

THE WAY TO HUMAN FREEDOM

Study 9

THE RESPONSE OF INHERITORS ON THE WAY TO FINAL FREEDOM

(a panoramic view of divine wisdom's covenantally-dynamic, holy & non-negotiable personal agendas)

The first eight studies of our series (followed by the 'Inner Song' meditation) have now established for us the grand Story of Redemption, told in the light of the great doctrinal realities it declares.

We have seen the perfections of God; the high calling of humankind; it's tragic fall and endless, restless struggle; God's redemptive covenantal action in the Old and New Testaments (culminated in the accomplished Redemption of the En-fleshed, Eternal Son); the Spirit's sovereign work of regeneration and the saving grace that has come to the redeemed, setting us on the way to that GREAT & GLORIOUS DAY OF 'FINAL FREEDOM OF SPIRIT, FULLNESS OF LIFE & WHOLENESS OF BEING', WITH US IN THE SON, WITH THE FATHER, BY THE SPIRIT, TOGETHER WITH ALL THE SAINTS—FOREVER!!!

At the heart of it all, has been the purpose of the Father to *sanctify* His human family and *restore* them to His likeness. He would do this by making them participants in the life of His En-fleshed Son's own Eternal Covenant Union with Himself, enabling them to increasingly fulfill their high human calling.

Study 2 revealed the *basic outline* of this calling and Study 8 the *grace* by which it may be fulfilled. The rest of the series will now *fill out* the shape of this high and holy vocation, and the ways in which all in Christ are both called and enabled to embrace it.

The studies to come will show how—by the grace of God—we may be fully and joyously engaged in fulfilling those two great commands that are the essence of our inheritance in the Beloved: to love God with the whole of our being and to love every other person as if they were us.

Our present study will serve as an introduction to the remaining ones.¹ It provides, as the title states, a panoramic view—'a big picture'—of the response that *all* inheritors in Christ are called to *always* be making in the midst of the daily circumstances of their lives. And this so that they may more and more live in the enjoyment of their inheritance—until their ultimate and glorious possession of it!

a Mount Nebo perspective

At this point we are, in a sense, like Moses in Deuteronomy 34. He had seen what the LORD had done in liberating His people from Egypt, and the provision made for them in the gifts of the word and the worship, and was now with Israel on the east side of the Jordan—as they prepared to enter into their promised inheritance. He was not to go with them but was instructed to stand upon the heights of Mount Nebo to survey the land. From that vantage point he would have a sweeping, panoramic view of the entire possession that lay before the people.

Moses was told that having ascended to that place and been given sight of what was to be possessed, he would then die there, and Israel would neither see nor hear him again. In the light of such a climactic moment in Moses' life, so much must have flooded into his heart and mind regarding those he had loved and led for so long. But we may definitely assume that it would have not only

¹ There is no key concept in this study, but being an introduction to the rest of the Series it will provide the basis for all the key concepts to come.

been a thrilling *visual experience* for him to see the physical nature of their inheritance. He would also have had an enormously sharpened *pastoral perspective*: a ‘shepherds eye view’ of all that lay before them.

Seeing with his eyes the big picture of the land Israel was to inherit, Moses—in the light of his recent urgent and full-hearted final proclamations—would have also immediately seen in his *mind* the big picture of *what possessing their inheritance would involve*. The fact that Israel would need to *respond* to the LORD in a way that was consistent with all they had heard, would, no doubt, have *burned like a fire* within him.

How Moses’ heart would have been powerfully stirred as he saw all this so clearly—and, we may assume, what fervent intercession must have risen to the LORD from Him on their behalf! In those moments he would have seen *with such clarity* that for Israel to both possess and enjoy their inheritance, there would have to be a *response* that involved certain *indispensable* elements: what will often be referred to throughout our study as, ‘divine wisdom’s covenantally-dynamic, *holy / non-negotiable, personal agendas*’. That is, their having as His people certain strongly-held, God-given pathways to, on every occasion, instantly and diligently pursue: ones that would enable them to enjoy all that the LORD had purposed for them within His great and glorious covenant of love!

As His people they would need to be *always decisively and wholeheartedly*:

- *remaining* fully assured of the LORD’S unfailing covenant love and faithfulness towards them;
- *embracing* the exclusively life-giving and non-negotiable call they had received to worship the LORD alone;
- *pursuing* the supreme passions of holy, non-negotiable covenant living:
 - to live for the LORD’S pleasure, glory and praise
 - to be and do all that the LORD had called them to
 - to want for their neighbour what they would want for themselves
- *treasuring* the LORD’S two essential gifts to them:
 - His word
 - their access to Him;
- *distinguishing* between themselves and the idolatrous nations around them;
- *contending* against the fierce and relentless opposition they would face.

We may certainly say that in terms of this series, we too are in a similar place to Moses here in Study 9. In 1–8 we received revelation of what has been needful to bring us out of the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of the Son—culminating in those awesome gifts of salvation in Him. But now we are to be given a kind of ‘Mount Nebo perspective’ of the ongoing *response* required, if we are to more and more enjoy a *possession* of the inheritance we’ve received.

Study 8 showed that a reception of the gifts of salvation in Christ has, actually, ‘set us on the way’ to ultimate freedom in the age to come. All that will be enjoyed eternally is *already ours in Christ*. We have seen that even now we are *glorified in Him*—seated at the Father’s right hand in the heavenly realms. It will just take His Appearing to finally liberate us into the *visible, uncontested and perfect* experience of this!

Although a participation in our *ultimate inheritance* is not yet possible, we may certainly enjoy more and more of its wonders as we *authentically press towards* the Final Day. As Study 8 declared, the sanctified children of God may, by the Spirit, be those who are:

- enjoying more and more *sight* of the greatest reality in all the world: that Jesus is Lord and He is everything!
- enjoying more and more of the Father’s face—with less and less of an orphan spirit;
- enjoying more and more relational freedom—with less and less grasping for life;

- enjoying more and more vocational fruitfulness—with less and less futile investment.

This was a kind of ‘big picture view’ of the *nature* of our inheritance ‘on the way to the Final Day’—a bit like Moses’ panoramic view of the land itself.²

In the light of such a prospect of present possession, then, Study 9 will also give us a big picture view of the *indispensable elements* of our ongoing *response* as inheritors, which will enable a maximum present enjoyment of what is ultimately to come. These most basic and vital things will be, in principle, the same as those we’ve ascribed to Moses on Mount Nebo—but, of course, spelt out in terms of life in the new covenant.

The purpose of having this kind of perspective is to enable us to *think clearly* and *respond truly* in the midst of the complexities that so often crowd into our lives. Apart from such indispensable elements being kept in sharp focus, we find our heart and mind operating in ways that tragically keep us from a daily, abundant foretaste of our inheritance.

We have surely received a high and holy calling, and through the regenerating work of the Spirit do desire to fulfill it. This study, then, will provide a basic ‘mental framework’ that will help us to, at all times, pursue just that.³

the nature of our response

Assuming that all have now received the grace and the calling that has been proclaimed in Studies 1–8, the redeemed from here on in the series are being referred to as ‘we’, rather than ‘they’. Yes, it’s time for us—joyously identified as the saints—to open our heart, be activating our will and setting our mind to ‘take hold of the eternal life’ to which we have been *called* (1 Timothy 6:12)!

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments our Redeeming Father has shown Himself to be the ‘Living God’. He is the One, who—with *the whole* of His divine Being—is *always* acting on behalf of His people and *decisively* working out His purpose of love towards them.

As was seen in Study 5, God’s old covenant name ‘the LORD’ (in Hebrew ‘Yahweh’) is strongly associated with His identification of Himself as ‘I AM’ (Exodus 3:14), the letters of which formed the verb ‘to be’. This declares that He is ‘the One who *is*’, or ‘the One who is *always* being in the *action* of who He is’. We may know that everything He is and does is ALWAYS! And yes, together with this—as the Story of Redemption has shown—His every action towards us is always a DECISIVE and WHOLEHEARTED manifestation of divine love! And so it is entirely fitting that as His people—being renewed in His image—we should, likewise, be *always decisively* and *wholeheartedly responding* to His glorious *initiative* towards us.

To hear Him—in the perfections of His divine Being—saying, ‘I will *always* ...’, brings us such pleasure. But we must also know that for the word ‘always’ to describe *our* response to God also brings great pleasure to *Him*. How He delights to see us being ‘always children’ in the face of His ‘Always Fatherhood’! And so as this study progresses, our ongoing response as inheritors will be very appropriately described by the use of *six present-tense verbs*—and these in regard to *six specific areas of focus*.

David’s appeal in the LORD’S presence to the consistency of his, own, response is a fine example of what is entirely fitting for us all. He said:

² The purpose of the remaining studies will be to more specifically spell out the details of this present capacity to experience our possessed inheritance in Christ.

³ Again, this mental framework—and the response it enables—will be increasingly developed as we move through the various studies to come.

Psalm 26:1, 3

I have trusted in the LORD and have not faltered ... I have *always* been mindful of Your unfailing [covenant] love and have lived in reliance upon Your faithfulness.

It's no wonder that the 'Always God' referred to David as one 'after His own heart' (1 Samuel 13:14). In Numbers 14 we have another example of excellent responsiveness—this time to do with *wholeheartedness*. In Study 5, when the LORD told the Israelites that the time had come for them to go in and possess their inheritance, they did as He said and went and spied out the land. But seeing many difficulties before them, they spurned His unfailing covenant love and faithfulness by refusing to respond to His promise. And so that generation did not get to possess what was freely held out to them. Only Joshua and Caleb were allowed to finally enter and inherit, because they alone responded appropriately to God's word.

Of Caleb the LORD said:

Numbers 14:24

[He] has a different spirit and follows Me wholeheartedly.

Again and again, the word of God draws us into an *ongoing answer to His love* that involves 'all our heart' and 'all our soul' (Deuteronomy 10:12). He loves us with the whole of His being and commands us into the nobility and blessedness of a reciprocal response! Anything less brings grief to Him, and sadly minimizes our capacity to presently enjoy our heritage. A decisively clear-cut and wholehearted response to His redeeming love is always the way of blessing. Apart from this, the biblically promised pleasures that are laid out before us in this series will be experienced in only a limited way.

revelation and participation

There is one other thing in regard to this matter of human responsiveness that is of great significance for our understanding. It has already been spoken of in principle, but to underline it here will be helpful. As those who are in Christ, the response we make is not something that *we create within ourselves*. As Study 8 has declared, our love for and obedience to the Father is a participation in the Son's own *relational intimacy* and *vocational partnership* with Him: a result of the Spirit's revelation to us of the grace we have received.

Neither does our response to the Son Himself, merely arise from within ourselves. It too, is a consequence of the Spirit's revelation to us of His glory: His Sonship in His Father's presence and purpose of love, which we were created to participate in as the image of God. In answer to such revelation our whole being may leap up to embrace Him as the One who is all that our heart has ever longed for!

Revelation is, indeed, central to a God-given capacity to respond to Him. And it is itself, of course, a gift to be always treasured and decisively and wholeheartedly fostered in our life.

And so, this brings us to the first *indispensable element* of our ongoing *response* as inheritors.

Firstly, as present inheritors, we are to be always decisively & wholeheartedly:

- remaining fully assured of the lavishly abundant grace that is ours in Christ, in 'The Great Redemptive Reality' of our death, burial, resurrection & ascension with Him

(all we have freely & fully received to set us on THE WAY: an absolutely NEW liberty, identity, serenity, capacity & destiny)

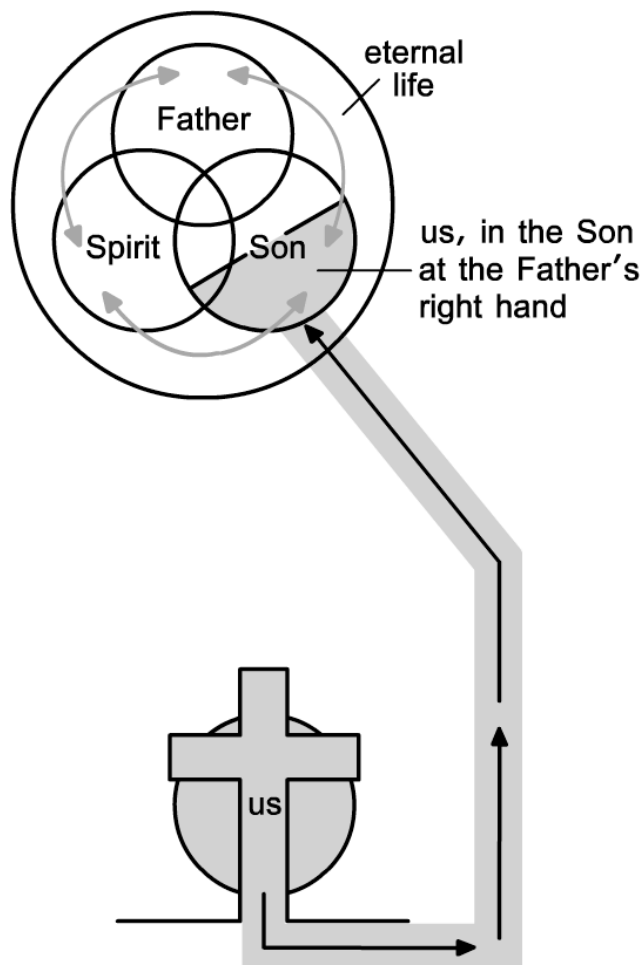
As Israel possessed what had been promised, it was *indispensable* for them to *remain* fully assured of and focused upon the unfailing covenant love and faithfulness of the LORD. They could never lose sight of all He had accomplished on their behalf: redeeming them from Egypt and bringing them as His ‘treasured possession’ into the place He had promised; and, with this, all that He had pledged Himself to *go on doing* according to His covenant.

In the same way, as the new covenant people of God we too, must keep our eyes sharply focused upon *the glorious redemption* He has accomplished; and so, be able to remain in the enjoyment of that amazing PLACE that has been secured for us in the Enfleshed Eternal Son. And this, of course, is centred in the wonder of those thrilling *covenantal realities* proclaimed in Study 8: the ‘new covenant gifts’ that have been abundantly bestowed upon us—WITH ALL THE PROMISE THEY HOLD!!!

our primary personal response

As the outline above has stated, our first response as inheritors is to be always, decisively and wholeheartedly *remaining* fully assured of the lavishly abundant grace that is ours in Christ (in ‘The Great Redemptive Reality’ of our death, burial, resurrection and ascension with Him).

Study 3 proclaimed to us ‘*The Great Moral Tragedy* of our self-exaltation and death in Adam’. But now, in total contrast to this is ‘*The Great Redemptive Reality* of our death, burial, resurrection and ascension with Christ’. Having been mercifully brought to that place of *owning* the horrible nature of our fallen, fleshly humanity in Adam, our focus is no longer to be fixed *there*, but rather, upon the glorious nature of our life in the Beloved: exalted with Him by the Father to *that PLACE* of *supreme privilege and blessing* at His right hand!



We saw in Study 8 that it is baptism that declares our total participation with Jesus in His Death, Burial, Resurrection and Ascension. And that the proclamation this new covenant sign makes (every day for the rest of our lives) is twofold: that we have been so wonderfully *loved* in His *death* and are now totally qualified to *be one with Him* in His risen and ascended *life*—the very life and way of His own Eternal Sonship!

Romans 6:3–4

All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

By the Spirit we have been baptized *into* a total identification with Jesus. And so the apostle Paul could exclaim:

Ephesians 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with [the whole] spiritual blessing in Christ.

Right now, in the Son, in the heavenly realms, every child of God has been blessed with the ‘whole blessing’ that the En-fleshed One knew, every moment, among us—the very blessing which He also enjoys now, reigning within His glorified humanity over all things in His Father’s presence and purpose of love!

And furthermore, he says:

Ephesians 2:6–7

“God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

Our ascension with Him has secured for us ‘incomparable riches of grace’ for all eternity! To the Colossians Paul also adds:

Colossians 3:1–4

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, [you must go on seeking] things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. [You must go on setting] your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

This Great Redemptive Reality is of such enormous significance, that we *must* ‘go on seeking’ and ‘go on setting our minds on’ all that it declares! And particularly, our focus is to be upon the ultimate assurance it brings: that our PLACE in Him at the Father’s right hand is the present pledge to us of an eternal participation in the glorified humanity of the Son! In Study 8 we saw that ‘those whom the Father justified, He also glorified’ (Romans 8:29). So complete is the Spirit’s identification of us with Christ, that our glorification could be stated as an already accomplished fact!

And so significant is this assurance of our amazing PLACE in Christ (dead, buried, raised and exalted with Him, with a glorious expectation of all that is to come) that Paul can then bring this command:

Colossians 3:5, 9–10

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature . . . For you have [put off] your [old humanity] with its practices, and have put on the new humanity, which is being renewed in [full knowledge] in the image of its Creator.

We may be commanded to ‘put to death’ everything that belongs to our old fleshly humanity in Adam, because having been put to death and made alive with Christ we have already *put off* the old and *put on* the new—and are in the process of being renewed as the image of God in a full and intimate

knowledge of Him. Yes, the glory that will be ours forever in the Son, is already beginning to come to us as we go on ‘seeking’ and ‘setting our mind upon’ the wonder of our PLACE in Him—who (3:4) *right now* is our very life!

It is certainly with good reason that our primary personal response as inheritors is, to *remain*, fully assured of such a Great Redemptive Reality.

In our next study the marvelous freedom we’ve been given for all this to be a daily experience, will be extensively proclaimed. Here, though, as we speak of the nature of our ‘remaining’, we will be hearing at least something of this matter that is, for us all, of such immense importance.

the grace of God—a great & unchanging reality that is *always* ours to know and enjoy

We have been told in Study 8 of ‘His *glorious* grace which He has freely given us in the One He loves’ and ‘the *riches* of His grace that He has lavished on us’ (Ephesians 1:6–7)—‘the unsearchable riches of Christ’ (Ephesians 3:8). There is, indeed, no greater wealth in all the world; and it is given without measure to all the sanctified children of God! The fact is that through our death, burial, resurrection and ascension with Jesus, there is nothing of this lavishly abundant grace of God, in Him, that is not ours to know and enjoy, each moment of every day.

The grace of God to His people in Christ is a GREAT and UNCHANGING reality. There is nothing more *comprehensive* than what it brings, and there is nothing that can ever *diminish* either its dimensions or power—which are as vast and as constant as God Himself.

Here again, as in Study 8, it will be good to affirm the declaration of the apostle Paul:

Romans 5:17

“Those who receive God's abundant provision of grace ... [will] reign in life.”

By the grace of God the *life* of the Son—in His eternal bonded union of love with His Father—may be richly experienced by His people in the midst of whatever they face. Grace is never to be seen merely as an occasional provision of kindness to help us in a particular time of need. Far from it! It is the unceasing and total endowment of all that was moment-by-moment enjoyed by the En-fleshed Son as He walked among us, in His Father’s presence and purpose. In Him we have received everything that is needed for us to *always* reign in life—regardless of our circumstances.

Yes, all who are in the Son must know that they may, every day, have the *grand assurance* of a lavishly abundant provision. As the Father’s image in His world—His ‘anointed ones’—we, too, may be sure of never lacking anything required to joyously live and reign in His presence and purpose of love.

full assurance—by an en-worded faith—of grace that is always ours in the *unseen* spiritual realm

This grace we are speaking of is not only for us *always* a *great* and *unchanging reality* but also one that is UNSEEN. Its effects may certainly be witnessed (Acts 11:23), but the grace itself is not visible. In fact, often everything *around* and *within* tends to deny its presence and power. If sight and sense are relied upon, very quickly any possibility of ‘reigning in life’ can seem to disappear!

God’s grace, however, can definitely be *known* and *enjoyed* by His redeemed children at any time, by *faith* in the *word of God* that proclaims it. God may, of course, directly visit us with glorious revelation of Himself. But it is through His indwelling word (Colossians 3:16) that we may always have immediate access to the wonders of His grace towards us.

Present possession of our inheritance in Christ is always on the basis of faith.

2 Corinthians 5:7

We live by faith, not by sight.

Above all else, we must operate upon what God's word declares to be so in the *unseen spiritual realm*. Life in the kingdom of God has to do with the word of God, not physical sight and sense. Through faith in the word, sight and sense may then follow. But even if they don't we are still to hold to what has been revealed. Feelings come and go. The important thing is that we keep on gratefully and wholeheartedly affirming in our Redeemer's presence, that we know these things to be true.

At different stages of our growth in the Lord some of us do have more of 'a knowing in our heart' than others. But if we hold to the word we've received *it will* increasingly impart its treasures to us. We all may be sure that it is our heritage as the children of God to regularly experience the wonders of His grace—maybe, with these at times almost exploding within us! The Holy Spirit is always at work, positioning us for revelation. So, we may patiently and expectantly co-operate with Him in His loving and zealous enterprise towards us.

The devil works endlessly to fix our attention upon the visible and changing situations around us, and so, to *keep* us from delighting in the abundance of grace—which is the only way to meet such things. There is therefore to be no room in our mind for anything that is not of faith. It is faith that brings us into a place of spiritual wealth: 'all the riches of a fully assured understanding' (Colossians 2:2)—the exact opposite of the evil one's agenda for us.

So then, to enjoy more and more of the human freedom and fullness we were created for—and towards which we are pressing in eternity—there is one thing above all else that is required. We must be always decisively and wholeheartedly '*remaining* fully assured of the lavishly abundant grace that is ours in Christ (in 'The Great Redemptive Reality' of our death, burial, resurrection and ascension with Him).

the glorious riches of grace that appeared among us in Christ

In Jesus there dawned upon the human scene an awesome manifestation: divine grace towards a corrupted, enslaved and willfully deprived humanity. That is, the revelation of a totally new liberty, identity, serenity, capacity and destiny. Nothing like this had ever been seen before throughout the whole of fallen-human history. But now here it was in Him—for us!

a new liberty

In the midst of the world, the flesh and the devil, and a humanity *oppressed* incessantly by this dark dominion, Jesus lived before His Father in that awesome *moral status* that was His as the Righteous One. And this, with a completely untroubled conscience, an absolutely free spirit and an entirely pure heart. Never—in this fallen and darkened world—was there anyone who had ever enjoyed such *total personal freedom of spirit*. A NEW HUMAN LIBERTY was manifested before our eyes!

a new identity

The One who lived en-fleshed among us was none other than God the Son, through whom and for whom all things had been created. He knew every moment that He was His Father's *Beloved Son* and the *Heir* of everything that had been brought into being through His own command. That is, He lived and breathed in the constant assurance of His Father's besotted love, and in the knowledge that this whole world was His! Such was His *personal status* in His Father's *presence*.

And He was also joyously assured of a rich and glorious *vocational status* in His Father's *purpose*. His task was—as *Priest*—to have every desire of His heart, thought of His mind, word from His mouth and action of His body as a fragrant, pleasure-giving offering of love to His Father; and, in

this, to both pray for us and offer Himself up as a Perfect Redemption for our sins. Also—as *Prophet*—to bring the Father’s word to us in everything He uttered; and—as *King*—to manifest the authority of His Father over the whole of the creation.

There was a NEW PERSONAL AND VOCATIONAL HUMAN IDENTITY being lovingly embraced and made known in our midst!

a new serenity

As Beloved Son and Heir in His Father’s presence, and Supreme Priest, Prophet and King in His Father’s purpose, He was within every circumstance serenely assured of His Father’s sovereign rule and care. No personally or vocationally threatening situation ever created a moment of hopeless panic within Him. A NEW HUMAN SERENITY asserted itself in the midst of the changing and perplexing circumstances of life in this fallen world!

a new capacity

By the Spirit upon and within Him He had unlimited capacity to fulfill the high human calling we have received as the image of God—and did so every moment. Indeed, His glory as the Eternal Image and Likeness of His Father was perfectly displayed within His humanity. In this He continued to personally enjoy the *relational intimacy* with His Father that He’d always known within their eternal bonded union of love. And He also expressed this in glorious *vocational partnership* with His Father—as in love for every person He lived impeccably as Priest, Prophet and King on their behalf. Such was the stunning manifestation of a NEW HUMAN CAPACITY in our midst!

a new destiny

Always before His mind was the most blessed goal to which He was headed: His eternal exaltation and glorification at the right hand of His Father—for our sake! There was constantly set before Him the joy of eternally mediating His Father’s kingdom—and doing that *together with* all who would forever perfectly participate with Him in His glorified humanity! Never was there pursued among us a future like *this* that so, rightly, impassioned a human heart, filled a human mind and determined the investment of human energy. Yes, a NEW HUMAN DESTINY—previously unimaginable—was joyously anticipated among us!

the incredible outcome of His accomplished redemption on our behalf

The revelation of Jesus’ divine, eternal Sonship—so gloriously displayed within His humanity—truly was an awesome manifestation of the grace of God dawning upon our fallen race. And yet, the wonder of it all is that everything we see in Him among us in His Father’s presence and purpose, is also for *us in Him!* Yes, (as we’ve seen above in regard to the nature of our baptism) THE GREAT REDEMPTION He has accomplished—together with the regenerating work of the Spirit within us—HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO *JOYOUSLY PARTICIPATE* IN THAT VERY GLORY HE REVEALED IN OUR MIDST!!!

We may well suppose that the Father’s final word to the Son before He was en-fleshed among us was: “It is time. Go, show them the glorious nature of the humanity they were created for—and liberate them into it!”

The truth is that no one created to be the image and likeness of God, can ever be satisfied with anything less than what is held out to us *all* in the En-fleshed One: the human magnificence, dignity and nobility that is in Him alone—the Christ, the Anointed One, the One we have always been looking for and longing for!

Study 4 showed how our old humanity in Adam—condemned, accursed and under the power of the devil—has incessantly striven to attain a magnificent human liberty, identity, serenity, capacity and destiny: all that would satisfy the noble human spirit. But it has been a futile pursuit! Every resource expended in this way has only served to further lock us into ‘an endless, restless struggle’.

But this ‘old us’ has been put to death with the One who loved us and gave Himself up for us. And now alive forever in Him (the Head of a glorious new humanity, and Lord over every power that enslaved us) we may be done with those vain hopes that once dominated our delights, desires, thoughts, speech and physical energies. And we may, indeed, go on holding joyously to our assurance of Jesus, with all that has been lavished upon us in Him.

We could definitely say that the proclamation of grace in Study 8 is like striking a glorious gong! But it is in fact a gong that needs to keep on being struck—drowning out everything contrary to what it declares—if we are to go on making progress in the present possession of our inheritance.

In this life there are all kinds of things, past, present and future, that confront us: moral, personal, vocational, circumstantial, relational and physical *realities*—many of which are a potential source of enormous emotional stress. But all these may be continually seen in the light of THE GREAT REDEMPTIVE REALITY we are speaking of. And it is this that must speak more loudly to us than anything else that has happened, is happening or might happen in the future: a redemption that has thrilling, life-changing power!

The apostle Paul declared the astonishing implications of redeeming grace in this way:

2 Corinthians 5:17

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!

More literally this could be stated: “If anyone is in Christ—new creation! The old things have passed away. And look—those old things have, actually, become new!”

The old has come to an end through the blood of Christ—and the new has already arrived in that One who, *raised from the dead* is Himself, the New Creation!¹⁰

And so for all who are in Him, by the lavishly abundant grace of God:

- the old struggle for *freedom of spirit* in the face of moral failure has been replaced by an entirely NEW PERSONAL LIBERTY—every sin forever forgiven, all defilement of our conscience totally cleansed, finding ourselves shockingly acquitted of all condemnation, and awesomely credited with the Son’s own righteousness in His Father’s presence!
- the old desperate way of seeing ourselves *personally* and *vocationally* has been replaced by an entirely NEW PERSONAL AND VOCATIONAL IDENTITY—now forever one with Jesus in *His personal status* as Beloved Son and Heir of the whole creation, and in *His vocational status* as Priest Prophet and King in His Father’s Presence and Purpose of Love!
- the old fear-based way of seeking to secure ourselves *circumstantially* has been replaced by an entirely NEW CIRCUMSTANTIAL SERENITY—the old orphan spirit made redundant, as we know ourselves to be as secure as the Son in His Father’s sovereignly wise and purposeful love!
- the old grasping ways of seeking *human fullness* have been replaced by an entirely NEW PERSONAL, RELATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL CAPACITY—at last able, by the Indwelling Spirit, to be a participant with the Son in His own *relational intimacy* and *vocational partnership* with His Father!
- the old dread-ridden and futile struggle for *hope* has been replaced by an entirely NEW PERSONAL AND VOCATIONAL, ETERNAL DESTINY—our hearts constantly drawn into joyous

¹⁰ The difference between the old and new covenant, is not just that we now don’t have to go to the temple to sacrifice. There is an entirely new creation into which we have been brought!

anticipation of an ultimate visible, uncontested and perfect participation in the Divine Son's glorified humanity forever!

What an enormous difference these gifts make! Yes, for us who have died with Christ the old things that belong to the old realm in Adam have passed away. And each of these aspects of human pursuit—through our union with Jesus in His Death, Burial, Resurrection and Ascension—have become new and glorious in Him. Surely, we can only exalt in the fact that the PERFECTIONS of our Redeemer, Father, Creator and King have secured for us the PERFECT liberty, identity, serenity, capacity and destiny of the En-fleshed Son Himself!

This amazing moment-by-moment grace of God towards us in Jesus, truly is a hugely comprehensive reality. There is nothing lacking. And there is definitely no reason why it all cannot be enjoyed more and more—regardless of difficulties that come our way. What has been lavished upon us in Christ is totally relevant to every circumstance and situation of our life—barring none. By *remaining* fully assured of the awesome dimensions of this grace, we may rightly, expect to increasingly enjoy its transforming powers.

Nothing is comparable to our union with Jesus—us in Him and Him in us. To put it in a nutshell: an absolute union that makes us to be one with Him in His own moral status as the Righteous One in His Father's presence; and there, freely one with Him in His Father's love and one with Him in His love for His Father; and so, in that, one with Him in His love for every other person!

Because this is actually is the way things are, Paul could boldly declare:

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

And this testimony belongs to all who are in Him: the One who delights to claim us as His own, and our body as His dwelling place. How He *yearns* for us to know this transforming redemptive reality to a greater and greater degree!

Such grace that has united us so totally with the Son truly is a staggering thing. This is why New Testament writers were so keen to invoke that blessing upon the Lord's people at the beginning or end of their letters: "Grace to you." Like their Lord they yearned for their readers to go on receiving thrilling revelation of its nature—and experience its liberating and enlivening power in the greatest possible way.¹¹

There is of course, still our ever-present capacity to sin under the relentless operation of the dominion of darkness: the pressure of the world, the passions of the flesh and the power of the devil and the forces he commands. Our next study, though, will speak very specifically of how we may *overcome* each day in the face of this dark and deadly reality.

Also, in our next study it will be seen that within the immense assurance of our death, burial, resurrection and ascension with Christ, we may, in fact, have that *'life-long inner song of love transforming the storyline of our days'*

'indicatives' & 'imperatives'—the inseparable nature of full assurance & active response

In Study 8 we spoke of two critical aspects of apostolic proclamation: indicative realities and imperative commands. It will be helpful to speak of these again here.

The indicatives are those things that God has both accomplished and promised through the Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of His Son, and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. And flowing from these, of course, the new covenant gifts we've been speaking of: the

new liberty, identity, serenity, capacity and destiny that belong to all who are in Christ. Together, these grand proclamations '*indicate* the way things are' for all who, by grace, have believed.

The imperatives, on the other hand, are what those who have received God's grace 'must do' in order to fulfill the calling they have received. These imperatives are the absolutely essential and non-negotiable requirements for an authentic experience of relational intimacy and vocational partnership with God.

Both the indicative realities and the imperative commands truly are inseparable. Apart from assurance of the indicatives there is no basis for any life-giving imperative action. And apart from the imperatives the indicatives remain facts that are 'agreed with'—and even joyously celebrated in ideal circumstances—but which have limited transforming impact upon a person's life. Both are indispensable: joyously received revelation of what *is* and our full-hearted, active response to divine command on the basis of that.

It will be seen as we continue through the series, that the key to our experience of the abundant life promised in Christ is, always, a full and active assurance of that *Great Redemptive Reality* that is in Him.

indicative declaration

When writing to the believers in Rome Paul delighted to make what is certainly a foundational indicative statement:

Romans 5:2

We have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

He so wanted them to be assured of the fact that by faith they had gloriously entered into the vast realm of God's grace. And for them it was an environment in which they would now always stand. Their experience of grace might vary, but never their place within it!

In Study 6 we saw that when speaking to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, Paul boldly announced:

Acts 20:32

I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

He had not the slightest shadow of doubt that—in the midst of their tough situation in idolatrous Ephesus—the indicative proclamation they had received was all they needed to 'build them up', and enable them to experience more and more of the *inheritance* that was theirs in Christ, as those who had been *set apart* to possess it.

The writer to the Hebrews brings this decisive affirmation:

Hebrews 13:9

It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by [anything else].

The only good and functional way for us to live in this world as the image of God is, to have our hearts strengthened by the grand indicatives of the gospel: *the way things are* for all who have been united forever with their Redeemer!

imperative exhortation

In the light of thrilling and sustaining *indicative assurances*, the apostolic writers would then bring a 'therefore': some heart-felt *imperative exhortation*, such as James delivered to believers who were suffering all kinds of trials:

James 1:21

Therefore ... humbly [and decisively receive] the word planted in you.

Paul, having proclaimed the new creation in Christ, brought to the Corinthians this arresting plea:

2 Corinthians 6:1

[Therefore ... we] urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.

By failing to diligently maintain a full assurance of grace by faith, it is very possible to be total *possessors* of it but know little of its *power*. To receive God's grace 'in vain' is to receive it in an *empty way*—in a way that doesn't fill us every day with the wonder of being participants in the new humanity we've been brought into.

How dreadful, to have an *entirely new* liberty, identity, serenity, capacity and destiny, but *live* as though it had all never been given!

To Timothy, who had been entrusted with the sure word of God in a difficult situation, Paul said:

2 Timothy 2:1

[Therefore, you must go on being] strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

What this young gospel worker knew by faith, he must choose to be strengthened by, in every circumstance that confronted him. He was to always decisively and wholeheartedly *remain focused* upon the great realities of grace—all he had freely and fully received in his Saviour!

Then there was Paul's earnest appeal to the Colossian believers, on the basis of their having received the liberating and life-giving benefits of Jesus' supremacy over all things:

Colossians 2:6–7

[Therefore], as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, [having been] rooted [in Him] and [now being] built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

We have seen that 'the faith' is that body of teaching which was established by the apostles and prophets and recorded in the New Testament. It is what proclaims the grace and purpose of God in Christ and the glorious calling His people have received. As the redeemed we may only *enjoy* the blessing of 'having been rooted and now being built up in Him', as we do all we can to be '*strengthened in the faith*'—and this in such a way that it causes us to 'overflow with thankfulness' through our consistently sharp focus upon it!

Imperative exhortations also have to do with other relational requirements arising out of what is so for us in Christ—such as Paul's words to the Colossians that we spoke of earlier:

Colossians 3:5, 9–10

[Therefore, put to death] whatever belongs to your earthly nature ... since you have [put off the old humanity] with its practices and have put on [the new humanity] which is being renewed in [full] knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Yes, because of what our baptism declares (our having been put to death with Christ, made alive and exalted with Him), there is an ongoing non-negotiable response of obedience to be made.

As mentioned already, Study 10 will proclaim and celebrate the freedom we have in Jesus to always make such choices. There it will be seen how we have been enabled to respond within the circumstances we face, in ways that are in line with both indicative reality and corresponding imperative command!

the immediate purpose of God-given declaration and exhortation

The writer to the Hebrews, having declared the truth of our unrestrained access into the Father's presence, gives expression to what is at the heart of all apostolic utterance when he says:

Hebrews 10:22

Therefore ... [let us] draw near to God ... in full assurance of faith.

We will continue to see in this study and those following that the *immediate purpose* of God's grace coming to us—and our being fully assured of its wonders—is for us to do just this: DRAW NEAR TO HIM!!! No more running *from* Him—only *to* Him.

Yes, whether we are old or young and whatever our past tragedies or present difficulties, we may at all times—in the full assurance of faith—decisively and wholeheartedly embrace our incredible, present inheritance in the Son, in the Father's glad and welcoming presence!

the most basic function of the anointing we have received

As this first section is concluded, let's underline what we have been seeing here in regard to the Spirit's joyous ministry (He truly is the joyous Spirit in His enlightening work!). Above all else, He has been given to us in order to reveal the glories of the Son as our En-fleshed Redeemer, and everything that is absolutely true of us in Him. Such revelation is, in fact, the most powerfully life-giving and truly humanizing thing in all the world!

It may be helpful to say here that, as the children of God we are not those who are to merely have certain religious ideas that are 'believed' (agreed with) and then 'applied to life'. Rather, we are to be free-spirited people who live in the realm of glorious, redemptive revelation in Christ. This makes what we *know* to be—in our *heart*—the inner spring of a *relationship* that is enjoyed day after day, rather than a *religion* to be 'worked at'.

The most basic function of the *new human capacity* we possess by the Spirit then, is the ability to *always* see what is TOTALLY NEW for us in Jesus—so we may live *immediately* in the blessedness of it!

That's why the apostle John said:

1 John 2:27

Just as [the anointing you have received] has taught you, remain in Him.

In Study 8—from John 15:5—we spoke of the Spirit revealing OUR GOD-GIVEN POSITION IN UNION WITH CHRIST and our need, by obedient faith, to go on *remaining focused* upon this fact—and so be able to ENJOY THE REALITY OF HIS REMAINING IN US!!!

Yes, the most basic function of the Spirit's anointing is simply this: that we may be always decisively and wholeheartedly *remaining* fully assured of the lavishly abundant grace that is ours in Christ ('The Great Redemptive Reality' of our death, burial, resurrection and ascension with Him). How good it is to have such an incredible salvation, and be urged by our Divine Lover to always keep it sharply in focus. Whatever the Spirit manifests in and through us of our personal and vocational heritage in Christ, will *always* be the fruit of such responsiveness.

receivers responding to the Initiator

The present tense verb 'remaining', is a very effective way of describing what is 'an appropriate fully assured response' to God's grace. And this is why: We may remain in such assurance because God, Himself, is all the time *remaining faithful* to all that He has declared—regardless of what is happening (or not happening) within and round about us. *Our* remaining is based upon the reality of *His* remaining. He is always the same—the Faithful One who fulfills every promise He has given to His sanctified children.

Our response is extremely significant, but it is to be in answer to His perfect and constant initiative towards us. Yes, one of the great facts of life in Christ is that GOD IS CONSTANTLY *INITIATING*, AND WE ARE CALLED TO BE CONSTANTLY *RESPONDING* TO HIM AS JOYOUS RECEIVERS!!!

Throughout this study it will be shown how all six expressions of *our ongoing present-tense response*, do flow out of the perfection of *His gloriously ongoing present-tense initiative*.

the absolute nature of what is to be focused upon

The response we are to make throughout this study is not only to be on the basis of divine initiative. It is also to be made in the light of the *absolute* nature of the six required areas of focus. For example, here we have been speaking of a response to '*the* lavishly abundant grace of God in Christ', in '*The Great Reality*' of our Redemption in Him. The word 'the' is used because what is referred to is, definitely, *the one* and *only* presence of such grace and redemption in this world! Apart from it there is no freedom from a life of endless, restless struggle within the realm of the world, the flesh and the devil. This absolutely unique reality is, indeed, beyond comparison to anything else!

Engaging truly in each prescribed area of focus, we may always be sure that we are investing our energies in what is entirely foundational to authentic, redeemed human endeavour. It will be decisive and wholehearted action that is 100% in line with what is redemptively *real*—rather than merely *supposed* according to fallen human understanding. The 'wisdom from below' will insist that there are other alternatives, but 'the wisdom from above' reveals what is, *uniquely so*, according to our Creator and Redeemer.

All six areas of non-negotiably required focus in this study are absolutely necessary for maximum, present possession of our inheritance. There is never a time when these may be dismissed as irrelevant or optional.

So there it is, the first indispensable element of our response as inheritors on the way to the Final Day: We as the inheriting children of God are to be—by faith—always *remaining* fully assured of our redemption and the thrilling nature of the grace it brings. Yes, if we are to reign in life and fulfill our holy calling—tasting more and more of what is to come—we *must stay strong* in the grace we've received. And by the Spirit's revelation we most certainly may!

This brings us to the next indispensable element of our responsive life as the redeemed children of God—pressing towards the Goal.

Secondly, as present inheritors, we are to be always decisively & wholeheartedly:

- embracing the one pure-hearted, primary delight:

our Triune Creator—the Father, the Son & the Spirit

(finding our greatest pleasure & only boast in all that the three Persons have done, are doing & will do, out of that *inner spring of holy delight & desire* within the 'Triune Communion of Love')

Israel had been given amazing revelation of *who God is* in what He had done and promised to do for them as His people. And so in the light of this, if they were to possess the inheritance set before them there was an indispensable requirement. They should be always decisively and wholeheartedly *embracing* the exclusively life-giving and non-negotiable calling they'd received: to worship the LORD alone.

Clearly, this is also to be an indispensable element of our *new covenant response* as inheritors in the Son, as we anticipate the joys of the Coming Day.

a non-negotiable, new covenant requirement

As with the old covenant, the way of the *new covenant* in which we've been embraced has to do, above all, with our vertical relationship with God. And so, as those who are to be always *remaining* fully assured of His incredible grace, we are now to see that we have each day a supreme new covenant responsibility to fulfill: to be all the time *embracing* that *one primary delight*: God—the Father, together with the Son and the Holy Spirit. That is (as in the Ten Commandments), to have only one Object of life-sustaining worship: God Himself—the Living God, whom Moses declared to be our *very life* (Deuteronomy 30:20)!

A non-negotiable requirement isn't something that we may fulfill at one time but not at another. It's never an expression of vocation to be 'considered' or merely agreed with, but rather, always decisively and wholeheartedly *embraced*. And this is especially so when it comes to the matter of our worship of God alone—who is, ever, the one *authentic* primary delight of His image.

We have seen that we are always worshipping (giving ultimate worth to) something that promises us life; and that the focus of our worship will always be either our Creator or what He has created.

In 'the flesh', of course, we have always *primarily* sought-after happiness in the creation (people, situations and things) rather than in the Creator Himself. But now in Christ, we may daily enjoy a new freedom from this incessantly desperate, dark and deadly inner drive—through revelation of the lavishly bestowed grace we've received.

We were indeed created, above all else, for the pleasure of joyous *communion* with the Holy One (and, as will be seen, a participation with Him in His glorious purpose of love for His world). And here's a fact: The more we experience of this supreme expression of our human calling, the more *personally non-negotiable* it becomes—NOT MERELY A RESPONSIBILITY TO BE FULFILLED, BUT THE ALL-SURPASSING DELIGHT OF OUR LIFE!!!

embracing the Embracer

We've said that throughout this study it will be shown how all six expressions of *our ongoing present-tense response*, flow out of the perfection of *God's own gloriously ongoing present-tense initiative towards us*. And that is most certainly the case when it comes to our *embracing* Him as the one and only *primary* object of our worship.

In responding to this non-negotiable new covenant requirement, it truly is simply a matter of our embracing the Embracer! Just as the LORD told Israel, 'I have carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself ... [to] be My treasured possession' (Exodus 19:4–5), so also in the En-fleshed One, who has eternally been His Treasure, He has *embraced us* and goes on doing so every moment!

We'll see in this section, that the *intimate and life-giving pleasure* that is found in our embracing of Him as the primary delight of our life is, only ever to do with one thing: our response to His ceaselessly *intimate and life-bestowing embracing of us*, as His treasured children in the Beloved!

However, before we speak further regarding this awesome aspect of our human calling—and the others to follow—there is something that must be firmly established in our understanding.

a pure heart—the only source of 'holy response'

Nothing can stop the powerful and relentless thrust within us for whatever will bring the personal freedom and fullness we crave. Even when one has slumped lethargically into the depths of a hopeless despair, the pitiful cry is still for the joy and vibrancy we were all created for. Every person's heart (that innermost realm of human desire and resolve) is always full of some strong, non-negotiable passion.

Our heart is the enormously powerful engine of our humanity. And so it must surely be, that our most pressing and critical need is centred there: to have an inner spring of life-giving purity of delight, desire and resolve within us!

an unwelcome testimony

As previous studies have shown, the Scriptures bring an eye-opening and arresting witness to the nature of the human heart. They reveal that it was always intended to be the glorious centre of our being—full of delight in and desire for the Creator Himself. And then in this to be a wellspring of divine moral purity, producing a moment-by-moment human representation of the glory of God. But although this is the created purpose of the heart, the Scriptures also reveal that in its fallen and unregenerate condition it is, instead, a wellspring of all that misrepresents the likeness of its Maker! God's (post Flood) evaluation of our unredeemed fallen state is unmistakably clear:

Genesis 8:21

[The LORD said] ... "Every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood."

Of His old covenant people who had experienced so much of His unfailing love and faithfulness, He tragically had to say:

Jeremiah 5:23–24

[They] have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away. They do not say to themselves, 'Let us fear the LORD our God'.

Isaiah 65:2–3

All day long I have held out My hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations—a people who continually provoke Me to My very face.

The En-fleshed Son among us, Himself, graphically described the heart as a *polluted spring*:

Mark 7:21–22

For from within, out of your hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.

A question Solomon asked then, is a most appropriate one:

Proverbs 20:9

Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure?"

All this is understandably an *unwelcome testimony* to ears that have no delight in the grace of God—almost always bringing a defiant insistence that we do actually have 'a good heart!' Structured by creation to be the image of God, fallen humanity of course, does remain capable of all kinds of magnificence. But the fact is that without *remaining* fully assured of God's grace, we find ourselves desperately seeking to find life in all manner of things, apart from, a primary experience of intimacy with Him.

That's why His new covenant people need to hear the urgent exhortation:

Hebrews 3:1, 12

"Fix your thoughts on Jesus ... [and see] to it ... that none of you has [an evil], unbelieving heart that turns away from the Living God."

Yes, there is indeed, vehement, general resistance to revelation of the corrupt nature of an unredeemed human heart. However, it is not at all an unwelcome testimony to those who do remain fully assured of divine grace. Rather, such exposure of our inner corruption, serves to keep us joyously in the wonder of that liberating and enlivening word we've received.

the absolute priority of an inner purity

Purity of heart is a supreme priority for the redeemed children of God, because that is exactly *their Redeemer's supreme priority for them!* Yes, the primary purpose of God in redemption is the

purification of our heart so that we may be renewed as His image. In the beginning, the creation of a pure human heart was, in fact, our Maker's *greatest masterpiece*—and His restoring it within us today is the greatest miracle He can perform!

In His anguished love for His old covenant people the LORD lamented through Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 17:9; 13:23

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? ... Can an Ethiopian change his skin, or a leopard its spots?

But as we saw in Study 8, He then announced through Jeremiah the dawning of a new era:

Jeremiah 31:31, 33–34

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant ... After that time ... I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts.”

The LORD also lamented through Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 6:9; 20:16

“I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts which have turned away from Me ... [Their] hearts were devoted to their idols.”

But also, as we saw in Study 8, Ezekiel too became the Redeemer's mouthpiece in foreshadowing a new day to come:

Ezekiel 36:26

[This is what the Sovereign LORD says,] “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.”

Our Maker's supreme priority in all of redemptive history is, indeed, to transform the fallen-human heart into a glorious inner spring of holy delight and desire!

The apostle Peter in giving witness to the miraculous work of the Spirit within the first Gentile converts declared with wonder:

Acts 15:9

He purified their hearts by faith.

And, of course, this divine priority was superbly testified to by Jesus in ‘The Sermon On The Mount’, when He announced what was, in reality, the fountain of His own blessedness in His Father's presence:

Matthew 5:8

Blesséd are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Our greatest need—the Son's own blessedness in the Father's presence—is only fulfilled out of that spring of life that flows from a grace-born inner purity of desire.

This priceless gift of a pure heart then, is something that is to be nurtured and maintained at all costs—an urgent priority that the wisdom of Proverbs strongly affirms:

Proverbs 4:23

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Every thought, word or act has its origin in the heart. Furthermore, the heart of God's sanctified children in Christ has been made to be *the holy inner sanctuary* of their being—in which the realities of His own *divine* Being are to be *delighted in* above all else. And so this one thing must surely be a *non-negotiable* requirement: that our hearts be diligently guarded from the intrusion of anything that is *foreign* to a pure-hearted worship of the Holy One—*evicting* whatever displaces our primary delight in Him, and brings corruption into all else that we delight in, desire, think, say and do.

James—writing to those whose faith was being severely tested through suffering—was aware of their critical need above all else for a pure-hearted pursuit of God Himself. So, he gave this resounding command in the name of the One who held before them ‘the crown of life’:

James 4:8

Purify your hearts you double-minded.

Double-mindedness in our relationship with God—believing the truth but thinking in ways that deny it—always comes from the presence of inner impurity. Such thinking must be constantly, decisively and wholeheartedly dealt with at its murky source!

Paul exhorted his young co-worker Timothy to be—in the midst of his sufferings—among those “who [are all the time calling] on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22).

David knew this to be his *most pressing human need* and that he could only gain it through the merciful provision of the One who commanded it. So, he cried out with anticipation to the Faithful One:

Psalm 51:10

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Psalm 86:11–12

Teach me Your way, LORD, that I may rely on Your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart that I may fear Your name. I will praise You, LORD my God, with all my heart.

David understood the LORD’S great priority for His servants—maybe having been told of the word that came to Samuel when choosing him as king rather than his brothers:

1 Samuel 16:6–7

Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’S anointed stands here before the LORD.” But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things human beings look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

It is the condition of our heart that matters more than anything else. Actually, it is the only thing that really matters at all. All of us tend to discern the nature and worth of others in the light of their appearance, particular skills, amount of knowledge, or pleasing and impressive speech and actions. But the Creator *looks into the heart* of His creatures. It is what stirs in our innermost parts that is of greatest concern to Him.

It may at times be possible to hide our own inner impurity from those around us—even the ones closest to us. Such an endeavour, of course, keeps us all the more focused upon our outward performance.

We do tend to spend so much mental, emotional and physical energy on the external appearances of our life. But Jesus said,

Matthew 23:26

First clean the inside of the cup ... and then the outside also will be clean.

The way things are on the inside will determine the way they are on the outside. At all times what is *within* is to be our supreme priority—for this will produce every desired external result.

It would be good to say here, then, that as we proceed through this study in preparation for the rest of the series, something very significant is taking place. Understanding is being given that will enable an authentic outward manifestation of our humanity in every area of life: the personal and vocational fruit we have been redeemed to bear as the image of God.

purity of heart & a fruitful life

Jesus often spoke of such fruitfulness, and He taught that the nature of the fruit produced in any person's life is determined by what kind of tree they are. He said:

Luke 6:43–45

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars. Good people bring good things out the good stored up in their heart, and evil people bring evil things out of the evil stored up in their heart. For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

Yes, as we continue it will be clear that before we think of *doing* what a human is to *do*—the external things—we must first *be* what a human was created to *be*, within. It's all about a human being, *being* truly human on the inside—with the *doing* naturally following!

A good tree that bears good fruit is a person whose heart is full of good things: one who (as we've been seeing) is always decisively and wholeheartedly '*remaining* fully assured of the lavishly abundant grace that is ours in Christ'. A heart that remains full of such assurance (and the worship it creates) is one that truly is full of good things. Joyously focused on all that is in Jesus, we ourselves become, in Him, a good tree that bears the good fruit of His own Sonship!

The fact is that there are only two 'heart affecting' realms in which a person may live: the flesh or the Spirit. Every moment we live under the dominance of one or the other: the natural and habitual focus of the flesh or the life-giving revelation of the Spirit. And this then, determines the innermost motivations for what we desire, think, say or do. Much more will be said of this in our next study.

Because our personal living will always reflect the motivations of our heart, each day of our life there are questions to be asked above all else, like: 'What do I really want?' and 'What is my primary purpose for being alive today?' Our answer to such questions will always determine what is the wellspring of our life, and the fruit it produces. How good it is when our reply is a grace-charged manifestation of what stirs continually in the heart of Jesus!

Ah yes! It is THE SON'S OWN PURITY OF HEART IN HIS FATHER'S PRESENCE AND PURPOSE OF LOVE, that is the most basic element of our eternal, new covenant inheritance in Him.

The Study 2 outline showed that an intimate knowledge of God and the reflection of His glory through our humanity, *flows out of* 'a clear conscience, a free spirit and a pure, undivided heart'. It is these things that are the source of every authentic expression of our humanness. And so, each study throughout the rest of the series will have a key concept which begins with the words, "fully-grace-assured, with a free-spirited and pure-hearted primary delight in God and His call."

So, we can now make this absolute statement: ANY TRULY WHOLEHEARTED RESPONSE TO OUR MAKER—a 'holy response' to Him and His purpose—CAN ONLY EVER ARISE OUT OF A GRACE-CREATED PURITY OF HEART IN CHRIST!!!

With such a critical truth now firmly established, we may return to the subject before us at this point of our study: an *embracing*, as present inheritors, of 'the one pure-hearted, primary delight: God Himself'.

a primary delight in God that is pure-hearted participation in the Son's own joy within the Triune Community

The pure-hearted primary delight into which we as the redeemed children of God are *called*, is simply, a participation with the Son in 'the unbounded joy and delight of God': the absolute blessedness of the Three Persons of the Divine Triune Community of Love. The joy that is at the

core of our ultimate inheritance in the Son is nothing less than this—and is what we may experience more and more of on our way to the Final Day!

In order to understand something of the nature of this blessedness, it may be helpful here to list what can be described as **seven springs of divine joy**. That is, seven things we may glean from the Story of the Scriptures that are clearly part of the blessedness of God the Father, Son and Spirit. And then together with these for us to see how, in the Son, we may participate in them. Hopefully this exercise (although it may be a little ‘wordy’ in places) will give us further cause to exalt in the incredible scale of the grace we’ve received. After being stated they’ll be summarized in a simpler way.

spring of divine joy #1:

- *Their own and each Other’s Personhood—as Father, Son and Spirit*

our participation:

We may be *with the Son* in His utter delight in the dimensions of His Father’s glory; with Him in His boundless joy in His own Sonship; and with Him in the immense pleasure He has in the Spirit’s intimate engagement with Them both.

spring of divine joy #2:

- *The sheer loveliness of their communion with One Another*

our participation:

We may be *with the Son* in the intimacy of His own communion with the Father and the Spirit: the Eternal Life of the Triune Community of Love.

spring of divine joy #3:

- *Their vocational action of love together—as Initiator, Mediator and Facilitator*

our participation:

We may be *with the Son* in His absolute delight in the Father’s gloriously wise *initiative*; with Him in His own unbounded Sonly pleasure in *mediating* this; and with Him in His adoring elation as He witnesses the Spirit’s exalted joy in constantly *facilitating* it all.

spring of divine joy #4:

- *the goodness and excellence of the creation, with humanity as its crowning glory*

our participation:

We may be *with the Son* in His exuberant pleasure (together with the Father and the Spirit) in the perfectly functional *form* and *fullness* of all that has been made and faithfully sustained—with humankind at the centre of it all, magnificently structured to *humanly represent the Divine Sonship*, as the image and glory of the Father.

spring of divine joy #5:

- *the supreme accomplishment of the Father’s purpose in the outworking of redemptive history, by the facilitating work of the Spirit and through the liberating Action of the En-fleshed Son; that is, the stunning revelation of divine love in SAVING MERCY AND GRACE among all the redeemed, in every nation.*

our participation:

We may be *with the Son* in His depthless joy together with the Father and the Spirit, in seeing ourselves and every redeemed person mercifully brought from death to life, and by grace, given a new human liberty, identity, serenity, capacity and destiny; all of which, in spite of the dominion of

darkness, may at last, progressively enable a human manifestation of the Divine Sonship over all the earth!

spring of divine joy #6:

- *Their boundlessly generous pleasure in supplying the personal and vocational needs of the sanctified children of God—that we may receive abundantly more than all we have asked for or imagined, for the fulfillment of our High Human Calling*

our participation:

We may be *with the Son* in the perfect joy of His oneness with the generous heart of His Father, together with His unwavering delight in the Spirit's power to do all that has been promised to 'the poor in spirit': those who know they have nothing of themselves, but who, with shameless boldness are now able, in Jesus, to expect and laughingly enjoy a participation in the dynamic realities of the kingdom of God.¹⁴

spring of divine joy #7:

- *the Father's ultimate purpose for the creation through the Son and by the Spirit*

our participation:

We may be *with the Son* in His perpetually joyous *anticipation* together with the Father and the Spirit, of an *Eternal Day to come*. One in which all the redeemed and sanctified children of God from among all nations will, at last, have been brought to their goal as *perfect participants* in His glorified humanity—and this, in a renewed heavens and earth in which only the righteousness of divine love dwells!

what can be said in response to this?

From the Story of the Scriptures, we may say that it is, at least, these seven things that are part of the *pure-hearted delight* of the Father, the Son and the Spirit—into which we as the redeemed image of God are called in the Beloved! And, as indicated earlier, at this point it may be helpful to summarize these more simply in the following way:

- joy in the glory of the Three Persons
- joy in the Triune Communion
- joy in the Triune vocational action
- joy in the nature of creation and providence
- joy in accomplished saving mercy and grace
- joy in generous supply for the children of God
- joy in the ultimate purpose for the creation

To participate in the Son's joy in such ways is, indeed, the very essence of the eternal life we have received in Him—and the key to free and full human living.

It was, of course, this joy that was the inner spring of Jesus' own divine Sonship humanly expressed among us: the eternal life that was always 'leaping up' within Him! And it was so that we too could be partakers of it, that He pursued the Cross with such unswerving and self-abandoned love (John 4:13–14; Luke 9:5).

Every promise Jesus gave was with a view to our possession of His joy—including, of course, the promise of the Spirit. The whole of the Blesséd Spirit has been given to us that we may delight in the whole glory of the Son, and be with Him in His *delight* in the whole of His Father's glory!

¹⁴ Such confidence in prayer will be set out in detail in Studies 12 & 13.

Without any reservation, then, it can be said that all of our incessantly embraced false promises of life, are *nothing* compared to an innermost welling up of the joy we've been describing. No amount of grasped-after *sensory stimulation, magnificent possession or personal elevation*, could ever go close to matching the enormous significance of this!

As the apostle Paul exhorted Timothy to take hold of the eternal life to which he'd been called, it is completely understandable that he boldly declared:

1 Timothy 6:8

If we have food and [shelters] we will be content with that.

There are so many creational delights and relational pleasures to be freely embraced. But none of them may legitimately have a *primary place* in our heart. And it is a superlative truth that if any or all of them were absent for any reason, *then* the inner spring of sonship in Jesus our Lord may still always be to us *life itself!* The only prerequisite for this to be so, is the purity of heart that a full assurance of grace enables.

The words that were always on the tip of the Saviour's tongue were, 'Come to Me'. And to this very day that response to Him is still the most basic need of every person. He says, "Come to Me, your Liberating and Life-giving Redeemer and Lord. As the Enfleshed Divine / Human Son, I am your Glorious Christ: the Anointed One you have always been hoping for, and the Answer to the deepest and most desperate cry of your heart!"

Our Lord's great delight is to bring us freely with Him into His Father's presence. There is no difference between what He enjoys in His own communion with the Father, and the joy He has in bringing us with Him into it all!

This is, surely, part of the ultimate pleasure that is set before us on the Final Day: To see *His* supreme happiness—the 'reward' of His suffering love—as He beholds each of *us* coming fully into the blessedness of our inheritance in Him, at last! In His love 'that surpasses knowledge' (Ephesians 3:19) He yearns for nothing less than to see us wholly with Him forever in His Father's love and purpose—with all the joyous and intimate immediacy that the Spirit delights to bring.

How evident it is that life in our Lord is not just about believing certain things, going to church and even getting very busy in the process! It has, above all, to do with our being besotted with Jesus and with Him in His joy.

It is also evident that 'the Trinity' is certainly no mere theological proposition: a fascinating fact to agree with. We are confirming here that it is actually a *glorious and joyous relational Reality*. It could well be said that the life of the Triune Community is, above all else, a DIVINE SONG OF LOVE!!!—one to be celebrated in the heart of every redeemed and sanctified child of God in Christ!

delight in God Himself—the greatest pleasure that may be known

Fallen humanity is endlessly restless in its quest to find that 'WOW factor', which will totally satisfy the 'joy hunger' of the human spirit: some awesome object of enlivening pursuit. And when a promise of this is in sight the chase is quite unrestrainable.

Well, without reservation, we may declare that the Triune Community of the One True God—with all of the divine perfections that flow within and from it—is that *supreme* WOW factor which every joy-hungry, pleasure-seeking human creature is structured to respond to, and actually *participate* in! Yes, God Himself—and the breathtaking wonders of His divine Being and action—is the most delightfully awe-inspiring Object of human pleasure imaginable. Nothing can compare to the relational and vocational wonders of the 'Three-Personed Holy One'—who is Perfect Love itself, and in whom *alone* are the boundlessly glorious and thrilling treasures of eternal life!

the WOW of the Creation Event

We've already spoken of the spring of divine joy in regard to the creation. Here we could say that this exalted joy of the Father, Son and Spirit in what was made, may also be described as a "THE 'WOW' OF GOD"!!!

We are told that when the LORD saw all He had created He said it was 'very good'. But surely, we may assume that this was not merely a statement of calm, divine satisfaction: "Mmm, that should do it. It's excellent. Just perfect."

Study 1 mentioned that at the Creation the angels 'shouted for joy' (Job 38:7). It's difficult to imagine that such ecstatic exuberance was expressed, merely, in the midst of a quiet atmosphere of divine pleasure in a job well done. Rather, it seems to be very evident that these angelic beings were caught up in what may only be described as nothing less than a DIVINE WOW!!! The eternal purpose of Triune Love had now been given magnificent physical form and fullness, and been crowned with a humanity that was the very image and likeness of its Maker—AND IT WAS SO VERY SINGABLY AND DANCEABLY GOOD!!!

Like the angels at the beginning we are called to join the celebration: marveling and exalting in the glory of the Creator Himself. Today in our hearts, we may well be (at least in some way) with the heavenly authorities in their abandoned response:

Revelation 4:11

They fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say, "You are worthy, our Lord and God to receive glory and honour and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being."

the breathless wonder of redemption

Our participation in God's joy in His redemptive work has also been referred to above. But here it will be helpful to further emphasize the impact this may have upon each of us in His presence: the WOW of exalting in the awesome nature of the redemption we have received. And more than that—in the Redeemer Himself!

Just as the creation—with humanity as its crowning glory—was declared to be 'very good', it is true that everything our Redeemer has done in restoring us to His likeness in His Son is also VERY GOOD!!! All that Jesus is in His glorified humanity at the right hand of the Father is, just as it needs to be, to bring us to our goal in Him forever!

For us all, there certainly is nothing more thrilling—and more perfectly fitted to our human need—than revelation to our heart of THE DIVINE MERCY AND GRACE THAT HAS ENGULFED US IN CHRIST!!! For in this we *alone* know the dimensions of the love of God that our whole being craves above all else.

As with the creation, redemption calls forth the most rapturous possible response:

Revelation 5:12–13

In a loud voice they were saying, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!" [And] I heard every creature ... saying, "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

Such is the joyously abandoned and wonder-stricken worship of those who have witnessed what is, actually, the most superlative thing imaginable: THE MANIFESTATION OF DIVINE GLORY IN REDEMPTION!!!

It's only natural, then, that the apostle Paul should use *language* that is nothing less than *superlative*, in giving voice to the wonders of that 'Great Redemptive Reality' in Christ. He found himself spontaneously using such words as 'exceeding', 'unsearchable', 'boundless', 'all surpassing', etc. This is the utterance of exalted worship in the face of what is absolutely beyond compare.

**accepting where we are—& by grace,
pressing on towards where we may be**

The worship we've been describing is entirely in keeping with a full-hearted knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer. But we must not allow ourselves to feel *disheartened* or even *condemned* because of personal lack in this regard. Such feelings will only impede our progress rather than contribute to it.

We are all growing in our knowledge of God, and none of us are where we would want to be in our enjoyment of relational intimacy with Him. But we may be certain that the One who called us into communion with Himself has not given up on us, despite how slow our response to Him has been. As we saw in Study 8 in regard to living in the fullness of the Spirit, it is important to understand that God's love for us has nothing to do with our ability to enjoy His presence at any time.

And furthermore, a holy discontentment with where we are is, actually, a sure indication that the Spirit is at work within us. He is creating an inner hunger for more and more of what will be ours on that Great, Final Day—when we, at last, receive the fullness of all that He has redeemed us into. And *that divinely given hunger* is something to rejoice in!

It is also true that when we have revelations of the love of God—in His goodness, mercy and grace towards us—it is *no less real* if we don't *feel* it the next day! Feelings come and go but He is steadfast. He isn't always changing His mind. There is never a moment when we are not of incalculable value to Him. Each of us can be quite certain that whenever we, or any of the Father's redeemed children, sincerely seek Him—no matter how inadequately—His eyes sparkle in the same way as when He looks upon His Beloved Son!

Yes, His love for us is *never* diminished to the slightest degree. And even when at times our idolatrous impurity of heart brings Him a burning holy-grief—and we know the weight of His disciplines—His own heart is always full of divine tenderness towards us. Every person in Christ is a constant object of the Father's holy affection.

It is never a wise thing to depend upon our feelings for assurance of God's love. And yet His loving agenda is, in fact, to capture our heart! The Father delights to see our face flushed with love for Himself, the Son and the Spirit, whenever the wonders of His goodness, mercy and grace are able to impact us in an intimate way.

So let's be encouraged to do all we can to remain fully assured of what we have come to rejoice in thus far: staying focused upon the glorious love of the Father, the Son and the Spirit in creating and redeeming us—and lifting up our heart in thanksgiving in the light of all the incredible promise this has brought. We will surely then be enabled to go on embracing our heritage of wonderment and joy in the Holy One's presence—and come to know more and more of that greatest WOW!!! in all the world!¹⁸

¹⁸ As the series continues, we'll understand more of what it means to remain fully assured, and the ways this may be enjoyed in the midst of life's many circumstances.

a sweet spirit of awestruck delight in Him as self-boasting is dissolved

In addition to the foolishness of living by our feelings there is an even greater impediment to our enjoyment of the presence of God: the deeply engrained drive within the fallen human heart *to have a righteousness of our own* (as we have previously seen). Without an intimate knowledge of God's grace we are always seeking to have some basis for self-praise: a proud place to stand before Him and others. There is nothing that more tragically prevents a sweet spirit of awestruck delight in the Holy One than this!

Such a self-exalting pursuit inevitably leaves us somewhere between two extremes: intoxicated with our own supposed moral success, or crushed by a morbid sense of personal failure to thrive. The kind of joy we are called into cannot exist within such an environment.

How critical it is for us to understand that the primary manifestation of human freedom is to have only one boast: God alone (1 Corinthians 1:28–31; 4:7; Galatians 6:14; Ephesians 2:8–9). That is, for our sense of personal status to be founded solely upon the Father's glorious goodness in creating us in His image—as the unique person that we are—and the absolute wonder of His mercy and grace to us in His Son! In this alone, there is liberation into the joyous purity of worship we were created for. That's why GOD PROVIDED A SALVATION IN WHICH, NO ONE, COULD FIND ANY POSSIBILITY OF BOASTING, WHATSOEVER!!! He wanted to *totally eliminate any impairment of our capacity for blessedness in His presence!*

On that Final Day when our delight in the Father, Son and Spirit is beyond our present ability to describe, there will be not the slightest trace of self-congratulation within us. The perfect exhilaration of our worship will be in direct proportion to the perfect revelation of His goodness, mercy and grace towards us—ravishing our heart as never before!

And so, today, our urgent need is to know that IN THE SON WE ARE 100% RECEIVERS 100% OF THE TIME!!! Everything required for a total fulfillment of our humanity is *freely given* to us in Jesus: every moment and without limit, His own glorious liberty, identity, serenity, capacity and destiny. And all this lavished upon us who—once tragically dead in our sins—have been MADE ALIVE BY A SOVEREIGN ACT OF DIVINE MERCY!!!

We are certainly called to respond to the absolute abundance of what we have received and go on receiving. And, yet, even the response we make is grace-enabled at every point.

It is the wonder of such 100% *receiving* that alone dissolves the hideous pursuit of *self-boasting* that plagues every day of an un-assured life. What an incredible thing it is to be able to enjoy THE SHEER FREEDOM OF NO LONGER HAVING ANY SELF-EXALTING BOAST TO MAINTAIN!!! In this way we are, indeed, mercifully set up to go on enjoying a sweet spirit of awestruck delight, in the presence of our Triune Redeemer.

maintaining our primary delight in Him—on account of each vertical and horizontal pleasure received

We have said that the heart is 'the enormously powerful engine of our humanity'; and so, *human joy and delight* (that supremely animating object of a heart's desire) is by nature a very dynamic thing. We could in fact say that a heightened experience of *pleasure* is by far the most powerful driver of our human energies.

Anything that is A FOCUS OF GREAT PERSONAL DELIGHT is something that very quickly holds a 'promise of life'. And so, understandably, it is something that becomes A NON-NEGOTIABLE, PERSONAL PURSUIT: AN ALL-CONSUMING, LIFE-PROMISING PASSION!!!

Clearly, from what we've been seeing, the kind of delight that our humanity demands, is only truly to be found in the One who 'has life in Himself' and 'in whom we live and move and have our being' (John 5:26; Acts 17:28). The promise of life that the image of God craves is known *primarily* through joy in His Presence.

That *one pleasure* above all others that every human heart is in desperate need of, is known in the 'vertical relationship' we were created for, with the Creator Himself. And it's only in our constantly *embracing* this, that we may authentically relate 'horizontally'—with deepest satisfaction—to the many pleasures He has provided within His creation.

the only *possible* object of pure-hearted primary delight: God Himself

A pure heart is one that has *a single, unmixed primary focus*: that which is supremely worthy of primary human affection and energy. It, at all times, decisively and wholeheartedly seeks to embrace this one thing above all else.

Although there are all kinds of delights that may be exalted to a *primary* place within our affections, there is only one that arises out of a purity of heart: the sheer pleasure of a life-promising relational intimacy with our Maker!

It is for a very good reason that there can never be *pure-hearted* primary delight *apart from* our embracing of God Himself. And that is because it is, actually, impossible for *any other* object of joy to maintain a single, unmixed primary focus. Its primary place will always be usurped by the uprising of other urgently embraced pleasures (from people, situations and things). As we've been saying, only a primary delight in Him—the Life-Giver—will satisfy our insatiable desire for human fullness. Seeking to find a promise of life in anything apart from joy in *God Himself* will leave us unsatisfied in our quest, and will always be displaced by other pleasure-passions that *immediately* demand the supreme place in our heart: those three universal drives to gain 'the *stimulation* of sensory experience', the '*possession* of magnificent things' and 'the *elevation* of personal status'—things that may, in a moment, become to us entirely non-negotiable.

In the midst of every competing horizontal promise of enjoyment, how evident it is that THE GREATEST MIRACLE IN THE ALL THE WORLD IS THE PURIFICATION OF A HUMAN HEART, TO SEEK ITS PRIMARY SOURCE OF HAPPINESS IN GOD HIMSELF!!!

Yes, our Blesséd, Triune Creator and Redeemer can *alone* be 'the one, pure-hearted primary delight' of His divine image on the earth; for purity of heart is indeed impossible, where there is any other *primary* personal agenda for seeking the blessédness we were created to know.

vertical pleasures from the Father's hand

The vertical pleasures that are ours have already been mentioned in principle and will be enlarged upon in detail in Study 12 (where the matter of relational intimacy with God will be proclaimed much more fully). But what is said briefly here is extremely significant for us as we continue through our present study and the rest of the series.

Of great importance is the restatement of what was declared in Study 8, where Paul gave expression to the fullness of his heart at the beginning of his letter to those in idolatrous Ephesus, saying:

Ephesians 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with [the whole] spiritual blessing in Christ.

As we know, Adam lost the 'whole blessing' that belonged to his humanity when he sinned and incurred the curse that came upon him and the entire race because of his choice—together with the experience of *accursedness* it produced (as spelt out in Studies 3 and 4).

But we've seen that the Story of Redemption has heralded a new day with the coming of the Divine Son in our human flesh, in whom, at last, 'THE WHOLE BLESSING' AGAIN FOUND EXPRESSION ON THE EARTH—AND THAT, SUPREMELY!!! Here was One who every moment enjoyed the relational intimacy and vocational partnership with His Father that we were all created for.

And so now—in the redemption we've received in Christ—we may enjoy that most basic characteristic of true human experience: to be loved by God and be always delighting in Him on account of it. That is, BEING LOVED BY GOD—AND LOVING IT!!! And, amazingly, this even in the midst of all kinds of painful or deficient sensory experience, lack of magnificent possession or a diminished personal status in the eyes of others.

The vertical pleasures we receive, then, simply have to do with knowing and participating in the love of God: enjoying all that is absolutely *new* for us in the Father's presence and purpose, in the Son and by the Spirit. This is what is at the heart of our restoration to 'the original blessing'.

With such blessedness always available, it is of course, unthinkable that we would not do all we can to find our primary delight in the Holy One: making use of every moment of opportunity to *remain joyously assured* of His redeeming and life-giving Presence.

In Study 17 we will see how brothers and sisters in Christ may know the sheer blessedness of being—in all kinds of ways—in His presence *together!*

horizontal pleasures from the Father's hand

Our Creator has boundless joy in His incredible creation, and delights to personally bestow its benefits upon His beloved creatures.

The physical and relational pleasures He has provided for those created to be His image in His world, are truly magnificent. There is so much that comes to us from the Father's hand every moment of every day—excellent things to see, hear, touch, taste and smell. And THE DESIRE OF HIS DIVINELY GENEROUS HEART IS THAT WE FULLY ENJOY IT ALL!!!

God's good gifts, however, may not always be embraced in a legitimate way. Every gift must be used 'creationally': according the Creator's purpose in giving it. When a gift is wrongly used or related to, it becomes an '*illicit* horizontal pleasure': a stimulation of our human senses that brings fiery grief the heart of the Holy One.

But, as will be seen, there is nothing within the creation that is, of itself, a prohibited source of joy.

maintaining the 'vertical' in our enjoyment of the 'horizontal'

From what we've said, it is clear that the creation is not merely a kind of 'blessing machine'—something that a wise and powerful God has set up to go on operating apart from His own personal relationship to it all. His intention has always been that its rich benefits be enjoyed from His hand, within a life-giving consciousness of His presence.

The Father's loving word to His redeemed and sanctified children is: 'Enjoy everything I am giving you in My good world—and do so, as you delight in My salvation and participate in My Son's own relational intimacy and vocational partnership with Me!'

The horizontal pleasures of God truly are excellent. But it is crucial for us to preserve an understanding that they are always to be 'secondary-delights'. That is, not our primary source of joy. This certainly doesn't mean they are lesser or more unworthy. It's just that as good and holy gifts, they are only truly and most satisfyingly embraced within the smiling presence of the Giver.

If these superb creational endowments do become, of themselves, the primary delights of our life, they actually cause us the greatest personal harm we can know: a descent into that tragic realm of

‘idolatrous creation-grasping passion’ and the endless, restless struggle this brings. As we’ve said, there is only one, *pure-hearted* primary delight possible for the image of God: God Himself.

When that one, pure-hearted primary delight is maintained we are then in a superbly functional place. That is, we have a *personal environment* in which we may experience maximum, holy enjoyment of every pleasure-giving horizontal gift: all that the Father every day does, indeed, delight to bestow upon us!

Within such an environment we may know—as previously indicated—that nothing within the creation is of itself an unworthy means of our enjoyment. Paul was very keen for Timothy to emphasize this in the face of false teaching at the time, which required believers to abstain from certain creational pleasures. Bringing extremely helpful clarity to this situation he said:

1 Timothy 4:4–5

Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

That is, if the word of God doesn’t forbid the particular use of a creational gift, and it is embraced in a spirit of joyous gratitude in the presence of *the Giver*, then any enjoyment of it becomes a holy act. It is only a defiled or malfunctioning conscience that causes us to reject His good gifts as being in some way ‘unclean’.

All the pleasures of the creation are good. And yes, listen to this: We may, rightly, delight in Him because of the sheer pleasure of certain urgently required physical functions—like using our bowels! As the process takes place we may well sigh in the Father’s presence, ‘Oh, that was good!’ Being His sanctified children, holy worship and thanksgiving belong in every horizontal situation of enjoyment—excluding none! No God-loving engagement within a ‘good creational reality’ can result in un-holiness. It’s actually just the opposite.

This then brings us to an extremely significant outworking of the primary delight we are called to pursue.

primary delight that is a ‘holy joy’ —expressed in a lifestyle of worship

Our primary delight in God Himself is actually a *holy joy*—one that is known in the presence of the Holy One—and so is ‘different to’, and ‘other than’ any other joy. As such, it is something to be experienced daily, within an atmosphere of free-spirited and pure-hearted worship.

Holy joy arises *in the light of* all that our Creator and Redeemer is and has done, in all that He is declared to be doing right now, and all that we may rightly anticipate from Him in the future. And since there is nothing in any moment of our life that doesn’t have to do with such realities, there is, actually, never a moment in which He is not worthy—in some way—of our adoring response. There is always a creational or redemptive joy to savour in His presence!

It could be said, then, that one of the most distinguishing features of a redeemed person’s way of life would ideally be this: AN HABITUAL ANSWER TO RECEIVED PLEASURES, THAT IS IMMEDIATELY GIVEN IN A JOYOUS SPIRIT OF WORSHIP!!! To *embrace* the pure-hearted primary delight to which we are called, *surely does* involve our taking every opportunity to maintain this kind of daily response.

Study 2 spoke of ‘that inner music of thankfulness for the reality of His love’: that is, for each and every blessing that is bestowed. Remaining fully assured of ‘The Great Redemptive Reality’ that is ours in Christ, it may be—in the face of *each* and *every* pleasure enjoyed—that we seek TO LIFT UP OUR HEART IN ADORING WONDER AND GRATITUDE TO THE ONE WHO IS ALWAYS INTIMATELY PRESENT TO US!!! At any time, this may be either a substantially joyous affirmation or just a God-loving sigh within.

This is, without doubt, the only environment in which there may be an authentic reception of pleasures from the hand of the One who loves us. And, of course, it must be said that this is eminently the case in regard to our relationships with others.

The apostle Paul when writing to the Thessalonians—for whom he'd poured himself out in the Lord's love—found himself exclaiming:

1 Thessalonians 3:9

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?

He had clearly come to these people in that holy joy which is found in God's presence alone. And witnessing their response to the gospel he could only continue to exalt in Him—now with an inner spring of rich thanksgiving on account of them.

This is an excellent example of authentic reception of *any* pleasure from the Father's hand. That is, something entered into with a maintained holy joy in His presence, and with immediate delight in Him on account of blessings then received.

Actually, this is to be the *normal pattern* of experience for all the children of God, even in the midst of our many failures. It is to be the way of life we are always seeking to decisively and wholeheartedly *embrace*, as we press on fully assured of the abundant grace that has freely come to us.

Later (and particularly in Study 14, which deals with our being 'truly alive in the midst of complexity'), it will be seen that such holy joy is no less *life-giving* when, in any situation, expected pleasures for some reason are not forthcoming. This is because a participation in the Son's delight in the Father and the Spirit may, continue to be, that substantial 'WOW factor' we've been speaking of. And this, even in the face of the most acute horizontal difficulty and disappointment! In this way, holy joy truly is 'different to' and 'other than' the joys that are usually experienced.²²

We can surely say, then, that our being renewed in the image and likeness of the Father—as we are enriched in our inheritance in the Son—has everything to do with a spirit of worship becoming more and more the atmosphere of our days (as was portrayed in the 'Inner Song' meditation inserted between Study 8 and this one).

mercifully commanded to joy

With the many complexities that life brings joy can quickly vanish—with that old dullness and heaviness of spirit, sadly, dampening the atmosphere of our daily, personal environment. From a 'fleshly perspective' this is all very natural and understandable. But in Christ it is entirely abnormal! Joy need never be regarded as 'the occasional luxury' of the children of God—a happy respite from the natural frustrations and miseries of daily living. We know this because our Redeemer has *commanded* us to joy—mercifully calling us out of every moment of 'adamic gloom' into the blessedness we were redeemed to know! This of course (as will be seen further on here in Study 9 and later studies), doesn't mean that joy is always to be 'at full pitch'. But it does mean that it may always be present—and decisively restored when lost.

The Father's redeemed children are not merely *invited* into worship. All has been gloriously provided for, so in His great love HE *COMMANDS US INTO THE JOY AND HAPPINESS OF HIS SON—NOT SO THAT HE CAN LOVE US, BUT SO THAT WE CAN ENJOY HIS LOVE!!!*

That's why Paul could say to the Philippians:

²² Again—to minimize any present feelings of discouragement—be assured that as we continue, much more will be said regarding the way such joy is maintained.

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

The believers at Philippi were going through a difficult time. But the apostle Paul didn't say, 'Try to stay happy if you can'. On the basis of the proclamation they had received, He commanded them to 'rejoice in the Lord *always!*' And just in case this may have seemed to be a bit of an over-statement, he said, 'I will say it again: Rejoice!' ALL OF THE REDEEMED MAY REJOICE IN WHAT IS THEIRS IN CHRIST, ALL OF THE TIME—IF THEY WILL!!!²³

Before the coming of the Enfleshed-Son among us, joy was also a God-ordained priority for Israel. When preparing them to enter the Promised Land Moses said:

Deuteronomy 12:18

[You] are to rejoice before the LORD your God in everything you put your hand to.

David commanded Israel in a similar way in the midst their struggles as a holy nation, saying:

Psalms 37:4

Take delight in the LORD.

The Psalms consistently declare the absolute appropriateness of joyous living within the old covenant:

Psalms 105:3–5

Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Look to the LORD and His strength; seek His face always. Remember the wonders He has done.

Psalms 118:24

Let us rejoice today and be glad.

Psalms 98:1

Sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done marvelous things.

There is always that 'new song' to be sung to the Faithful One, in the light of the marvelous things He has done—*supremely* so for us in His Son! With our focus relentlessly fixed upon Him and His redemptive actions on our behalf, the song of our heart may always be freshly renewed within us.

Even in the midst of crushing personal, relational and vocational failure, it is this kind of joy that is the only way forward—a dynamic response that Ezra was quick to command Israel into in the LORD'S name:

Nehemiah 8:10

Do not grieve for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

After the people of Israel had returned from their exile—and had completed the rebuilding of the city wall—Ezra read to them from the Book of the Law. Realizing how greatly they had fallen short of the LORD'S way they were deeply grieved. Such realization was a good thing: something that needed to happen. But having come to this place of understanding, they were not to study their failures and the consequences these had brought, or to wallow in their guilt and sorrow. They were to *celebrate* the LORD'S unfailing covenant love and faithfulness towards them right then! BEING WITH THE LORD IN HIS OWN JOY IN WHAT HE HAS DONE, IS WHAT MAKES HIS PEOPLE STRONG—AND FILLS THEM WITH COURAGE!!!

In the midst of the situations and circumstances we face joy is so often an act of the will. That is, in them all, we may choose to 'always decisively and wholeheartedly' set our focus upon, and freshly *embrace*, the wonder of all that has come to us in Christ: that utterly new LIBERTY, IDENTITY, SERENITY, CAPACITY and DESTINY—which releases us into the blessedness that is ours in the Beloved!

²³ Study 10 will speak in some detail regarding our capacity for personal blessedness in Christ.

Yes, when the will is rightly and decisively engaged in regard to these supreme realities of the grace of God, dark-spirited preoccupation with difficulty, disappointment and failure may be set aside.

And furthermore, as was seen in Study 8 (from Romans 8:28–30), we as the children of God may know that IN EVERY PERSONAL, CIRCUMSTANTIAL, RELATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL SITUATION OF LIFE, THE FATHER IS AT WORK ACCORDING TO HIS GLORIOUS PURPOSE: TO CONFORM US TO THE LIKENESS OF HIS SON!!! And so at all times—remaining sharply attuned to this matchless fact—we may gladly lift up our heart to Him and find our life in His presence. There is nothing *redemptively unremarkable* about any moment of life, as we live in such assurance. James understood the nature of the Father’s sovereign, ongoing redemptive activity within the lives of His children, saying:

James 1:2–4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

We all face trials of different kinds (some very severe). Our primary focus though, is not to be merely upon what is currently happening, but upon what we know the Father has *done* and what He has promised to be *doing* in the midst of it all—let alone, the glorious Eternal Goal to which we are heading, that is always the supreme cause for pure joy!

There is never a time when we are not to fulfill that primary command, which expresses the essence of our inheritance in Christ:

Matthew 22:37

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul [and with all your strength] and with all your mind.

It is a great encouragement to know that we have been so endowed with the grace of our Redeemer, that He may *mercifully command* us into such blessedness in His presence—always!

our heritage of joy—a promised capacity

The *promise* of joy in God Himself is woven into the fabric of the Story of Redemption from beginning to end, and always stands before the people of God as a heritage to be received. No one needs to be left wondering whether consistent, joyous and life-giving fellowship with God is possible.

As we’ve been seeing, for us today such joy is nothing less than a participation in the blessedness of the Son, in His Father’s presence and purpose of love. He Himself said:

John 15:11

I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

John 16:22

You will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

Knowing all that His disciples would soon suffer, He prayed the night before His own untellable ordeal:

John 17:13

[Father] I am coming to You now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of My joy within them.

The old endless, desperate and futile quest for personal fullness and refreshment from people, situations and things need be no more. Hear Jesus’ *absolute promise to all without exception*:

John 6:35

“Whoever [keeps on coming] to Me will never be hungry, and whoever [keeps on believing] in Me will never be thirsty.”

All who *keep on coming in faith* to Christ may *participate* in the reality of a total, God-accomplished union with their Crucified, Buried, Risen and Reigning Lord. And they may—in a joyously maintained assurance of this union—constantly know the personal fullness and refreshment of being with Him in His Father’s presence and purpose. They may come to see that it is JESUS for whom they have been hungering and thirsting all of their lives—and that His promise of ongoing, joy-filled satisfaction is absolutely dependable!

Speaking of all who joyously find their identity in the presence of the LORD, the psalm-writing sons of Korah proclaimed:

Psalm 87:7

As they make music they will sing, “All my fountains are in You.”

What a perfect statement of a holy human happiness that is!

Then there are the words of the prophet Isaiah, who in the midst of his proclamations of that righteousness, retribution and restoration spoken of in Study 5, declared the LORD’S purpose for His people in it all:

Isaiah 51:11

Everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

This promise referred to what Israel would experience when they returned from their time of exile. It speaks too, in principle, of the joy that all the redeemed will know at the Appearing of Jesus. But it is also a promise to be *daily* enjoyed (to a great degree) by every believer, who is in Christ. As proclaimed in Study 8, in the midst of their struggles, all may know that they have been *liberated* from their sins and brought home to the Father and that ETERNAL HERITAGE HE HAS SET BEFORE THEM!!!

In this present age there certainly is sorrow and sighing in our experience of life. But sometimes—even often—this can simply be a result of refusing to ‘be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus’. There is much of the ‘everlasting joy of the age to come’ to be possessed in the present—in the midst of all kinds of troubles.

Finally, speaking of the liberating effects of the dawning of divine grace, Isaiah said:

Isaiah 61:3

[He will] bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

How glorious are God’s promises for all whom He has brought into life-giving union with His Son! We could say that in Him:

- our heads are crowned with the beauty of being released into the awesome, *moral status* of the Son in His Father’s presence, rather than the ashes of our personal failure being heaped upon us;
- we have each been anointed as a person of great honour and esteem, with the fragrant oil of the Beloved Son’s own *personal and vocational status*, rather than languishing under a mournful spirit of shame and indignity;
- we have been clothed with a garment of praise, through our Spirit-given capacity to participate in the blessedness of the Son’s own *personal and vocational fullness*—free at last from that deadening spirit of hopeless despair that has too often descended upon us!

Indeed, for all who find themselves in Christ there is certainly a new day that has dawned. In Him we are INHERITORS OF A NEW CAPACITY FOR LIFE, WHERE SORROW MAY WELL BE

KNOWN, BUT WHERE MISERY HAS NO PLACE!!! And this, as we more and more discover that He Himself is, indeed, EVERYTHING we have ever longed for!²⁴

joy that God's people have known by His mercy and grace

As we've been saying, the joy of the redeemed in God's presence is not in any way dependent upon ideal circumstances. His promises apply whether our environment is pleasant or painful. It will be good, then, to now see some examples of such resilient gladness in the hearts of the saints down through the centuries: the joy they have known by the mercy and grace of God.

Peter was able to give bold testimony to what his scattered and oppressed brothers and sisters in Christ experienced:

1 Peter 1:8–9

[In the midst of your many trials], though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you [go on believing] in Him and [go on being] filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

The apostle was celebrating the fact that *adverse circumstances* had not caused the redeemed children of God to fall prey to dark mental and emotional states. And this for a very good reason: In all the hardship they faced, they had known that they were *receiving* the ongoing salvation of their souls. Such difficulties, actually, provided a context in which the *reality* of their salvation could become all the more evident—giving opportunity to confirm the personally sustaining power of saving faith within them (v. 7). THE JOY OF A WORSHIPPING HEART WAS SEEN TO BE STRONGER THAN THE GRIEVOUS SITUATIONS THAT BEFELL THEM!!! So, they were being encouraged to continue on in the same way—with a view to that Final Day to come! Such exhortation is always very relevant for us to hear and embrace.

Paul underwent enormous suffering and difficulty in response to the call of God. He didn't find this pleasant. But he did prove that the grace of God was entirely sufficient to keep Him personally alive in a spirit of worship. Giving witness of this to the Corinthians, he said of himself and Timothy:

2 Corinthians 4:8

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair.

There's no doubt that circumstances can bring enormous pressure upon us at times—even threatening to crush us completely. And, as Paul and Timothy found, such things may be very confusing—even completely baffling and bewildering. But these need never be a cause of personal devastation and despair.

Paul's testimony assures us that a free-spirited and pure-hearted worshipper in Christ, may face the most severe and perplexing circumstances, and yet, *without* descending into the depths of a dark-spirited and God-refusing abandonment of hope. For Paul and Timothy, the joy of the Lord was consistently their strength, in the face of these very things.

2 Corinthians 6:10

[As God's servants we are] sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

²⁴ Later in this study, and in others to come, it will be seen that there is, of course, a deep personal anguish to be known in a sinful and suffering world. But this—rightly experienced—is itself the fruit of rich personal delight in God Himself. It has nothing to do with self-pity or other expressions of frustrated pride and self-interest, but arises out of passionate concern for both the honour of God and the human freedom and fullness of others as His image. And we will see that it may also be what is known during indispensable seasons of suffering that have to do with God accomplishing within us what could be done in no other way.

The impact of life's circumstances does, indeed, at times bring us great sorrow: a holy grief in the face of what is contrary to certain legitimate and strongly-felt desires. But Paul's testimony again assures us that this never means that our spirit need be either crushed or despairing. There may always be joy in the Father's presence in the midst of the sorrows that come into our life.

This is entirely consistent with Solomon's testimony to the experience of many old covenant saints: Proverbs 15:15

All the days of the oppressed are wretched, but the cheerful heart has a continual feast.

Personal wellbeing really does have everything to do with the state of our heart at any given time!

Habakkuk knew this. Although at first greatly perplexed in the face of an abhorrent and terrifying judgment that was about to befall his nation, he was in the end able to make this personal declaration:

Habakkuk 3:17–18

[Though everything around me fails] yet will I rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. The Sovereign LORD is my strength.

The word of God dwelt richly in the heart of Habakkuk, enabling him to anticipate ongoing strength in the presence of the Faithful One, who was entirely worthy of His joyous worship.

Isaiah, *foreshadowing* the coming of the Son among us made this announcement:

Isaiah 9:2–3

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light ... [They] rejoice before You as people rejoice at the harvest.

The promised redemption had come. What had always been longed for was seen, and a bright new day of harvest time joy had begun!

Isaiah himself had deep pleasure in anticipation of this coming visitation of God's mercy and grace. Although his present situation was indeed, dark and grievous, he was able to live within the joyous, personal environment of an enlightened heart—and gladly gave witness to it, exclaiming:

Isaiah 61:10

I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God.

some further testimony to the gift of joy in the Psalms

The Psalms contain the whole range of emotions experienced by us all.²⁵ But in particular, they give abundant witness to the joy of God's old covenant people in the light of His unfailing love and faithfulness. We may simply let these following scriptures speak for themselves.

Ps 104:33

—a song in the heart as a way of life

I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

Ps 86:12–13

I will praise You, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify Your name forever. For great is Your love for me; You have delivered me.

Psalms 92:4

You make me glad by Your deeds, LORD; I sing for joy at what Your hands have done.

Psalms 16:8–9

I keep my eyes always on the LORD ... Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices.

²⁵ Study 12 will deal with the significant matter of 'laments' in the psalms and elsewhere.

Psalm 21:6

[LORD], You have granted [the king who trusts in You] unending blessings and made him glad with the joy of Your presence.

Psalm 43:4

I will go ... to God, my joy and my delight.

Psalm 9:2

[LORD] I will be glad and rejoice in You.

Psalm 84:10

Better is one day in Your [presence] than a thousand elsewhere.

Psalm 27:4

One thing I ask ... This is what I seek: that I may dwell in [the presence] of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek Him.

Psalm 36:8–9

[LORD,] You give [people] drink from Your river of delights. For with You there is the fountain of life.

Psalm 73:25–26

Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Psalm 90:14

Satisfy us in the morning with Your unfailing [covenant] love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

A comment on Psalm 90 may be of benefit as we bring this section to a close. The psalm was a prayer of Moses, probably prayed during those forty difficult years of wandering in the wilderness. After the darkness of that period, Moses was keenly anticipating for Israel a new era of joy that would dawn in the land they'd been promised—within the many challenges it would bring.

For us in Christ such anticipation may be applied to the Final Day of promise to come. However, in these present days of the Spirit—in the 'whole blessing' of the new covenant—a new era *has* already dawned! The battles and difficulties are certainly still there. But in them we may nevertheless be satisfied *every morning* with the wonder of God's unfailing covenant love and faithfulness to us in His Son—and in this 'sing for joy and be glad all our days'!

We cannot help but be impressed by the testimony of God's old covenant people to the joy that was theirs. And yet, the new covenant refrain, 'How much more in Christ', surely draws us on to know all that incredibly belongs to us in Him: a daily, joyous participation in His own relational intimacy and vocational partnership with His Father.

We have, indeed, been looking at *many* scriptures to do with seeing 'great delight in God' as being a primary holy / non-negotiable, personal agenda. All this may, at times, have felt a little overwhelming. But the purpose of our being strongly commanded to joy, is never to in any way bring a sense of *oppressive legal obligation*. It is the exact opposite. Our Redeemer has given us such scriptures (in the midst of our weaknesses and struggles) to strongly and lovingly stir our hearts towards that one grand Goal: the blessedness of participating more and more in our awesome inheritance in the Beloved!

joyous communion with God—the gloriously wise and functional way of living

From all we've been seeing, it is surely clear that *a spirit of joy in God* is His intended way of true mental and emotional health for His children.

We've actually been speaking of what it means to *cease* to experience life as something we must *manage*, ever-striving to find solutions to the situations that deaden our spirit. There are, of course, times when we do need 'problem solving wisdom'. But in it all, we are being called into a realm where, all our days may be joyously lived within the glorious initiative and lavish endowment of our Maker and Redeemer—delighting in the absolute simplicity and perfection of our PLACE in the Beloved! Everything we will ever be called to be or do is found in our union with Jesus in His Father's presence and purpose of love. We need only remain fully assured of this—and go on freely and gladly receiving!

Yes, every day without exception, it is our amazing heritage as the children of God to freely pursue that sweetest pleasure of all: communion with Him. As will be seen later in Study 14, nothing is so conducive to a happily serene and childlike spirit in the midst of life's complexities.

Furthermore, finding our first and deepest pleasure in God, and delighting in Him on account of every 'vertical' and 'horizontal' pleasure received, actually, makes what is agreeable to be all the more pleasing to our senses. Everything joyously embraced within the sonship we have in the Father's presence, is more deeply satisfying than anything else.

None of us were ever intended to be focused primarily upon ourselves and other people, situations and things, with all the tormenting experience that such idolatrous living brings (itemized in the Study 4 diagram): a dark-spirited sense of guilt, condemnation, shame, humiliation (& remorse), lostness, inferiority, uneasiness, vulnerability, fear, anxiety, frustration, deadness, futility, self-pity, envy, anger and resentment. Living that way is both foolish and dysfunctional. It is also wicked, and deeply grievous to our Creator and Redeemer.

To refuse the supreme pleasure of a primary delight in God is a choice to spurn His goodness, mercy and grace, and so (in such situations) to lock-ourselves-out of the blessedness of authentic human experience. That is, choosing to *focus on* how we feel about *complexity* to do with certain people, situations and things—rather than, on the *simplicity* of that Great Redemptive Reality with which we have been wholly identified!

Surely no circumstance ever makes our worship of the Holy One something that may be set aside. Such lifting up of our heart to him is, without question, a totally indispensable and non-negotiable element of our daily response as present inheritors—to be always decisively and wholeheartedly embraced.²⁶

The words of Ethan the Ezrahite sum up very well the way of life we are speaking of:

Psalm 89:15–16

Blesséd are those who have learned to acclaim You, who walk in the light of Your presence, LORD. They rejoice in Your name all day long; they exult in Your righteousness.

There is, indeed, no more gloriously wise and functional way to live than to rejoice all day long in all that our Creator and Redeemer is, has done, is doing and has promised to do—having Him as our only boast and the supreme delight of our life. *Learning to acclaim Him* in this way truly is basic to the human freedom, fullness of life and wholeness of being we were created to every day enjoy!

²⁶ In Studies 10 & 12 –14, we will be looking in detail at what is behind our susceptibility to idolatrous (and often morbid) personal states—and how it is that we may be released at any time from the tragic dysfunctionality they bring. We will see what the Scriptures teach in regard to immediately identifying the cause of such guilt-charged descent—and the way of restoration to our heritage of joyous communion with God and authentic response to other people, situations and things!

So, then, we come to the end of this massively significant element of our calling: the necessity of *embracing* God Himself as that *one (possible), pure-hearted primary delight*. And having established this, we may now progress to the next indispensable and non-negotiable element of response.

Thirdly, as present inheritors, we are to be always decisively & wholeheartedly:

- *pursuing* the three pure-hearted, primary *desires*:

For Israel to possess their inheritance, they needed to *remain* fully assured of the LORD'S unfailing covenant love and faithfulness, and to *embrace* the exclusively life-giving and non-negotiable call to worship the LORD alone. But they would also need to be a people who were always *pursuing* the supreme passions that were at the heart of holy, non-negotiable covenant living.

In our introduction, these desires of the heart that Israel was to pursue were stated as being:

- to live for the LORD'S pleasure, glory and praise
- to be and do all that the LORD had called them to
- to want for their neighbour what they wanted for themselves

And for us embraced within the new covenant in Christ, these are the very same primary desires that need to be always decisively and wholeheartedly pursued. They are, in fact, the only desires that are authentically non-negotiable.

The present tense verb 'pursuing' speaks of personal action that is dynamically purposeful. It powerfully describes the response of a human heart in the face of what is, clearly, a totally non-negotiable, personal agenda. And so, understandably, this word will find a significant place in our present study and the ones to come. Its use will include the *unmasking* of pursuits that are idolatrous by nature, as well as *celebration of* and *encouragement into* those that are expressions of holy, grace-fired, urgent personal quest!

the supreme importance of pure-hearted desire

Desire is fundamental to human experience. It may, however, be authentic or not, healthy or unhealthy. For example in terms of our everyday living, physical appetite can be a sign of good health. But a passion for food can also be a sign of deep personal unhappiness: an unfulfilled appetite for joy.

'Passion' then, may have much more to do with a godless and unhealthy personal driven-ness, than free-spirited and pure-hearted pursuit of true, human desire. The 'passions of the flesh', the 'passions of the eyes' and the 'pride of life' are very powerful energies that operate within a fallen-human heart. As has been seen, we *are* often so quickly and unconsciously pressed towards pursuits that are idolatrous—seeking to gain emotional satisfaction merely through the *stimulation of sensory experience*, the *possession of magnificent things* and the *elevation of personal status*.

That's why we must be wisely discerning in regard to our various passions—even if they are based upon biblical themes! Something that is, of itself, authentic action to be passionately pursued, may not always be coming from pure-hearted motivation—as our darkened emotional state reveals when the passion is frustrated.

So then, this is what must remain clearly understood: JUST AS THERE IS ONLY ONE PURE-HEARTED, PRIMARY DELIGHT, THERE ARE ALSO ONLY THREE PURE-HEARTED, PRIMARY DESIRES—WHICH SPONTANEOUSLY FLOW FROM A SUSTAINED HOLY JOY IN OUR CREATOR AND REDEEMER!!! Then consequently, we understand that whatever is pursued apart from the presence of such pure-hearted, primary delight and desire, will inevitably be by nature

idolatrous: an illicit and polluting intrusion into the sanctuary of our innermost being. Without this wise perspective, we will surely lack the discernment that is necessary in the face of strong personal passion.

Jesus, speaking to His disciples about certain valid everyday desires that tend to wrongly dominate our lives, said:

Matthew 6:33

[Unbelievers] run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.

We will see that to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness is the same as saying, “Embrace the one pure-hearted, primary delight and pursue the three pure-hearted, primary desires”—which encapsulate ‘the two great commands’ that summarize the righteousness we are called to fulfill. And as the series continues it will be clear that obedience to such ‘seeking first’ does, indeed, bring the Father’s faithful provision of those needful ‘secondary desires of life’.

Within the *extremely powerful realm of human desire* it is crucial, then, to be able to distinguish between what is primary and secondary. That is, to understand what belongs to the very essence of our humanity and what does not:

- to see what has, on the one hand, to do with the indispensable, Spirit-given inner spring of living water and the out-flowing rivers of life, and
- to see what are, on the other hand, everyday things that are valid needs to be fulfilled and pleasures to be enjoyed, but which, are not *essential* to our relational intimacy and vocational partnership with God—and so are not, by nature, authentically *non-negotiable*.

How very important it is, then, that we receive proclamation of the three pure-hearted, non-negotiable primary desires before us now: supreme passions, that are indispensable to our response as present inheritors on the way to the Final Day.

We will actually be seeing that such desires are nothing less than a participation in all that stirs within the heart of the Son Himself—as we are with Him in His own delight in His Father’s presence, and His holy pursuit of His Father’s glorious purpose of love!

pursuing pure-hearted holy desire as worshippers embraced by the Pursuer

We’ve been saying that throughout this study it will be shown how all six expressions of *our ongoing, present-tense response*, flow out of the perfection of *God’s own gloriously ongoing, present-tense initiative towards us*. Now we’ll see that this is most certainly the case when it comes to our *pursuit* of all that is the fruit of a pure-hearted, primary delight in Him.

In regard to that second element of our response as inheritors (*embracing* God Himself as the primary Object of our delight), we saw that in doing so we are actually embracing the One who is Himself *our Embracer!* But now we may also know that the One who is our Embracer is also *our Pursuer!*

His embracing of us is always the result of His pursuit of us. No one may know the exalted joy of His glorious embrace apart from the prior action of His ardent pursuit. His pursuit of us in love has always preceded our delight in His embrace.

When in John 4, Jesus had spoken to the woman at the well of ‘the spring of living water within leaping up to eternal life’, He then (in v. 23) declared that the Father is *always inwardly pressed to seek after* those who will worship Him in spirit (wholeheartedly) and in truth (as participants in the

true sonship).²⁷ He delights to bring us, together with His Son, into the joy of His embrace as free-spirited worshippers—and passionately pursues us to this end!

In Luke 15 Jesus gave the parable of what is often called ‘the prodigal son’—which may be better titled the parable of ‘the seeking father’. It is a powerful picture of God the Father’s fervent son-pursuing love, in the face of the cold-hearted and self-seeking indifference of His two ‘lost’ sons: the one who was lost a long way from home, and the other who ‘dutifully’ remained at home but was equally ‘lost’.

This parable of ‘the seeking father’ was preceded by two other parables. Firstly, the parable of ‘the seeking shepherd’, who relentlessly pursued the one lost sheep out into the darkness of the night, to bring it back into the security and care that it desperately needed. And then, secondly, the parable of ‘the seeking woman’, who had lost one of the coins of her betrothal or wedding necklace. She couldn’t rest until she had that treasure back where it belonged.

The setting in which these three parables were given was one in which ‘sinners’ were, all the time, gathering around Jesus to hear Him. Religious leaders, however, were critical of His welcoming them, and His even bestowing upon them the honour of eating with them. But those leaders needed to know that He had come in the name of His Seeking Father, and would relentlessly and lovingly pursue these ‘lost ones’.

Then in Luke 19, Jesus in the midst of a crowd urgently called the despised tax collector, Zacchaeus, to ‘come down immediately’ out the tree where he was perched safe from hateful reactions. Jesus then honoured Him by saying, ‘I must stay at your house today’ (v. 5). Once again complaints were made that Jesus was honouring a sinner. Later Zacchaeus responded with an incredibly radical expression of repentance, moving Jesus to declare to the complainers, ‘The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost’ (v. 10).

Jesus truly was the Seeking Son who had come in the name of the Seeking Father. How beautifully He pursued the ‘lost sons’ He had been sent to deliver—His quest finally leading Him out into that darkest and most accursed place of human lostness, that He might bring us to be forever with Him in the blessedness of His Father’s embrace!

One thing will become clear to us as we proceed. In our being so ardently *pursued* and gloriously *embraced*, it is a very natural thing for there to be springing up within us these three pure-hearted primary desires that are our present subject—*pursuing* them as we participate in the holy passion of our divine Pursuer Himself!

The first pure-hearted, primary desire to be always decisively & wholeheartedly pursued is:

the pleasure, glory & praise of God

(holy zeal for ourselves & others to be a delight to Him; that He be honoured & adored by all & His glorious purpose fulfilled)

We saw in Study 2, ‘The High Human Calling’, that the fountain of true human vocation is ‘an inner spring of great delight in God’, producing an adoring spirit of reverent awe, child-like trust, grateful affection, and with these, a wholehearted obedience that wants His will and way—and *seeks His pleasure!*

Then it was seen that such an inner spring of great delight in Him produces a *reflection of His glory* through our humanity. And the first element of this reflected glory was amazingly declared to be the

²⁷ The word ‘seek’ in John 4:23 of the original Greek speaks of continuously present action.

enormous, ongoing blessing of being with Him in His own 'holy affections'. These were then firstly expressed as a spring of *divine moral purity* in our inner being: a *jealous passion for His glory and praise*, resulting in a hatred of sin and grief over its intrusion into our, or another's, heart, mind, words or actions.

And so, in line with the proclamation of Study 2, the first expression of pure-hearted primary desire (arising out of a pure-hearted primary delight in God Himself) is, as our Study 9 outline states: a constantly decisive and wholehearted pursuit of *His pleasure, glory and praise*. A true delight in the Holy One will always produce this kind of primary, holy passion.

The essence of this first primary desire, then, may be summed up in this way:

Pure-hearted desire for the pleasure, glory and praise of God is the product *an inner spring of great delight in Him*, that is at once within us a joyously affectionate desire to, at all times, be a source of great delight *to Him*: to bring Him *pleasure* in every moment of our days. And then that inner spring of delight in God immediately becomes *a spring of holy and jealous zeal* for His supreme honour in His world!

What a wonderful manifestation of true human passion it is that we should *seek His pleasure* in this way: that everything within us should rise up to declare that HIS PERFECTIONS ARE SUCH THAT HE IS *WORTHY TO BE HONOURED, WORSHIPPED, PRAISED AND ADORED, EVERY MOMENT, BY EVERY PERSON, IN EVERY SITUATION IN HIS WORLD!!!* And then, with this outcome so *earnestly desired* that we cannot bear it not to be so!

We are speaking of a perpetual longing for God's great reign and rule over all things to be made known, as His will is accomplished in every part of His creation. Consequently, it is not only a *present* manifestation of God's kingdom that is to be desired. The goal of this holy passion is for the kingdom's *ultimate fulfillment* at the Appearing of Christ—that which is behind the cry, 'Maranatha! Come, Lord!' (1Corinthians 16:22; Revelation 22:20). For only then will the Father have the pleasure we desire for Him in seeing all things full of the glory of the Son. And only then will He be honoured and adored by all as He deserves. And this, of course, as we ourselves on that Day know the ultimate pleasure He desires for us, His treasured children.

We have spoken—and will continue to speak—of the personal enjoyment of human freedom and fullness in Christ. But an inseparable part of this is a primary passion for *the pleasure, glory and praise of God*. To be focused merely upon our own and others' happiness betrays a tragically deficient personal drive. For the supreme issue in this world is not just the enhancement of human life. It is, above all, *the establishment of God's righteousness* within His creation. The gospel that we love and proclaim, and the desires that propel us, must never be merely human-centred.

God's own holy zeal for His name

In Study 1 we saw that our Maker relentlessly pursues one holy agenda above all others: THE REVELATION OF HIS GLORY!!! He declared to Moses:

Exodus 9:16

[My purpose is] that My name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

He later stated through Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 20:9

For the sake of My name, I brought [Israel] out of Egypt. I did it to keep My name from being profaned in the eyes of the nations among whom they lived and in whose sight I had revealed Myself to the Israelites.

Israel was to worship the LORD alone. He had revealed Himself to them as the One True God: the Living God, who is always in the action of being who He is on behalf of His people. He would show

Himself to be the Holy One, who is faithful to his covenant with them, and they were to respond faithfully to Him. They were told:

Isaiah 42:8

I am the LORD; that is My name! I will not give My glory to another or My praise to idols.

Exodus 20:5, 7

I the LORD your God am a jealous God ... You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.

His people were not to take His name and yet live in a way that denied the glory of who He is. In His divine, holy affection, He was rightly jealous for their response to His awesome purpose of love for them. He said:

Leviticus 22:32

Do not profane My holy name, for I must be acknowledged as holy by the Israelites. I am the LORD who made you holy and who brought you out of Egypt to be your God.

But Israel did go on to profane the LORD'S name: treating it as a common thing to be easily disregarded. And their behaviour was nothing less than an ugly spiritual prostitution (Jeremiah 2:20). Consequently:

Psalms 78:58

They aroused His jealousy with their idols.

And so His faithfulness to His covenant took the shape of the judgment He had promised through Moses before they had entered their inheritance:

Deuteronomy 4:25–27

“After [you] have lived in the land a long time—if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God and provoking Him to anger ... the LORD will scatter you among the peoples.”

Jeremiah reminded them of this before it happened so they would know why such disaster had befallen them:

Jeremiah 13:11,19

I bound the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to Me, declares the LORD, to be My people for My renown and praise and honour. But they have not listened ... All Judah will be carried away into exile, carried away completely.

But the One who is jealous for His name nevertheless promised that He would redeem His people, who in the eyes of the nations would now appear to have served a God who is both unfaithful and impotent. Through Isaiah He told them of a coming manifestation of His mercy, might and faithfulness:

Isaiah 52:3,5–6

This is what the LORD says: ... you will be redeemed. ... All day long My name is constantly blasphemed. Therefore My people will know My name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I.”

But they were also to understand that the redemption that would come was by no means to be seen as an affirmation of their integrity as a people. Through Ezekiel this proclamation came:

Ezekiel 36:22–23

Say to the house of Israel, “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘It is not for your sake, house of Israel, that I’m going to do these things, but for the sake of My holy name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them where you have gone. I will show the holiness of My great name.

Ezekiel 39:7, 25

I will no longer let My holy name be profaned, and the nations will know that I am the Holy One in Israel. ... I will be zealous for My holy name.

From this brief account of God's covenant relationship with His people one thing is very clear: Our Creator and Redeemer who has unbounded joy and delight in Himself and His glorious purpose of love, does rightly, have a holy zeal for His name. And in this the burning and yearning passion of His divine Being is, indeed, just as was declared in Study 1: THAT THE SUPREME EXCELLENCE AND WONDER OF ALL THAT HE IS AND DOES—HIS GLORY AS THE HOLY ONE—MAY BE MADE KNOWN AND ENJOYED IN ALL THE WORLD!!!

the Truly Human One's manifestation of this primary holy passion

It goes without saying that this first expression of pure-hearted, primary human desire was supremely exemplified in the life of the En-fleshed, Divine Eternal Son among us.

a life lived for His Father's pleasure

We saw in Study 6 that Jesus' life among us was a fulfillment of the declaration within Psalm 40 quoted in Hebrews:

Hebrews 10:7-10

When Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You prepared for Me' ... Then I said, "Here I am—it is written about Me in the scroll—I have come to do Your will My God."

Then after 30 years of normal, daily human living—before He had any public ministry—we saw that the Father was delighted to declare at Jesus' baptism:

Luke 3:22

You are My Son whom I love; with You I am well pleased.

Throughout His ministry He could, as the Son, testify to what always stirred within His heart above all else:

John 5:30

I seek not to please Myself but Him who sent Me.

John 8:29

I always do what pleases Him.

His will was always decisively and wholeheartedly to do the will of His Father (John 4:34; 6:38; Matthew 26:39, 42).

The Father's pleasure was ever the joy of His heart. After His disciples had returned from proclaiming the kingdom of God—having seen many amazing signs of divine goodness, mercy and grace—Jesus gave witness to His great joy in the pleasure His Father would have had in it all:

Luke 10:21

At that time, full of joy through the Holy Spirit Jesus said, "I praise You Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was Your good pleasure."

He rejoiced in His Father's holy joy!

And what pleasure the Father would have had in Him during the event of the Transfiguration: that time when He was speaking with Moses and Elijah of the unfolding fulfillment of His Father's redemptive purpose (which He was about to 'steadfastly set His face towards Jerusalem' to accomplish—Luke 9:51). There on the mountain the Father declared to Peter, James and John:

Matthew 17:5

This is My Son whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him.

Paul could testify that what Jesus went on to accomplish in Jerusalem on behalf of us all, was a supreme manifestation of His delight in the pleasure of His Father:

Ephesians 5:2

Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Jesus went to the Cross in love for us. But it was also manifestly for His Father's pleasure. As with every moment of His life, the abandoning up of Himself for us at Calvary was a fragrant, pleasure-giving offering to His Father—accomplishing the reconciliation of all things for the fulfillment of the Father's glorious plan of love!

His all-consuming zeal for His Father's glory & praise

In the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus was speaking of the true motivations of a human heart within the joy of the kingdom of God, He said:

Matthew 6:9

“This then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’ ”

In giving this instruction He was in fact saying, “It is to be for you, how it is with Me in every moment of My life. In My boundless love for My Father and intimate joy in His presence, what stirs incessantly within Me is that His name be *hallowed*. Yes, I am jealous for Him to be perpetually honoured and adored in the hearts of all who are created to be His image and likeness—and in My love for Him and them there burns within Me a holy grief and indignation when this is not the case! Join with Me in the deepest cry of My innermost Being in the midst of human fallen-ness: ‘FATHER, HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME!!!’ And in this be with Me in My relentless pursuit of the manifestation of His glorious kingdom—so that every loving purpose of His heart in heaven may be made known on the earth!”

After His baptism when He was tempted in the desert by the devil, He was enticed to illicitly possess the authority and splendour of the kingdoms of the world displayed before Him; and this simply through a once-off act of false worship: an acknowledgement by Him of the evil one's accomplishment of such a grand spectacle (that is, the ‘impressive passion-filled human culture’ he had devised in it all). But Jesus immediately replied:

Luke 4:8

It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.’

He would not for a moment give to the devil or anyone or anything else what belonged only to His Father. The subtle deceptions of false worship—with the profaning of the Father's name—had no access into His heart!

Then there was the occasion when He was twelve years old and taken with His parents to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. At its conclusion when the company they'd travelled with began their journey home he was inadvertently left behind in the city. It was only after three days of his parents searching that He was finally found by them in the temple courts, ‘sitting with the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions’. And when asked by His mother why He had stayed behind causing such anxiety, He said with twelve-year-old simplicity:

Luke 2:49

“Why were you searching for Me? Didn't you know I had to be in My Father's house?”

He was puzzled by their failure to understand why He should not be inwardly pressed to remain in the place that was set apart for the honour of His Father's presence—and to pursue that purpose in discussion with the teachers there. An all-consuming holy passion for His Father's name was clearly within Him from His earliest years.

And then, when during His later ministry He was again in the temple and saw the blatant disregard for His Father's honour and purpose, we see in His response *a powerful manifestation of divine love's holy indignation*:

John 2:15-17

[Jesus] made a whip out of cords and drove all out of the temple courts ... [He said], "Stop turning My Father's house into a market!" His disciples remembered it is written, "Zeal for Your house will consume Me."

On one occasion when His opposers accused Him of being demonically driven, He said to them:

John 8:49-50

I am not possessed by a demon, but I honour My Father and you dishonour Me. I am not seeking glory for Myself; but there is One who seeks it, and He is the Judge.

He knew that His Father's purpose was to *glorify Him* for the sake of the humanity He had come to redeem—and in His love for us He Himself desired this as a functionally right and holy outcome. But His own priority among them was the honour of His Father. His relentless and decisive *confrontation* of desire, thought, word and action that didn't come from a holy source caused much offense. But every confronting word was a manifestation of pure-hearted desire for His Father's Name—which was always affirmed by the Father as an authentic expression of His glory as the Son.

In John 14 Jesus spoke of how His divine Sonship (being openly made known within His humanity) showed exactly what the Father was like. And He then immediately took his disciples' minds to a place that pointed to one of the grand fruits of the redemption He would soon accomplish: They themselves, would be enabled to so participate in *the life of His Sonship* that they would do the very works He had been doing—and even greater works than these, because He was going to the Father to pour out the Spirit upon them in His name. With such an awesome prospect in mind He said with great passion:

John 14:13

I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

The Father would be glorified as they participated in the Son's ongoing relational and vocational life and action as Lord over the whole creation. This supreme outcome was part of what stirred so passionately within Jesus as He proceeded towards the Cross.

During His final week in Jerusalem when, in John 12, certain Greeks had come seeking Him, His attention was turned to the redemptive terrors that lay before Him, and His prayer was immediately:

John 12:28

"Father, glorify Your name!"

Then in John 17, in His prayer at the close of that final Passover meal, He could say with deepest satisfaction regarding His work of revealing the Father among us:

John 17:4

[Father], I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave Me to do.

Yes, Jesus' all-consuming desire was His Father's pleasure in seeing His purpose of love fulfilled—as He is enjoyed, glorified and praised by those created to be His image and likeness in His world. WHAT ELSE WOULD WE EXPECT FROM THE TRULY HUMAN ONE: THE BLESSÉD, EN-FLESHED, DIVINE ETERNAL SON!!!

holy desire for God's pleasure, glory & praise in the hearts His redeemed people

Just as Jesus—in manifesting His divine Sonship through His own humanity—always had this primary holy passion stirring within Him, this also then, is to be the way it is with us. Yes we're to

remain in the enjoyment of being with the Truly Human One in His delight in His Father's pleasure, glory and praise—zealously desiring it just as He does!

As we move through this section it will become very apparent that such a grace-inspired and delight-fired primary passion, truly does become a life-changing presence within the human heart.

a life lived for the pleasure of our Creator and Redeemer

For Jesus, pleasing His Father was clearly never to do with a mere, legal-spirited compliance to divine demands, and neither is that to be so for us. Outside of an experience of God's love it is certainly natural to have such a grimly compliant view. But in the Son we may all be released into a desire to please the Father that is so very different: a free-spirited response of love that spontaneously seeks His pleasure throughout the moments of our days.

Paul was one who had clearly been released into a life that was animated by such affection-filled passion. We may see something of the source of this in His personal testimony to the Galatian believers, when he said:

Galatians 1:15

God ... was pleased to reveal His Son in me.

A joyous assurance of divine pleasure towards him, must surely, have been part of what produced in him an incessant desire to bring pleasure to the Father.

Later, in the light of The Great Day of Consummation to come, he said of himself and Timothy:

2 Corinthians 5:9

So we make it our goal to please Him.

It was only natural, then, that in proclaiming the glorious purpose of God to His people Paul should desire the same response within them. He said:

Colossians 1:10

[We pray that you may] please Him in every way.

Ephesians 5:8, 10

[As] children of light ... find out what pleases the Lord.

He said to the Roman believers:

Romans 14:17–18

The kingdom of God is [a matter of] righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit ...
[Anyone] who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God.

Romans 12:1

Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, pleasing to God—this is true worship.

Paul understood with sharp clarity that merely 'doing the right thing' was not what God desired from His beloved children. It had in every way to do with what is in the heart! He was very much aware of what the LORD had said to Israel concerning their mere outward compliance to what was 'right', but without them having delight in His love and desire for His purpose:

Isaiah 1:11

"The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to Me," says the LORD ... I have no pleasure in [them].

The apostle knew that through our being in the Son, and with Him dwelling in us, we too, may be as He was among us: expressing through our body what is a pleasure-giving, fragrant sacrifice and offering to the Father. So he could not be content with anything less for either himself or others.

David, who rejoiced in the provision of sacrifice, nevertheless understood that there was something that was to characterize such offerings, apart from which they would be of no value. So He made this full-hearted declaration:

Psalm 69:31

I will praise God's name in song and glorify Him with thanksgiving. This will please the LORD more than [sacrifices].

The old covenant saints were given rich psalms to stimulate such God-pleasing responses of the heart. For example:

Psalm 147:11

The LORD delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love.

Ps 104:34

May my meditation be pleasing to Him as I rejoice in the LORD.

The writer to the Hebrews, illustrating from the lives of old covenant men and women, said:

Hebrews 11:6

Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He [is who He is] and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

It's only those who have believing and God-pursuing hearts who bring Him pleasure, and receive the many personal and vocational blessings He promises. In Hebrews 11:5 the people were encouraged to imitate Enoch, who 'walked faithfully with God' (Genesis 5:24) and was 'commended as one who pleased God'.

One psalmist's experience of divine covenant love and faithfulness had opened his eyes to see—and his heart to respond to—the astounding nature of God's excellent creation and His constant relationship to it all. In great wonderment he could only exclaim:

Psalm 104:31

May the LORD rejoice in His works.

Everything within him desired that God should have the pleasure that was so rightly His, in the face of a world so gloriously full of His incredible handiwork!

Isaiah called the people of God to fully appreciate the pleasure of the LORD in giving them His amazing law. He said:

Isaiah 42:21

It pleased the LORD for the sake of His righteousness to make His law great and glorious.

Such revelation of the LORD'S way was given to His people that He might fulfill His righteous and holy purpose through them—and this for their blessing. However, when they heartlessly behaved in a manner that opposed His purpose and rightly incurred His judgments, we witness this passionate and ardent plea:

Ezekiel 18:23, 32

Do I take pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? ... I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

Ongoing rebellion would ultimately bring dreadful consequences. His pleasure would not be found in this, but in them embracing again the excellence of His way. They needed only to change their mind! What a powerful revelation we have here of how God's heart burns with holy grief when His people turn away from His face—rejecting His gifts and desecrating His divine image.

No wonder the angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner comes to repentance (Luke 15:10). They are caught up in the joy of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—filled with an exalted celebration of the Holy One's pleasure!

Surely, then, it's absolutely fitting for us, too, to find our greatest happiness in delighting in the presence of our Creator and Redeemer, and in bringing Him pleasure throughout the moments of our days.

our all-consuming zeal for His glory & praise

Earlier we spoke of Jesus' teaching that revealed what our primary focus is to be in the presence of God: that we should seek the hallowing of His name. There is no other passion more basic to the image of God than this, and without it there is no possibility of authentic human experience.

The Father desires that such holy zeal be present within us, for it is the only way we may truly be with Him in His glorious vocational enterprise on the earth. This will particularly be seen later in Study 12 when we look in some detail at the matter of prayer.

Fundamentally, any diminished passion for the hallowing of the Father's name will always result in a diminishing of our humanity. It will be a clear sign that our primary delight is being sought elsewhere than in Him. How awful that His name be profaned in such a way: as some kind of *everyday, common thing* in the heart and mind of a sanctified child of God.

The Psalms give many examples of a heart that longs for the glory, honour and praise of the Holy One—by everyone and everything, everywhere in His world!

Psalm 96:8-9

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name ... Worship the LORD in the splendour of His holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth.

Ps 148:13

Let them praise the name of the LORD for His name alone is exalted; His splendour is above the earth and the heavens.

Psalm 96:11–13

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all of the trees of the forest sing for joy. Let all creation rejoice before the LORD.

Psalm 150:6

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Psalm 145:21

Let every creature praise His holy name for ever and ever.

The whole of Psalm 145 is a magnificent example of focused delight in God that culminates in jealousy for His name.

Psalm 67:3

May the peoples praise You, O God; may all the peoples praise You.

Psalm 99:3

Let them praise Your great and awesome name.

Psalm 113:2-3

Let the name of the Lord be praised, both now and for evermore. From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised.

Finding their joy above all else in God Himself, His liberated people are jealous for His glory, honour and praise—in the heart of every person who enjoys the light of day!

Psalm 108:5

Be exalted O God above the heavens. Let Your glory be over all the earth.

Psalm 72:19

May the whole earth be filled with His glory.

The psalmists were led to yearn for that Day when the glory of the LORD will manifestly fill the entire creation! And to this ultimate end they desired that His manifest blessing be upon them as His people:

Ps 67:7

May God bless us ... so that all the ends of the earth will fear Him.

Ps 119:38

[LORD] fulfill Your promise to Your servant that You may be feared.

Yes, it is the hallowing of God's name that is to be our supreme purpose in seeking His blessing!

Daniel, at the end of his prayer for God to remember His promise to be merciful, urgently appealed:

Daniel 9:19

Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For Your sake, my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people bear Your name.

As King Hezekiah concluded his prayer for Judah's deliverance from the Assyrian king, he said,

Isaiah 37:20

Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You, LORD, are the only God.

Isaiah gave voice to the words of a song that was to be sung in Judah as they anticipated the LORD'S saving action:

Isaiah 26:8, 13

'[LORD] Your name and renown are the desire of our hearts. ... Your name alone do we honour.'

The redemption we have received in Christ is so perfect in every way, and it is so *natural* that we should desire its manifestation in God's world to the greatest possible degree—in the face of all that would seek to oppose and frustrate it.

In this life we are often tempted to *look forward* to all kinds of things that bring us some promise of life. But as we've seen, the only true promise of life is found in a primary delight in God Himself—out of which we then find ourselves seeking manifestations of His glory, that will cause Him to be exalted in every human heart and mind.

We may know that whatever the situation or circumstance, it is always the Redeemer's good and holy purpose to glorify His name. And so, in every moment of our daily living *that* is to be our primary desire, rather than, merely seeking the 'best outcome' for ourselves. **WHAT AN EXCELLENT THING IT IS TO LOOK FORWARD, WITH JOYOUS EXPECTATION OF FAITH, TO SEEING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN REVEALED IN ALL KINDS OF WAYS—GREAT AND SMALL—THIS MORNING, THIS AFTERNOON, TONIGHT, TOMORROW!!!**

Having joy in the gloriously redemptive nature of the mercy and grace of God towards us, surely does, make us to be jealous for the honour of His name and zealous for the manifestation of His kingdom.

grief over all that dishonours the Holy One

As briefly described in Study 2, when the way of God is refused and His name is considered to be unworthy of praise, this naturally brings great sorrow and holy disturbance to His adoring servants. For those who 'delight in revering His name' (Nehemiah 1:11) there is always a deep, inner current of resistance to whatever is *against* His will and way. This is powerful evidence that the wisdom of God has found its place in a person's heart, as Proverbs declares:

Proverbs 8:13

To fear the LORD is to hate evil.

The psalmists again bring their own testimony—giving witness to such holy, inner stirrings that belong to those who fear God. Hear these expressions of hatred for sin and jealousy for the LORD'S name and word to be honoured:

Psalm 119:104

I gain understanding from Your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.

Psalm 119:136

Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for Your law is not obeyed.

Psalm 119:53

Indignation grips me because of the wicked, who have forsaken Your law.

Psalm 104:35

May sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more.

Paul, was deeply grieved at what lay before his eyes in Athens:

Acts 17:16

[He] was greatly distressed [and provoked in his spirit] to see that the city was full of idols.

He also gave witness to his grief over whatever discredited the redemptive purpose of God towards His people, saying:

Romans 3:4

Let God be true, and every human being a liar!

Philippians 3:18

As I have often told you and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:29

Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

2 Corinthians 12:21

I am afraid that when I come ... I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented.

Of course, God's servants are not only grieved by the human failure of others. They know that their own sinfulness dishonours Him greatly—and apart from the wonder of forgiveness and justification, would find their misrepresentation of His glory to be an intolerable burden. That was the case with David, who responded to His personal failure with a holy zeal in the LORD'S presence, saying:

Psalm 25:11

For the sake of Your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.

Here David was desirous of more than mere 'guilt-relief'. He felt that his primary *need* was to bring honour to the LORD'S *name*—and sought the liberating joy of forgiveness to that end!

In regard to this holy-grief we are speaking of, we have another word of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount. Referring to that inner lament that is never far from the redeemed in a fallen world, He said:

Matthew 5:4

Blesséd are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

It truly is impossible to desire God's honour and acclaim in the midst of all that opposes it—either within or without—and not regularly experience waves of deep inner mourning. But our Lord's promise is that such mourners will be comforted!

And in the face of the grievous reality of our personal failures, there certainly is that comfort to be known in the promise of forgiveness. As David was also able to say:

Psalm 65:3

"When we were overwhelmed by our sins, You forgave our transgressions."

Grief over our own sinfulness is, in fact, a fruit of the Father's kindness and mercy—sensitizing us to indwelling moral impurity. In this we come to understand that He is worthy of so much more—and what a good thing that is! And yet the pangs we feel as a consequence are not to be something that

plunges us into a state of morbid preoccupation with ourselves. For how would that bring Him pleasure? The moments of crushing angst are, actually, meant to immediately launch us into a renewed joy in the lavish abundance of His grace. And He loves it when that is our response!

Another study will show that when it comes to the grief and mourning that we experience over the sins of others, we may also have great comfort—as we hold to the Father’s promise to hear our intercessory cry on their behalf. We can know that individual and corporate situations may be transformed as a result of our anguish-fired prayers.

But as we mourn over the tragic reality of life in a fallen world, it must be said that there is a supreme experience of divine comfort: *the hope* of an entirely sanctified and renewed creation at Jesus’ Appearing. Yes, and what a Day that will be! Regardless of our how greatly we have mourned throughout our lives, it will be to us as nothing compared to the rapturous *comfort* we know in the glorious perfection that has finally come! And, even now, for each one who longs for that ultimate coming of the kingdom, there is *huge comfort* in their every joyous contemplation of its arrival

In all our days, then, may our greatest joy be to bring pleasure to our Maker and Redeemer, and our greatest sorrow to cause Him grief. May we be able to say with all our heart: “WHAT DO I LOVE? I LOVE EVERYTHING THAT REVEALS THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT! AND I AM GRIEVED BY WHATEVER DIMINISHES THE REVELATION OF THAT IN ANY WAY!!!”

free from small-minded ‘glory-grasping’

Earlier we spoke of a sweet spirit of awestruck delight in God as *self-boasting* is dissolved. The astounding nature of God’s grace certainly liberates His people into a noble and joyous, creaturely humility!

It was so appropriate that the people of Israel were encouraged to sing together:

Psalm 115:1

Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to Your name be the glory, because of Your [unfailing covenant] love and faithfulness.

The apostle Paul incessantly sought to guard the saints against that horrible intrusion into their hearts of, a personally deadening and God-dishonouring spirit of glory-grasping. Inwardly fired with an enraptured assurance of the Holy One (after eleven chapters of rich proclamation of His mercy and grace to believers in Rome) Paul found himself erupting into this outburst of abandoned praise:

Romans 11:33–36

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord and who has been His counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever and ever! Amen.

Similarly—in the light of the sovereign wisdom, mercy and grace of God—he made this passionate appeal to the church in Corinth:

1 Corinthians 1:26–31

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him. It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is our righteousness, [sanctification] and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let those who boast, boast in the Lord.”

Paul was ever zealous in regard to God-honouring relationships among the saints. And he knew well that a joyous spirit of humility is actually *indispensible* to such relational living. So to the church in Philippi—in which it seems certain individuals were being tempted to exalt themselves over others—he brought this earnest proclamation:

Philippians 2:5-11

In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be [grasped after and] used to His own advantage; rather He [emptied Himself and] made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a [bond-slave], being made in human likeness. And being found in [such human likeness] He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In the En-fleshed Son—who was ‘gentle and humble in heart’ among us (Matthew 11:29)—we witnessed a life of total Self-emptying, out of the absolute Personal Fullness of His joyously reverent and intimate communion with His Father.

This was the dawning of a glorious new day of revelation in which we saw the nature of the humanity we were created for: one that wholly expresses the glory of the Divine Sonship, the very image and glory of the Father. It is a humanity that out of its God-endowed *fullness* delights to pour itself out to *emptiness*. One that out of its ‘everything’ is free to be nothing—free from the unthinkably inglorious bondage of grasping after a self-exalting, proud place to stand.

The very relational nature of the Triune Community is to pour out its Fullness for the sake of the Other. For this TOTAL AND PERPETUAL SELF-EMPTYING IS ITSELF THE VERY FULLNESS OF THE DIVINE ETERNAL LIFE!!! And so that was precisely the nature of the Son’s humanity among us.

Such humanity has enormous personal dignity—and it has, of course, a personal, relational and vocational outcome that is entirely to the glory of God the Father!³⁶

A lovely example of Jesus’ freedom from glory-grasping and His desire for all others to know that same liberty is found in John 5. Testifying to His being sent by His Father to bring the life He enjoyed to all who believe in Him, Jesus said to some Pharisees:

John 5:41–42

I do not [grasp hold of] glory [and honour] from human beings. But I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.

Giving witness to His own relational freedom in the presence of others, He lamented that these men could know nothing of it, because they did not know the Father’s love for them and for those around them! It was to free them from such an accursed state that He had come. So His holy lament continued:

John 5:43–44

I have come in My Father’s name and you do not [grasp hold of Me]; but if someone else comes in [their] own name you will [grasp hold of them]. How can you believe since you [are all the time grasping hold of] glory [and honour] from one another but do not seek the glory [and honour] that comes from the only God.

³⁶ This is a subject that will obviously be pursued further in other studies.

How true this is of us all when we are not in the enjoyment of the love of God poured out in our hearts (Romans 5:5). There will always be someone's (or some community's) approval, praise and honour that we are desperately seeking. And this, keeping us from a divinely bestowed, honour-filled and honour-giving participation in the Sonship of Jesus!

The glory and honour received in the joy of being one with the Son in His Father's love, makes all else that we foolishly grasp after to be as nothing. Seeking glory and honour in such grasping ways is, actually, an exercise in 'small-mindedness'. This is most certainly the case, when we understand the awesome, *personal human dignity* and *relational capacity* that is found in joyous communion with God Himself—along with a zealous pursuit of His pleasure, glory and praise!

A pure-hearted and 'large-minded' zeal for God's name is a very natural consequence of the relationship we've been called into, in the Son. But it is also true that in direct proportion to any *impairment* of that relationship, we will, actually, find ourselves not only apathetic regarding *God's honour*, but also, engaged in a self-exalting pursuit of our *own*. Yes, as surely as night follows day, being bereft of the honour and dignity we were created to enjoy *in God's presence*, we are immediately pressed to illicitly seek it *from the people, situations and things around us*.

On one level it is a natural thing to enjoy hearing our name praised. But when above all else our delight is in God Himself, such praise from others loses its intoxicating power—as we enjoy more and more of the BIG THING: the thrill of understanding our Creator and Redeemer's absolute worthiness of being honoured and adored by all!

Through the wisdom we have in Jesus we come to understand that it would be very wrong for God to not seek His glory—for such a divine apathy would leave His creation in darkness! And we see also that in being preoccupied with the elevation of our own personal status in the eyes of others, we are, ourselves, part of the ongoing darkening of His world.

What a grand thing it is, then, to be released into a spirit of joyous humility in the presence of God and all others—with a capacity to love and honour those around us as never before! In this we may be free to remain in the background, unseen or unrecognized. Or free to be in a position where we are both seen and recognized to a large degree. And in either situation desiring, with all that we are, the pleasure, glory and praise of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!

Now we are to see that this first primary desire is filled out by the next two.

The second pure-hearted, primary desire to be always decisively & wholeheartedly pursued is:

our own conformity to the likeness of the Son

(hungering & thirsting for righteousness; joyously anticipating a fruitful life in pressing towards that Final Transforming Day)

Clearly the most significant way that we may bring pleasure, glory and praise to God is, through our fulfillment of His stated purpose for His elect children: that we be conformed in every way to the likeness of the Son (Romans 8:29). That is, that our lives be a constant expression of the High Human Calling outlined in Study 2.

We could say that conformity to Christ is simply being with Him in the glory of His own Sonship in His Father's presence and purpose of love. This and nothing less is what we have been redeemed into in our Lord. But as will be seen further on in this study there is a *relentless spiritual battle* that is incessantly raging in each of our lives—which has to do with the insanely, vicious opposition of dark spiritual power to *this supreme purpose* of our redemption.

In John 17 Jesus prayed for our *protection* from the evil one, and our *participation* with Him in His own relational intimacy and vocational partnership with His Father. And this is still what is on His heart for all whom the Father has given Him!

the glorious way of the Son

Paul delighted to proclaim the absolute wonder of what Jesus manifested within His humanity: His own divine Sonship as the eternal image and glory of His Father. And wanting the Colossian believers to sense the Father's pleasure in purposing this, he wrote:

Colossians 1:15, 19

The Son is the image of the invisible God ... For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him.

The glory of the En-fleshed Son among us was the visible manifestation of the glory of the Father, which—as we've been seeing—was always to be our own awesome function as the image and likeness of God!

Already in this study we've spoken of what was referred to in Study 6 as the 'priestly action' of Jesus, as humankind's True, Representative Worshipper. In this He revealed the 'way' and the 'aroma' of the kingdom', with His every desire, thought, word and act being an offering of 'fragrant incense', which brought unbounded joy and delight to His Father's heart.

In this revelation of the life of the kingdom we beheld the *righteousness* to which we have been called as the divine image—with our regenerate hearts no doubt longing for a personal conformity to what was portrayed! In that brief sketch of Jesus' perpetual way of living and relating, we saw the glory of a true humanity lived moment-by-moment before the Father and all others. AND TO SEE THIS IS TO WANT IT!!! A truly legitimate 'passion of the eyes'!

the liberating reality of having the Son's own status of righteousness in His Father's presence

From all eternity—and during His days among us—the Son has enjoyed an utter freedom of spirit in the presence of the Father. He has known that everything He is, has done, is doing and delights to endlessly pursue, has always wrought within His Father the most perfect pleasure. And it is this very freedom of spirit that the Father desires for us all in His presence, in the Son!

Because we are speaking of 'righteousness' in this section on conformity to the likeness of Jesus, it will be helpful at this point to clarify some of the terms being used and their significance to us. And so here a quite extensive footnote is provided:⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Above and elsewhere in Studies 8 and 9 we've spoken of the righteousness of Jesus that is credited to us as a 'moral status'. Some are a little uneasy about the word 'moral', feeling that it has too much of 'legality' attached to it. But as was pointed out briefly in Study 8, the word moral is simply speaking of the *relational choices* we make. For something to be 'morally right' means that it is a 'right relational choice'. We could say, then, that the righteousness of God—and the righteousness to which we are called—is simply that 'moral action' which has to do with choosing what is relationally right.

God's righteousness isn't a right *legal* choice. In the choices He Himself makes He is not submitting to a law (although everything He does is consistent with His own eternal law or way). His are always the *relational* choices that flow out of His divine Being of Love. And so now our definition can be put more fully in this way: **RIGHTEOUSNESS IS MORAL ACTION THAT HAS TO DO WITH A RIGHT, RELATIONAL CHOICE TO OPERATE IN THE WAY OF DIVINE LOVE.** And nothing else will satisfy either the righteous Being of God, or in fact, the innermost being of one made in His image.

Naturally, the Holy One requires that our relational choices be of the same nature as His—and commands us accordingly. As we've been seeing, Jesus told us that authentic human righteousness has to do with loving

our old moral status in Adam

The tragedy of our life, in Adam, is that it has robbed us of this most basic element of our true human heritage: a free-spirited access into the Father's presence. Since the Fall we have possessed a fleshly humanity, in which there dwells, in reality, 'no good thing' (Romans 7:18). And although our *worth* as God's beloved image has always been to the Father of equal value to that of the Son Himself, we have appallingly lived before Him as those whose desires, thoughts, words and actions (although still with a powerful thrust for human dignity) could bring no true pleasure to our Creator. They could, actually, only bring Him a burning holy grief.

The shocking fact of our moral performance in Adam was that it amounted to 100% sin and 0% righteousness, and our personal *moral status* in God's presence apart from His grace could only be one of *condemnation*. Consequently—although benefiting from His goodness to us in so many ways—we were given up to our God-refusing passions, with the dark and halting spirit before Him that these inevitably produce.

So, then, regardless of ceaseless efforts to dull the sensitivities of our conscience (through cultural or philosophical rationalizations and zealous expenditure of moral energies), we are left with an un-resolvable problem: There can never be any possibility of the freedom of spirit that the Son has known—which our whole being has been created to delight in with Him, in the presence of His Father. This is, indeed, the foundational dilemma of a tragically fallen humanity.

our new moral status in Christ

The magnificent reality that we have been proclaiming, however, is that on the Cross Jesus has embraced our old, condemned and accursed humanity in Adam—and bled it out to death! And in our having believed what He has done for us in His love, the Father has not only declared that we have *died* with Jesus, but that by the gift of the Spirit He has also *raised us to life with Him* and credited us with His righteousness! Made, then, to be utterly one with our exalted Lord in the unseen spiritual realm, WE HAVE MERCIFULLY HAD BESTOWED UPON US NOTHING LESS THAN THE VERY MORAL STATUS OF THE EN-FLESHED AND GLORIFIED SON, IN HIS FATHER'S PRESENCE!!!

Yes, as proclaimed in Study 8, we have been *justified* in Christ. And how the Father delights to see us grasp the reality of this total reversal of our moral status! Whereas in Adam our moral performance

God with all of our being and loving every other person around us as if they were us—nothing more and nothing less. And therefore, moral action that has to do with *loveless* relational choice—unrighteousness—does rightly come under divine judgment. In our fallen world, then, human beings structured to be the image of God sense always the presence of the 'divine courtroom'; and outside of an experience of the grace of God this is always with some kind of thrust for guilt-aversion (expressed in either a sophisticated or a crass manner).

We must say, then, that there certainly is a *legal element* to the experience of *justification* (being credited with the moral status of the Son). In Him we will in fact never stand *condemned* in the courtroom of God—even though in His love He may convict us of unrighteous behaviour. And when He does, we—un-condemned—may freely respond to His rebuke. It also means that we may stand in the various 'courtroom situations' that are part of everyday relational interaction, without a desperate need to 'defend the rightness of our choices' in order to disprove any condemnation of us. We may, with a free spirit, remain authentically related to God and to all others without a merely *legal view* of the situations we are in—and without unfortunate legal reactions.

The incredible thing about justification is that we are given the status of being those who are credited with the *relational choices* of the Son Himself, in regard to His Father and every other person. This is in essence, as we've been seeing, the wonder of having His own moral status bestowed freely upon us!

amounted to 100% sin and 0% righteousness, now, in Christ all is the complete opposite. We have been credited with His own moral performance: i.e. 0% sin and 100% righteousness. And the Father delights to declare to each one of us: “I have made you up to 100% in my Son, so that you can come into My presence at any moment with His own utter freedom of Spirit—and I want you to know that I have no greater pleasure than when this is what you do!”

We of course, are still able to sin at any moment. The 0% sin and 100% righteousness doesn't apply to our *moral performance* (this side of the Final Day) but to our *moral status*: the Father's 'freedom gift' to His redeemed children. And we will continue to see as our studies proceed, that it is this gift that releases us into His presence with that inner moral liberty which alone enables us to *prevail* over sin!

So with our new *moral status* in Christ the call to righteousness is no longer a 'spirit-deadening invitation to remorse'. Rather, it liberates us into joyous, pure-hearted and holy passion for this astounding status to be more and more actually, worked out in our lives—through the *new capacity* we've received to *participate* in the Son's ongoing *moral action* by the power of the Spirit.

the awesome, presently dynamic hope of a perfectly manifested righteousness in the Son—forever

In our pursuit of personal conformity to the likeness of our Lord, there is another incredible, freedom-giving reality that may be embraced by faith. As we've already intimated in this study (and spelt out in detail in Study 8), on that Final Day of Liberty to come we will see the goal of our justification fulfilled. The moral status we have been given in the Righteous One will, in a single moment of transformation, become a status that is perfectly exemplified in our every desire, thought, word and act—nothing less than a *total* and *unfailing* manifestation of the *moral being* and *action* of the Son Himself! THE FULLNESS OF HIS MORAL STATUS CREDITED TO US WILL BE INSEPARABLY JOINED BY THE FULLNESS OF HIS MORAL ACTION MANIFESTED THROUGH US—THE VERY RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD EXPRESSED WITHIN OUR HUMANITY FOREVER!!!

As the Study 8 outline declared, we are receivers of a NEW ETERNAL DESTINY in Christ—one which enables us to every day eagerly anticipate that future blessedness of 'a visible, uncontested and perfect participation in the Son's glorified humanity'!

This is precisely the assurance that Paul gave testimony to when encouraging his fellow pursuer of righteousness, Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:8

“There is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that Day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His Appearing.”

On that Day when we receive 'the crown of righteousness', the Father's predestined goal for His redeemed children will have been finally accomplished: We will be the perfect image of the glory of the Father in the Son! No wonder Paul spoke in Galatians 5:5 of the redeemed 'eagerly awaiting the hope of righteousness'.

Study 8 spoke of the certain hope of all that is to come, as being a *transforming moral power* within the hearts of the saints. We saw that the apostle John wrote to several believing communities saying:

1 John 3:2–3

“[Dearly loved] friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. All who have this hope in them purify themselves, just as He is pure.”

It is the heart-thrilling hope of finally being ‘like Him’ when we ‘see Him as He is’, that has a moral power to *even now* significantly conform us to the Son’s own purity of heart and Being!

And so, with the freedom of spirit enjoyed by the gift of a *perfect moral status* in the Father’s presence, combined with the breathtaking anticipation of *actual, moral perfection to come*, there is (in spite of present personal difficulties) this amazing reality: the capacity for a *powerfully passionate drive within us* to joyously pursue a participation in the *present moral action* of the Son: the *righteousness* to which we have been called.

a holy hunger & thirst for righteousness that is the most satisfying thing of all

As we’ve said, this second earnest heart longing (hunger and thirst for conformity to the likeness of the Son), is clearly the most obvious passion to flow from the first one (desire for the pleasure, glory and praise of God)—with, of course, both of these flowing out of a primary *delight* in God Himself.

To speak of hungering and thirsting for righteousness evokes a very powerful mental image indeed. When anyone is lacking the essential food and water required for the sustenance of their physical being, the intensity of desire is extremely great. They will do everything possible in order to satisfy this urgently pressing need.

It is the Father’s purpose that we should be so convinced of our utter, personal poverty apart from His Son, together with the boundless riches that are ours *in Him*, that we then incessantly and single-mindedly pursue our most dire necessity: an ever-richer, daily participation with Him in His joyous communion with His Father and His love for every other person. For we know that apart from this, we are totally bereft of what is required to sustain an authentic humanity.

It was Jesus Himself who used such strong imagery in regard to this second primary desire. Again, from the Sermon on the Mount we hear Him say:

Matthew 5:6

“Blesséd are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

He declared this kind of heart craving to be an integral part of the way of personal blessedness within the kingdom of God—bringing that human fullness we were created for.

The promise is that if we are content with nothing less than a life swallowed up with the Son in His Father’s love—and, so, being with Him in His love for His Father and for all others—such insistence will result in the most personally satisfying pursuit of our life!

It is entirely true that to have our heart and mind fixed upon Jesus as the One for whom we’ve been hungering and thirsting all our days, *and to taste the glory of His Sonship within us*, is better than any amount of otherwise pursued, sensory stimulation, magnificent possession or personal elevation.

Yes, if we hunger and thirst for righteousness we truly will be filled. That is, if we hunger and thirst for Jesus! When we are all the time by faith feeding on Him and drinking Him in, we will never be hungry and will never be thirsty (John 6:35).

In fulfilling the very essence of our human being our greatest need is to lose sight of all but Him. That is, to be focused upon the perfection of His love for us and upon the loveliness of His eternal union with His Father, in which we have been embraced forever! Yes, our supreme and most pressing need is to, at all times, have a God-given eye for Him above all else.

A primary agenda of our Lord was to show His disciples that He is EVERYTHING. He longed for them to see that apart from Him they *are* nothing, *have* nothing and can *do* nothing, and in this, to create within them a soul-satisfying hunger and thirst for Him. And today the Spirit has come in His Name with this very same agenda!

We will see that it is by the Spirit that we in fact participate with Jesus in all the stirrings of His own heart. And this is no less the case when it comes to His yearning desire for us to be conformed to His likeness. We could never want it more than He does. But the Spirit has come in His Name so that we may, if at all possible, desire it as much!

So, all may *know* according to the promise of our Lord, that a primary pursuit of such holy desire does, indeed, fulfill our deepest personal and vocational longings—and results in that most satisfying of all things: bringing pleasure, glory and praise to God.

the example of an impassioned apostle

The free-spirited apostle Paul is one who gave a powerful witness to this holy passion we are speaking of. For him it was a very natural product of the liberating and life-giving word that was like a fire within him. In letter after letter Paul found it impossible to not speak of the strong and incessant stirrings of his own heart—and expected that these would be present also within those who received the word he proclaimed.

As mentioned previously, in his letter to the Philippians Paul was writing to a community of the Lord's people who had brought great joy to him. But among them there had now intruded some element of self-interested passion. It seems that the presence of at least some form of *glory grasping* among them was threatening to tragically diminish their personal, relational and vocational fruitfulness. And so, he was constrained to testify for their sake to his own all-consuming hunger and thirst for righteousness—that was like the word within Him, an ever-blazing flame.

Listen to the witness he gives to the Spirit-ignited cry of his heart:

Philippians 3:8–11

“[Whatever] were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I've lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own ... but that which is through faith in Christ. ... I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of His Resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His Death, and so, somehow, attaining to the Resurrection from the dead.”

When Paul thought of the gift of righteousness that He had received—as both a status and a capacity—and the *hope* of that righteousness being totally expressed through his humanity in the age to come, HE WANTED AS MUCH AS HE COULD HAVE OF IT, NOW!!!

He could be content with nothing less than being this side of eternity an *embodiment* of the risen Jesus! HE WANTED TO HAVE SURGING WITHIN HIS OWN BREAST THE *WHOLE* OF THE SON'S JOY IN HIS FATHER, AND THE *WHOLE* OF THE SON'S OWN LOVE FOR EVERY OTHER PERSON—LOST OR REDEEMED!!!

The apostle also equally desired to be a participant in the *sufferings* of Christ. This desire was based upon three things regarding the nature of His Lord's sufferings.

Firstly, Paul was aware that the One who was the True Image of God in this world, doing His Father's will, finally had nail scars in His hands and feet. The darkness hated the light—and so THE SUFFERINGS OF THE HOLY AND RIGHTEOUS ONE WERE BY NATURE, *INEVITABLE!!!* And Jesus had said that it was equally inevitable that *all* who live righteously in His name, in this world, would suffer too (John 15:18–21).

Secondly, he also understood that THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST WERE *REVELATORY*—MAKING KNOWN THE VERY NATURE OF THE LOVE OF GOD Poured out for sinners!!! That's why the Son was truly the Image His Father as He bore the sins of the world: in the fullness

of divine love embracing our emptiness—with its own awful fullness. So Paul too, wanted to be part of that glorious, ongoing revelation of divine mercy and grace; himself, in the fullness of the Son, pouring himself out!

Thirdly, he knew that the sufferings of Christ were not only by nature *inevitable* and *revelatory*, they were also **INDISPENSABLE**. Our salvation could have been accomplished in no other way. And by experience Paul knew that the *proclamation* and *manifestation* of this salvation among the nations could also be accomplished in no other way. It is a sober yet glorious truth that **IN THE PRESENT AGE, GOD'S GREAT REDEPTIVE PURPOSES OF LOVE WILL ALWAYS BE WORKED OUT WITHIN A GENERAL CONTEXT OF SUFFERING**. In our fallen world, participation in the suffering love of God is **AN INDISPENSABLE MODE OF AUTHENTIC, LIFE-GIVING REDEPTIVE-SERVICE TO OTHERS!!!**

Paul was keen for the Corinthians also to know that this principle was at the heart of his ministry among them, and so with great affection declared:

2 Corinthians 4:10–12

“Death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.”

Knowing the love of God towards Him in Christ, the grace-inflamed apostle wanted personally above all else, to deeply participate in such a redeeming love—for His life to be wholly immersed in the action of that love, with all of the *inevitable*, *revelatory* and *vocationally indispensable suffering* it would bring.

Already Paul had come to participate in so much of the Son's *joyous communion* with the Father and His *Self-expending love* for every person. But to bring maximum revelation of the glory of God, he wanted more! MUCH, MUCH MORE!!! He knew that apart from the fullness of the Son he could never hope to abound in his Lord's glorious, Self-emptying relational life. For it is only to the degree that such fullness is known that the Divine Love may be manifested in this world.

His testimony to the Philippians then continued on in this way:

Philippians 3:12–14

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize [of the high calling of God] in Christ Jesus.”

When it came to *personal longing* the Spirit-filled apostle said, “**THIS ONE THING I DO!!!**” A HOLY, SINGLE-MINDED DESIRE FOR TOTAL CONFORMITY TO THE LIKENESS OF THE SON!!!

Paul was not specifically using the imagery of hunger and thirst here, but that of ‘the Greek Games’. He was saying that every day he was like an athlete fully engaged in the biggest race of his life—with His focus wholly fixed on the supreme prize set before Him.

The issue of his moral, personal and vocational status had been settled once and for all: it was only in Christ. And now, in the exalted freedom of spirit that was his, Jesus had become the focus of his every personal, relational and vocational drive.

What a strong apostolic witness Paul is to us, then, of that holy hunger and thirst we are speaking of—which he would insist is entirely *normal* for all who remain fully assured of the lavishly abundant grace that has come to us.

Without hesitation he concluded his testimony with these words:

Philippians 3:15–17

All of us then who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently God too will make that clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already

attained. Join together in following my example brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.

The impassioned apostle was utterly convinced that his desire and expectation regarding the Philippians, was identical with God's. If some didn't really understand the implications of it all just yet, he knew that the Father would make it clear to them. But they needed to know that if they were to come to maturity they would, without question, have to embrace the example that he and others among them had set—and definitely not slip back from the progress they'd already made!

What a blessing it is to hear this full-hearted testimony—and to receive that exhortation to be ourselves content with nothing less.

our status of righteousness & sanctification in the Son fruitfully 'lived out' in the power of the Spirit

Study 8 showed that the sanctified children of God—forever set apart to the Father and His purpose—not only have the *moral status* of righteousness in the Son, as well as 'the hope of righteousness' set before them in eternity. They also have been given—in the gift of the Spirit—a new *moral capacity* to 'live out' their sanctification, by a *daily participation* in the Son's own ongoing, *moral action* as the Righteous One.

In the full assurance of this, then—as we've been saying—ALL MAY BE ONE WITH THE SON IN HIS JOYOUS COMMUNION WITH HIS FATHER, AND IN HIS LOVE FOR EVERY OTHER PERSON!!! And so they may participate in 'the way and aroma of the kingdom', being a fragrant offering to the Father as they are transformed into their reigning Lord's likeness, with ever increasing glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). This is the amazing present vocation that the Father's 'holy ones in Christ' have been set apart to, and are enabled to be fruitfully engaged in every day by the power of the Spirit.

Conformity to the likeness of Jesus is not just something to aspire to. It is our amazing heritage to be increasingly *possessed*, becoming like Him in *every way* as we participate in His own heart, mind, words and actions—as part of a new gloriously redeemed humanity in this world!

In Study 8 it was, rightly declared, that a child of God need never live, any day, without a glad anticipation of the transforming work of the Spirit towards and within them. And so as we come to the close of this second section on pursuing the three primary desires, we'll look briefly at the way this confidence may be expressed.

joyous anticipation of a fruitful life

We've seen from John 15 that a fruitful life is precisely what Jesus promised. He said:

John 15:5

I am the Vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.

In Him, much fruit. Apart from Him, nothing!

Paul's prayer for the Philippians was that they be "filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:11). How amazing does that sound! But in praying like this the apostle was not dreaming up some overly grand outcome for his friends; for his prayer was totally in line with what he knew that both he and they could *anticipate* as the normal product of their lives in the Spirit.

It could be said that to be 'filled with the fruit of righteousness' is to have a personal life, or a community, that is full of the evidence of an intimately joyous communion with God and a free-spirited love for all others. That is, a gloriously whole and integrated expression of personal and

communal living—one that bears all the marks of the indwelling life of Jesus! As the final section of this study will show, the fruit of righteousness is, in essence, a blessed personal and communal manifestation of the very rest and peace of God (Isaiah 32:17).

Earlier in this study we were speaking of the *purity of heart* that produces the personal and vocational fruit we were redeemed to bear as the image of God. We saw that Jesus often spoke of such fruitfulness, and also how He taught that the nature of the fruit produced in any person's life is determined by what kind of tree they are: either a good tree or a bad tree. And that a person who is a good tree is one who has good things stored up in their heart—A HEART THAT *REMAINS FULLY AND JOYOUSLY ASSURED OF EVERYTHING THAT IS IN HIM!!!*

We certainly are all called to bear fruit. But fruit itself is not to be our focus. We are called above all else to be a good tree—with our heart and mind set on Jesus! If it's all just about bearing good fruit, the fruit bearing will be an agonizing process (if we can imagine a tree grunting and groaning to produce!). When the tree is good there'll be no struggling to bear fruit. It comes naturally!

And that's what this study is all about: being fruitful children of God, who are more and more possessing our inheritance in the Son, as we simply *remain* fully and joyously assured of Him, *embracing* the Father as our one, pure-hearted, primary delight, and *pursuing* the three, pure-hearted, primary desires: the supreme fruits of that life-giving, inner spring of the Spirit.

As also mentioned earlier, life in the Lord is not just to do with filling our mind with biblical ideas that we agree with, and then straining to 'live them out'. No! WE JUST NEED TO OPEN OUR HEART!!! The whole of the Spirit has, indeed, been given to us that we may delight in the whole of the Son and be with Him in the whole of His delight in the whole of His Father's glory—so that we may spontaneously bear that fruit which is a glorious manifestation of His Sonship! That's how the gift of sanctification is 'lived out'.

Later in this study we'll see that there is a 'contending' to be exercised in the midst of a relentless spiritual battle. But this has nothing to do with 'gritting our teeth' and 'surviving'. It has everything to do with joyously *remaining, embracing and pursuing*, together with the other responses that are yet to be spoken of. Victory in the battle is simply the triumph of a *maintained worship* that is stronger than whatever else we face—THE FRUIT OF A HEART THAT HAS DISCOVERED WHAT IS MORE WONDERFUL THAN LIFE ITSELF!!!

always pressing towards that Final Transforming Day

Fruitful living is the result of a will that has been set free to be fully engaged in a pursuit of our holy calling. Paul, having exhorted Timothy to '[go on being] strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus', confidently went on to urge him to:

2 Tim 2:22

Flee the [passions] of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Out of a purified heart that is *remaining strong* in the grace that is in Christ, such pursuit is the most natural investment of our human energies.

The more we see of Jesus in the glory of His eternal Sonship—with such love giving Himself up for us that we may share with Him in His own blessedness forever—the more we want to be *like* Him. We find ourselves **DESIRING AN EVER-RICHER PRESENT POSSESSION OF THE INHERITANCE THAT AWAITS US AT HIS APPEARING!!!**

In Him we have not merely been provided with a freedom to sin without condemnation. Rather, we have been given a way to be free from everything that is less than *truly human*, in anticipation of all that will finally be! Alive in the wonder of having been delivered from the dominion of darkness in

Adam through our death, resurrection and ascension with Jesus, we know that in Him we may now live truly, and truly live!

In that Great Redemptive Reality that has been revealed to us, we have been brought into a place where we may co-operate with the Holy Spirit with the whole of our being—now able to be always *working out* what He is *working in* (Philippians 2:13–14). Remaining strong, then, in the incredible truth of our redemption, makes us free to go on knowing the Spirit's transforming power in every aspect of our daily living (John 8:31, 36).

The Spirit of God has come to inflame within us an *unsettling* and *dynamic* hunger and thirst for righteousness, that *presses* us into an *ongoing* conformity to the likeness of the Son. Yes, the Spirit, Himself, presses in upon us, so that we will put off all unrighteousness and be filled with the righteousness of Him who is the Image of His Father!

The passion of the Spirit is that from the moment of our regeneration in Christ we may always be *advancing* in the way of Jesus our Lord, within the glorious enterprise of His redeeming love. New, fresh vision of Christ always captivating our affections, engaging our will and renewing our mind!

We have spoken of Peter's exhortation to 'grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (1 Peter 3:18). In the light of this and all else that we've been saying, one of the worst things that can ever happen for a child of God must, surely be, that we become *satisfied* with our present state of conformity to the Son. This could only indicate a lack of co-operation with the Holy Spirit in His enlightening and enlivening agenda—and a sad deficiency in our desire for the Father's pleasure, glory and praise. We must always be *pressing forward* with all of our being in the light of that Final Transforming Day to come!

To speak of advancing and pressing forward, of course, doesn't mean 'climbing the performance ladder' (spoken of Study 8). It's to be about keeping our glorious hope always before us, and being *focused* upon what will bring the greatest pleasure, glory and praise to our Creator and Redeemer—rather than upon our own 'spiritual performance status'. If we become obsessed with *ladder climbing* then we find ourselves with either a soaring spiritual ego or one that is dashed to the ground in humiliation: both being conditions that belong to the darkness rather than the light, and having in them little of genuine love for either God or others. Ours is always to be a pure-hearted, humble-minded and free-spirited quest, which finds its deepest happiness in the simple intimacy of communion with God—and in *that*, the joy of spontaneously participating in His amazing love.

And it must always be remembered that it is not just we who are pursuing our inheritance in the Son, but that the Father Himself is also *pursuing us* as His *own* inheritance! Having embraced us as His treasured possession, THE FATHER WANTS US TO KNOW, ENJOY AND REPRESENT HIM JUST AS THE SON DOES—AND TO THE SAME DEGREE!!! And so our conformity to the likeness of His Son is the Father's greatest pleasure. It is also the Son's greatest pleasure because it is all that He has redeemed us for in His love. And it is the supreme pleasure of the Spirit because He is at work—moment by moment—to bring this glorious reality into being!

Finally, in pressing towards the Goal before us, it is surely clear that a major part of our own inheritance to be presently possessed is a *sweetly surrendered will*: A DAILY PARTICIPATION IN THE JOYOUSLY INSTANT SUBMISSION OF THE SON AND THE SPIRIT TO THE WILL OF THE FATHER!!! Delighting with the Son and the Spirit in the Father's will, we know with bright-eyed certainty that His commands are not in any way to do with burdensome obligation (1 John 2:3, 5; 1 John 5:3). For us they are the way of a true and delightful humanness—to be always decisively and wholeheartedly pursued.

And so, we conclude the second of these three pure-hearted, primary desires that are at the very core of an authentic humanity. That is, 'our own conformity to the likeness of the Son'. A pursuit of

the righteousness that is purely and simply this: participation with Him in His own joyous communion with His Father and His love for every other person.

So now then, we are ready to proclaim that third primary desire which the Spirit of God seeks to incessantly arouse within us: one that we'll clearly see is an integral part of the first two.

The third pure-hearted, primary desire to be always decisively & wholeheartedly pursued is:

other's human freedom & fullness in Christ

(yearning for all to exalt with us in the Son, the True Neighbour; being joyously resolved to pour ourselves out in His love, that they too may press towards the goal of utter conformity to Him)

We've been seeing that a true humanity is expressed only in fulfilling those two great commands: to love the Lord our God with the whole of our being and to love our neighbour as ourselves. And it is the second of these commands that is the major focus of this third primary desire.

Having established that our conformity to the likeness of the Son necessarily involves participation with Him in His love for every other person, it is evident that this third primary desire is, indeed, very much related to the second. The two are inseparable.

To begin with, it must be said that to love our neighbour as ourselves is nothing more and nothing less than to want for them all that we want for ourselves—and to the same degree. And so it must also be said, then, that our desire for others to know all that we have spoken of, thus far, *cannot* be any greater than our own desire for those very things. As the saying goes: the river will never rise above its source.

And, yes, the more our hunger and thirst for personal conformity to the likeness of the Son is *satisfied*, the more intense will that yearning be for others to enjoy the same. As we increasingly know the sheer, holy happiness of communion with God (and with this, liberation from what has enslaved and oppressed us within the dominion of darkness) we will also, increasingly find ourselves longing for that same blessedness in the lives of those around us. We will, very naturally, desire that their hearts be filled with all that has been flooded into our own!

A hungering and thirsting for personal conformity to the likeness of the Son, truly is, the most *relationally liberating* desire we can have; for it alone produces within us a pure-hearted yearning for the life-giving freedom and fullness of others in Christ. There is, in fact, no true relational freedom apart from such holy passion.

As was seen in Study 2, the presence of an inner spring of *divine moral purity* that brings a jealous passion for the Father's glory and praise, is *also* a spring within us of His own *divine love*—bringing yearning desire for every other person to know the blessedness of communion with the Father. This, truly is a 'holy affection' that is indispensable to an authentic expression of the image of God!

the 'neighbour love' to which we are called

When it comes to understanding that love which is central to this third primary desire, we must obviously begin with the One who exemplified it to perfection in our midst—the En-fleshed, Eternal Son Himself. In Jesus we actually witness within fallen-human history, a revelation of that *Supreme Neighbour Love* which has eternally been expressed within the Divine Triune Community.

We have seen that within our Lord's own humanity, there was a manifestation of the Divine Sonship He had always enjoyed in communion with the Father and the Spirit; and that in this, we have a peerless portrayal of the very nature of our own high calling as the image of God.

And so, the incredible implication for us is that the *neighbour love* we are each to express within our daily relationships, is to be nothing other than a representation of the *Divine Neighbour Love* of the Triune Community that the Son has made known!

How appropriate, then, to now fix our gaze upon Him who came among us as the image and glory of His Father. For only in beholding His relational action towards us do we know what true neighbouring is. And only in Him do we have any true capacity to, ourselves, be a neighbour to those around us.

the True Neighbour of us all—and one man's arresting encounter with Him

In focusing our attention upon the neighbour love of the En-fleshed Son, we will examine in some detail from Luke chapter 10 what is often called, 'The Parable of The Good Samaritan'—or as it may be better titled, 'The Parable of The True Neighbour'. And in doing so, we will describe a potentially life-transforming encounter with Jesus that took place in the process of this story being told. Spending some time on this passage of Scripture will repay us with rich insight into our theme. So, let's begin.

the scribe

Luke's account starts with Jesus being approached by a scribe (or teacher of the law) who is the one to whom the parable was soon to be directed, and who experienced this powerful encounter about to be described.

As explained in Study 6, a scribe was a Pharisee whose task was to interpret, teach and explain the old covenant law to the people. But in the process of fulfilling their role, these teachers in order to guard the law from being violated, had surrounded it with so many rules that Moses had not given. And they also had come to believe that if Israel would for one whole week—from Sabbath to Sabbath—keep all that was required, then the Messiah would come and deliver the nation into a life of never-ending freedom, blessing and abundance!

Consequently, the scribes despised all who did not observe every intricate detail they had set forth. And sadly, for the people (often called 'sinners' because they didn't perform to the standard of the self-righteous Pharisees), this was all a weight far too heavy to bear, and they lost any expectation that God would be good to them simply because He loved them.

Well, this scribe approached Jesus, and in verse 25 put to Him what was, actually, the most important question anyone could ask: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And so a conversation ensued:

Luke 10:26–28

"What is written in the law?" [Jesus] replied. "How do you read it?"

[The scribe] answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and 'love your neighbour as yourself.'"

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "[Keep on doing] this and you will live."

The scribe's answer was a well-known and accurate description of what the entire sense of the old covenant law was about. Jesus Himself had declared these to be the two great summarizing commands (Mark 12:28–31). So here He affirmed that they were indeed the essence of the Mosaic covenant, and that anyone who truly kept on fulfilling them would know what it means to inherit eternal life! And if the scribe's heart had been pure, Jesus' answer would have brought the conversation to a happy end.

However, in verse 25 we were also told that in asking his question this teacher of the law had 'stood up to *test* Jesus'. It is understandable that a scribe might do this as part of his protective role among

the people. His reply, though, showed that there was a more devious purpose behind the otherwise legitimate question:

Luke 10:29

But [the scribe] wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

Ah, so now we see what this was all about. The teacher of the law was, wanting to *justify* himself. That is, he was set upon a self-obsessed course of *proving* that He was *morally right* in what he felt, thought, said and did. This, of course, indicates an attitude that knows little of the love expressed in those two great commands.

The problem for this man was centred in the fact that the scribes interpreted the two commands in this way: To love God with your whole being is to keep all of the scribal law; and to love your neighbour as yourself is to love all those who run with you in this non-negotiable personal quest. However, anyone who does not hold to all the details of scribal instruction is not among those to be loved. They're not a neighbour but rather an enemy. And you are to hate your enemy! (For example, the scribes taught that a 'faithful' Jew was not under any obligation to save an 'unfaithful' Jew who was drowning. Such a person was not worthy of neighbour love.)

Jesus had shown the foolish and oppressive nature of several elements of scribal legislation, and hearing of it, the scribe had clearly initiated this conversation with what was, to him, an urgent quest: to confirm in his mind where he must stand in relation to this One to whom so many were flocking. Was He a neighbour to be loved and affirmed? Or an enemy to be hatred and despised! And he was evidently quite certain that the latter was the case with this young rabbi who was disturbing the people.

As He so often did, though, Jesus chose to not argue with the man, but rather to tell him a story that would settle the matter of who rightly was his neighbour. And we may be sure that this 'shepherd of Israel' would have been sharply attentive to every unfolding detail!

the parable begins

First of all the scene was set for what was to come:

Luke 10:30

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when He fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him [and beat him] and went away leaving him half dead.

Now the scribe would have been very familiar with the mental picture that Jesus had painted. This particular road from Jerusalem was a very steep and winding descent down to the lovely, palmed city of Jericho, where many of those who served in the temple lived in between fulfilling their rostered duties in Jerusalem. And he would have known how treacherous a journey it could be to travel down this road, and how so many had been beaten to death by robbers.

But immediately the story would have created complexity in the scribe's mind. For the man on the road had been stripped of his clothes and was lying half dead. This was to be a parable that clarified who may be his neighbour. But the person lying there could not be identified either by his clothing or his speech. He was simply a human being! Although probably a Jew, there was no way of knowing whether or not he was a 'faithful' one. And there was still the chance that he was a Gentile whom the scribes said a Jew must not even touch. Or he could even have been a despised law-perverting Samaritan!

And heightening the significance of the situation even more was the fact that the man was not only unconscious, but also 'half dead'—meaning he was so ill that he could die at any moment. What if the victim were to expire in the midst of aid being offered? Who would want to unnecessarily risk

ceremonial defilement by touching a dead man—who was possibly an enemy? A testing situation indeed!

character # 1:

Jesus then brings into the story the first candidate for neighbour love.

Luke 10:31

A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

This priest would have been on his way home from a period of service in the temple. And seeing this naked man on the road—speechless and half-dead—would have keenly felt the dilemma described above. Should he help one who may not even be a Jew, and in the process, risk defilement? (Which, by the way, for him as a priest would have required a return trip to Jerusalem and an expensive week-long process of cleansing.)

So in obedience to the scribal law he remained within two meters of this potentially expiring person and continued on his way. Maybe a little perplexed. But nevertheless, comforted by the fact that he had made what must be considered a faithful decision.

And the scribe's response would have been: "Ah yes, that's a true neighbour."

character # 2:

Now to see how the next person who came along would respond. Jesus continued:

Luke 10:32

So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

The Levite would also have been returning from his time of service in the temple. Unlike the priest, however, he needed only to remain ceremonially clean while performing his duties in Jerusalem. But the unidentifiable 'human being' in principle created the same dilemma for him.

Furthermore, it is known that because of the very steep and winding descent, the Levite would have seen what the priest had done, and the priest up ahead would only have needed to turn around to observe the Levite's response—and would have been interested to do so. And, also, the Levite would have been keenly aware of a priest's power to have him put out of the synagogue in Jericho, if he considered him to have failed to act 'responsibly'.

So the Levite, too, although not needing to keep the two-metre distance passed by on the other side—just like the priest. And the scribe's response would again have been: "Yes, he too is a true neighbour."

character # 3:

The scribe knew that 'the law of the three' applied in this parable and would have been extremely attentive to what was coming next. The priest and the Levite did what he would have expected. But it was this third category now to come that represented the critical area of concern. What would the *everyday Jew* do? For it was he who was the 'big problem'—the one very likely to be a non-neighbour.

Jesus then introduced His third character:

Luke 10:33

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came to where the man was.

Can we imagine what the scribe must have thought at hearing these very first words? He must surely have screamed out in his mind: "A what? A SAMARITAN!!! This is supposed to be a parable that clarifies who may be my neighbour. HOW CAN A SAMARITAN BE MY NEIGHBOUR!!! This is ridiculous!"

The Samaritans had set up a rival temple at Mount Gerazim and refused to accept anything but the five books of Moses as having authority. The Jews hated them—and the feeling was mutual! In fact, one of the worst things you could say to an orthodox Jew was to call him ‘a Samaritan’. To them the term meant, ‘A PERVERTER OF THE LAW’.

But then we could imagine the scribe after his initial outrage immediately also thinking, “But, ah yes, he may be actually playing into my hands here. For he Himself truly is a law-perverting ‘Samaritan’—one who could never be my neighbour!” And, actually, in John 8:48 when Jesus had spoken of the truth He’d come to bring, the Jews called Him precisely that. They said, “You are a Samaritan.” In their eyes He was nothing other than ‘a perverter of the law’.

However, as Jesus’ description of this Samaritan unfolded, the scribe’s mental rollercoaster ride was to escalate.

Luke 10:33

... a Samaritan, as he traveled, came to where the man was; and when he saw him, he [was filled with compassion].

The Greek word for compassion here is the strongest one possible to describe deep feeling on behalf of another. It spoke literally of a compassion that was ‘gut wrenching’. And with an obviously similar word used by Jesus in Aramaic to describe the Samaritan, the scribe’s triumphant thoughts would have suddenly come to a halt. “He was what? He was filled with compassion?”

Straightaway our Old Testament expert would have recognized that this term described what was, in fact, central to the very nature of the God of Israel. Passages such as Psalm 116:5 would have flooded into his mind: “Our God is full of compassion.” Or that proclamation in Exodus 34:6 of the glory of the LORD: “The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in unfailing covenant love and faithfulness.”

Jesus was describing one whose first response was a perfect description of the nature of God Himself in His love for His erring yet treasured people: HE WAS FILLED WITH COMPASSION!!!

But if the scribe’s thinking had been arrested by these words, there was much more to come. Jesus continued:

Luke 10:34

He went to him and [bound up] his wounds ...

Now the shock of what Jesus was saying must have made the scribe’s blood run cold. For he knew this very action attributed to the Samaritan, was at the heart of what God had promised His rebellious people when they had tasted the pain of promised judgments—HE WOULD BIND UP THEIR WOUNDS!!!

The scribe would have recalled passages like Deuteronomy 32:39: “I have wounded and I will heal.” And Hosea 6:1: “Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but He will heal us; He has injured us but He will bind up our wounds.”

So here is this Samaritan who comes filled with compassion, manifesting the very nature of the God of Israel, and He comes binding up the wounds of this man—DOING THE VERY WORK OF GOD!!! And of course, that is what he, himself, as a scribe should have been doing. But instead it was the proclamation of Ezekiel 34:4 to the shepherds of Israel that applied to him and his associates: “You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.”

But Jesus also added:

Luke 10:34

He went to him and [bound up] his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.

Now oil does have a soothing function and wine is an antiseptic—so it fits the story. But in the light of all else that had been said, the scribe would know that more was being referred to here.

One of the most important things that the priests and Levites did in their service in the temple, was to at the conclusion of a sacrifice go up to the high altar and pour oil and wine upon what had been offered—and this particular oil mixed with the wine would cause there to rise up from the sacrifice a fragrant smelling aroma!

God in His great mercy and grace had made the provision of sacrifice for His people. And when they had performed it exactly as prescribed and poured on the oil and wine, the fragrant aroma declared to them that He was pleased with what they had done—and they could enjoy this sign of His pleasure!

And so not only did the Samaritan manifest the nature and character of the God of Israel, being filled with compassion; and not only was He doing the very work of God, binding up the wounds of His people; but **THIS ONE WAS PLEASING TO GOD IN WHAT HE DID!!!**

And how very true that was of Jesus! He had come from His Father and had always lived in His Father's love in intimate and joyous communion with Him. And every day His delight was to manifest His Father's love in His world—filled with His compassion. He only ever said and did what His Father was saying and doing, and so would have been able to cry out at any time, **"FATHER, YOU KEEP ON GIVING ME ALL THESE THINGS, AND I KEEP ON OFFERING THEM UP TO YOU—AND I KNOW THIS GIVES YOU SUCH PLEASURE. YES, THIS IS SO MUCH A PART OF THE ETERNAL LIFE I HAVE COME TO BRING!!!"**

Surely by now the scribe would have been very sober indeed—and, one would expect, keenly aware that the identity of the Samaritan was Jesus Himself. And He would also be conscious of the fact that when the Messiah came, it was He who would do in the name of the LORD the very things this despised Samaritan was doing.

But there was still one more part to the story. Jesus added in conclusion:

Luke 10:34

Then he put the man on his own donkey, bought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ['Make sure he is looked after,'] he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

When a person in that day led a donkey with another sitting upon it they were saying to that one, **'YOU ARE THE MASTER AND I AM THE SLAVE'**. And this is, of course, exactly what we saw earlier of Jesus in Philippians chapter 2. In a lovely and noble humility, He came as a bond-slave in His Father's will, to us in our deepest and most desperate need!

The Samaritan then brought the man to an inn and took care of him—throughout the night, we assume. Then the next day he took two denarii (the earnings of a servant for two days labour), gave them to the innkeeper and gained a pledge from him that the man would be looked after; then promised that he himself would reimburse any extra expense on his return, saying in effect, 'I don't care how much it takes to restore this man. Whatever it costs for his restoration I will pay it!' **WHAT MORE COULD HE HAVE DONE!!!**

And what a glorious thing it is that the One who is **OUR TRUE NEIGHBOUR HAS, INDEED, COME AMONG US FULFILLING EVERY DETAIL OF THIS STORY!!!** Yes, He came filled with His Father's compassion and doing His Father's work. He came as a pleasure giving offering to His Father on our behalf; and in a beautiful spirit of bond-slavery, with unbridled self-expenditure acting to the utmost for our sake, **HE SAYS, "FATHER, WHATEVER IT COSTS FOR THEIR RESTORATION AND WHOLENESS, I WILL DO IT!!!"**

How telling was that prophetic word so many years before:

Isaiah 53:5

Surely He took up our [afflictions] and bore our [pains], yet we considered Him punished by God, stricken by Him and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed.

the scribe's encounter brought to a climax

The story complete, Jesus then addressed the scribe personally, saying:

Luke 10:36–37

Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Notice that Jesus has turned the question around. It was no longer, ‘Who is my neighbour?’, but rather ‘Who *acted as neighbour* to this unidentifiable human being?’ And the scribe’s chastened answer? Without mouthing the word ‘Samaritan’, he said: “The one who had mercy on him.”⁴⁹

And Jesus’ final word: “Go and do likewise.” ‘Yes, do this and you will live: knowing what it is to be an inheritor of eternal life.’

How lovely it would have been to see Jesus’ eyes at this point. We’d be very wrong if we thought they were communicating, ‘I’ve won this one, haven’t I!’ No, His whole countenance would have been full of love and compassion for this scribe, saying, “Listen, you’re a shepherd of Israel. You have such a holy calling. But what do you have to give those entrusted to your care? Your life is nothing better than a living death. Every day, within both your Pharisaic and broader community you battle and strive to have ‘a righteousness of your own’—under a rulebook religion that leaves you bloodied and beaten and half-dead. You’re the man in the story as much as anybody else! Don’t regard Me as your enemy. Embrace Me as your True Neighbour! I’ve come to restore you, to make you whole. I’ve come to bring you into the blessedness of My own Eternal Life! Yes, into the freedom and fullness that you and all entrusted to your care may know.”

a personal participation in the ‘neighbour love’ of the Son

In the first primary desire it was shown that our calling is to *participate in the Son’s desire* for His Father’s pleasure, glory and praise, and the fulfillment of His Father’s purpose in the whole world. Then in the second, we saw that our calling also includes being *a participant with the Son in His desire* for our own conformity to His likeness. And now, thirdly, we are seeing that our high calling requires us to be *with the Son in His desire* for the freedom and fullness of a fallen humanity—those who are presently regenerate and those who are not yet.

The love of the En-fleshed Divine Son, indeed, ‘surpasses knowledge’ (Ephesians 3:19). It is beyond our comprehension. But, incredibly, by God’s grace it may nevertheless stir deeply in the heart of His servants! How wonderful that we should come to share in this unbridled and self-expending love of our True Neighbour; wanting all others to know and exalt in the grace of God as we ourselves do—never satisfied until all are joyously pursuing their high calling with the whole of their being, for the pleasure, glory and praise of the Liberating Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

Yes, we are called to be truly one with the Son in His own yearning desire for the human freedom and fullness of others—a longing so beautifully expressed as He prayed:

⁴⁹ Compassion is the heart response to another’s misery, and mercy is the action that flows out of that.

John 17:24

“Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory, the glory You have given Me because You loved Me before the creation of the world.”

The blessedness of His divine Sonship manifested so gloriously within His own humanity, was such that He longed with the whole of His Being for others to enjoy it with Him, increasingly now and wholly forever. His love for them was as great as His love for the Father and the Spirit. And how He longed that all who were given to Him should participate with Him in that love—the divinely intimate and purposeful Neighbour Love which had *eternally flowed* within the Triune Community!

the need for us to be living out of our own ongoing arresting encounter with our True Neighbour

Having looked in some detail at the parable of the True Neighbour, and having witnessed the scribe’s arresting encounter with Jesus (the One who had come to gloriously neighbour him and all others), we may now see our own ongoing need for a radically renewed relational perspective: one that keeps us dynamically participating in true neighbour love.

This whole matter of ‘neighbouring’ that is at the heart of the second great command is a very powerful thing (whether well or poorly fulfilled)—particularly within a humanity created for intimate and purposeful relational living. And let’s face it, in a fallen world sometimes we are not neighbored too well by those around us. It’s a sad reality that fathers, mothers, children, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, friends, carers, fellow workers, bosses, governments etc., may neighbour us in ways that can be painfully disappointing—at times tragically so.

And unfortunately, within such deficient relational circumstances, if our experience of the eternal life we’ve been speaking of is *lacking* we may well continue to feel robbed, hurt, battered and wounded. And then, with our spirit embittered and our heart hardened towards our oppressor, we fall prey to that darkened state that finds us becoming like the scribe in Luke 10: a rule book person.

It’s then that we resolutely establish what is required of those around us if they are to be considered our neighbour—requirements that even have a strong biblical flavour! Those who don’t keep the rules are seen as unworthy of our honour, affection or compassion. They may be tolerated by us and even manipulated towards better performance—but not loved. And in it all, we find ourselves being locked into a self-obsessed, personal crusade to *prove* the ‘rightness’ of what we are requiring, thinking, saying and doing.

Of course, existence within such a relational environment is largely, if not completely, miserable. And although we claim that it is those around us who are the cause of the ‘living death’ we experience, the fact is that the guilt of our refusal to keep those ‘two beautiful commands’ is what is chocking the life out of us! For Jesus said, “DO THIS, AND YOU WILL LIVE!!!”

When we find ourselves existing in such dark-spirited misery—or even tasting just something of its dullness and deadness—it’s then that WE ONCE AGAIN NEED AN ‘ARRESTING ENCOUNTER’ WITH OUR TRUE NEIGHBOUR!!! That One in whom is all our capacity for the blessedness we were created and redeemed to know, regardless of how deficient others’ neighbouring of us has been and continues to be. We need to experience afresh His great love and compassion towards us, even in our present ugly state; allowing Him to, through the word of His lavishly bestowed grace, tenderly bind up our wounds and renew within us that sparkling spring of His own Eternal Life!

It will be in our next study and others to come that the nature of this ongoing encounter with Jesus will be spelt out. That is, His relentlessly arresting revelation to us of His glory, and His resolute calling of us into a participation with Him in its manifestation.

It would be good to now launch out into a full-orbed exposition of the ways in which the eternal life expresses itself, that is, vertically towards God and horizontally towards all others—spelling out in greater detail the various biblical dynamics involved in freely experiencing and maintaining this. But that will be the task of other studies. Just now, we will be served well simply by observing something more of the heart of the apostle Paul.

once more, the example of that impassioned apostle

As we saw in Study 6, Paul was one who himself had a powerfully ‘arresting encounter’ with the True Neighbour, when the Risen One appeared to him on the road to Damascus. At the time he was a zealous Pharisee filled with a fiery hatred for the name of Jesus and all who embraced Him. But that hostility was dissolved by the revelation that came to him during the three days of blindness that followed. And, from this time on, Paul’s understanding of what it meant to know the love God and to love Him and others was never to be the same again. And as shown earlier, he became a full-hearted participant in those holy stirrings of the heart of the One who was now to him, ‘Christ Jesus, my Lord’ (Philippians 3:3–8).

Yes, this free-spirited herald of ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ’—who was always overwhelmed by the fact that the Father had been pleased to ‘reveal His Son in him’—could boldly say, ‘Follow my example’. He knew that every life-giving element of what he daily enjoyed in such rich measure, was also for every child of God in Christ.

And so having already examined Paul’s hunger and thirst for ‘righteousness in conformity to the likeness of the Son’, we will now see something of the corresponding outworking of this in his yearning desire for others to know the same: that rich personal freedom and fullness that was his as he lived and laboured in the name of Jesus.

As we saw earlier, he had not yet experienced the power of the Resurrection as he longed to know it—becoming a total embodiment of the love of the Risen Jesus for His Father and all others—but he was pressing towards this with all that was in him. And in that, he certainly does provide an example for us to follow.

In focusing upon Paul in this way we are by no means exalting him as some kind of superhero of the faith. He would have been horrified to think that those he was writing to would adulate him and ascribe to him honour that belonged only to his Lord. But his apostolic witness to us of the impact of God’s grace upon a redeemed soul is, nevertheless, a great encouragement to us all.

Paul was one who, indeed, knew much of the *two great realities* that are synonymous with keeping the two great commands. These are the manifestations of the Spirit that Jesus spoke of in John 4:14 and 7:37: an *inner spring* of living water *leaping up* within us to eternal life, and in that, joyous communion with God, and the *rivers* of living water *flowing out* of our innermost being—the rivers (plural) of the love of Christ flowing out *towards* all who come into our sight or mind! It’s Paul’s witness to such an outflowing of love in his life that we’ll be examining now.

We receive this witness through his spontaneous expression towards others of such things as holy affection, tenderhearted compassion, deeply earnest prayer, zealous proclamation, relentless exhortation and admonition etc.—all within an environment of ‘personal out-pouring’ in self-denying and self-expending service.

Such manifestations of the love of Christ in Paul and others will be dealt with in detail in the studies to come. But just now we’ll simply quote—without comment—a brief selection of verses from Paul’s letters, which illustrate this neighbour love we have been called into.

Galatians 4:19–20

[You are my] dear children, for whom I am again in pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.

Philippians 1:7–8

I have you in my heart. ... God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:22–26

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

Philippians 2:17

[Even] if I'm being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

Philippians 4:1, 9

[My] brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord! ... Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

1 Thessalonians 2:6–9, 11

[Even] though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our prerogatives. Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. Surely you remember brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you ... [We] dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory.

1 Thessalonians 3:5, 8, 10, 12

I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labours might have been in vain ... [But] now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord ... Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith ... May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

2 Corinthians 2:4

I wrote to you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

2 Corinthians 4:5

[What] we preach is not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your [bond-slaves] for Jesus sake.

2 Corinthians 5:13–14

If we are “out of our mind,” as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind it is for you. For Christ's love compels us.

2 Corinthians 6:11–12

[Our mouths have been opened to you and our hearts have been] opened wide to you.

2 Corinthians 12:15, 19

I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well ... Everything we do, [dearly loved friends], is for your strengthening.

And like his Lord, the yearning of Paul's heart was not only for the regenerate children of God, but also for those who had not yet received salvation. He said:

Romans 9:2–3

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race.

2 Timothy 2:9–10

[I am suffering for the gospel] even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Acts 26:29

[King Agrippa, regardless of how long it takes, I pray] that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.

Yes, with his whole heart, Paul longed for all to know precisely what he himself knew and earnestly desired to a greater and greater degree. May we never be content with anything less than such holy pursuit on behalf of both ourselves and others!

And so we have come to the end of this third indispensable element of our response as inheritors on the way to the Final Day. We are called to be always decisively and wholeheartedly *pursuing* those three pure-hearted primary desires: the pleasure, glory and praise of God, our own conformity to the likeness of the Son and others' human freedom and fullness in Him—the second two being the fulfillment of the first.

And now there is just one more thing to do before we move on to the fourth element of response: to make a statement in regard to the *non-negotiable* nature of the one primary delight and three primary desires. That is, to emphasize the indispensability of their persistent presence in a life that enjoys the transforming power of redeeming grace.

**a tremendously significant summary statement:
pure-hearted primary delight & desire, are together,
the primary manifestation of a gloriously functional redemption**

The one pure-hearted, primary delight and the three pure-hearted, primary desires are, indeed, indispensable to a life that *enjoys* the transforming power of redeeming grace, and for this reason: they are, without question, the *primary manifestation* of the glorious redemption that has come to us in Christ. THERE IS, IN FACT, NO ACTION OF THE GLORY OF HIS DIVINE SONSHIP—WITHIN AND THROUGH US—WHICH IS NOT A PRODUCT OF THESE SUPREMELY DYNAMIC REALITIES OF PURE-HEARTED DELIGHT AND DESIRE!!!

Here then, we will reinforce this summary statement by re-emphasizing some of the key elements of our redemption.

**the fact of our having been redeemed into the
covenant life & love of the Triune Community**

A participation in the Son's own pure-hearted primary delight and desire in the ways we've been describing, has everything to do with divine, covenant faithfulness. It is a fulfillment of both the

creation covenant in which we've lived all our lives, and the gloriously redemptive *new covenant* in which we've been embraced in Christ.⁵³

As seen in Study 8, Jesus the Faithful One among us has, on our behalf, fulfilled the 'covenant righteousness' we were created for as the image of God: that way of *free-spirited* and *authentic relational-choice* which has always been His from eternity, as the Son within the Triune Community. So we love Him! This One who through the Cross has wholly embraced and put to death our old, accursed humanity in Adam (which was condemned and under the power of the devil). And He did this so that we, having been raised up with Him in His Resurrection and Ascension, may know the exhilaration of being *credited* with the *moral status* of His own righteousness in His Father's presence! And in this, liberated—as part of that glorious *new humanity in Him*—to participate by the Spirit, in HIS OWN *FUNCTIONAL-MORAL-ACTION* OF JOYOUS COMMUNION WITH HIS FATHER AND LOVE FOR EVERY OTHER PERSON!!!

the nature of our participation (present & eternal) in the supreme functionality of divine delight and desire

Within the Divine, Triune Communion of Love, each of the Three Persons endlessly delights in and desires the *supreme, functional blessedness* of the Others (whether initiating, mediating or facilitating). This is what has always been at the heart of the Divine Communion (what we could call the 'Divine, Eternal Functional-Relational-Flow').

And it is this *very same* functional delight and desire that is *also* to be expressed within each of our own *human* relationships—for the pleasure glory and praise of God!

Yes, we do indeed love Him, who has brought us freely and fully with Himself into nothing less than the relational life of the glorious Triune Community of Love—forever!

Our desire for the human freedom and fullness of others, then, is in essence, that they be liberated together with us into that supremely functional, pure-hearted *blessédness* of life in the Son: having only one primary delight and three primary desires. Such freedom and fullness most certainly, is, the only authentic alternative to a life of *slavery to idolatrous passion* (with the haunting emptiness and futile pursuit that such bondage inevitably brings). We then, hunger and thirst for all others to know and daily exalt in the *blessédness* of the amazing redemption that we, ourselves, have received.

a life of always 'being' rather than merely 'doing'

Let us be reminded that, sadly, we ourselves can be redeemed and doing lots of 'christian things'—even 'kingdom things'—yet without knowing each day the sheer *blessédness* of our redemption. There is always so much we can be 'doing'. But none of this will be an authentic action of life in the Son unless it flows out of a personal 'being' in Him.

The foundational place of true human 'being' is to live in glad abandonment to the love of Jesus: having our heart and mind set upon Him as the One for whom we've, actually, been hungering and thirsting all of our life. THAT ONE IN WHOM WE'VE NOW COME TO SEE IS ALL OF THE HUMAN LIBERTY, IDENTITY, SECURITY, CAPACITY AND DESTINY THAT, IN OUR DEPTHS, WE HAVE ALWAYS YEARNED TO KNOW AND EXALT IN!!!

To truly 'be' as a child of God is to, above all, maintain an adoring communion with the Son, as we delight in *being* one with Him in His own 'spirit-singing *moral* and *personal* status' in His Father's presence—in the sheer happiness of His Father's love! And then, *being* with Him in His love for His Father! And *being* with Him in His love for the Spirit! And *being* with Him in His love for every other person!

⁵³ These being spoken of in Studies 5 and 6.

Yes, to exalt each day in these things is the *personal being* into which we are called—and out of which our *doing*, no matter how seemingly insignificant, will be a glorious manifestation of His divine Sonship within our humanity!

So in the midst of everything that demands our energies of heart and mind, what matters *above all else* is, that we seek to maintain this one pure-hearted primary delight and those three pure-hearted primary desires. This is to be our supreme priority within every personal, relational and vocational moment of our days. As was stated earlier, such a priority is precisely what Jesus was speaking of when He said, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). Primary delight and desire is, indeed, the very essence of both the kingdom of God and that righteousness which is at the heart of the two great commands. We may also say, of course, that such pure-hearted delight and desire is the ‘choice fruit’ that is borne in the life of one whom Jesus said could be called ‘a good tree’ (Luke 6:43–45).

**the redeemed looking as if they really are
—a glorious outcome indeed!**

We have seen something of Paul’s and others’ apostolic expectation of what a redeemed child of God may look like. We’ve also seen (and will do so increasingly) that the expectation of Jesus Himself was that we would be *like Him*—particularly that we would know His Father’s love and love others just as He Himself did (John 17:26; 15:12).

In John 1:4 we saw that in Jesus was *life* (the life of His Eternal Sonship) and that this life was the *light* of all people (showing them and, drawing them into, what they were created to be). In John 8:12 He joyously declared Himself to be ‘the Light of the world’. But then also, in Matthew 5:14, He announced to the disciples that they themselves—as those given to Him by the Father—were also ‘the light of the world’!

As we proceed through the series, it will continue to be evident that being a redeemed person is a most extraordinary thing. The dimensions of what the Scriptures reveal to be our calling (as the very image and glory of God) will go on being spelt out. And it will also become ever more evident to us, that each element of such an awesome vocation has been *provided for* in the perfection of the redemption that has been accomplished. We will not be speaking merely of what *should* be, but always, with this, declaring the lavishly abundant provision that is ours to fulfill it.

The glorious nature of the redemptive power at work towards and within us, is such that we may all expect to increasingly enjoy freedom from illicit primary delights and desires: **LIBERATION FROM THOSE IDOLATROUS PASSIONS WITH THEIR FALSE PROMISE OF LIFE, WHICH DECEPTIVELY INTRUDE INTO OUR SANCTIFIED BEING AND, TRAGICALLY, DIMINISH OUR LIKENESS TO JESUS!!!**

Studies 10 & 14 will show that strong drives have been deeply—and often unconsciously—embedded within us for a long time. But as they are exposed and we find release from them, we will be able to know more and more of the personal, relational and vocational blessedness that is ours in the Beloved: **A LIFE THAT IS THE PRODUCT OF THE PURE-HEARTED PRIMARY DELIGHT AND DESIRE, WHICH IS AT THE CORE OF OUR GLORIOUS HERITAGE IN HIM!!!**

These first three elements of our response as inheritors on the way to the Final Day, have indeed established for us what is at the heart of our human calling. And they have also provided the **RELATIONAL FRAMEWORK** that will become an integral part of the recurring song to be sung throughout the rest of the studies. And in this, they will also form a basis for all the ‘key concepts’ that are to come.

The purpose of the next three elements will be to serve the first three, and preserve their central place within our personal, relational and vocational life.

Let's now then, open our heart to receive this fourth indispensable and non-negotiable element of our redemption-charged response!

Fourthly, as present inheritors, we are to be always decisively & wholeheartedly:

- *treasuring* the two inseparable essentials

(the life-giving word of God & the dynamic-intimacy of prayer)

We have seen that for Israel to possess its inheritance, there could never be less than a wholehearted and decisive *treasuring* of the LORD'S two essential gifts to them: His word and their access to Him. And so, again, with us it is our *treasuring* of these same two gifts, that sustains us in our relationship with Him and the purpose He has called us into.

The word we have received as God's new covenant people is so much richer than what Israel enjoyed under the old covenant; and the access we've been given into His presence brings us into a relational intimacy with Him, that has dimensions unknown within the system of old covenant worship. It is very much in the content of *the word we've received* and the nature of *our place in God's presence*, that we see the 'surpassing glory' of the *new covenant* (2 Corinthians 3:7–11). And so we may say that if Israel was to treasure these two gifts as they knew them to be, how much more may we!

Of course, as we speak of *treasuring* the word of God and prayer, we are establishing yet another present-tense action that corresponds to the present-tense initiative of God towards us. It is in the knowledge of our being the Father's *constantly treasured children* that we find ourselves, able, to be *always treasuring* His word to us and our access to Him in prayer: valuing above all else these two supreme, relational gifts bestowed upon us. And this, so that we may *embrace* those awesome dimensions of the life that is in His Son, which is His glorious agenda in delightedly *pursuing* us!

In this study we will look only briefly at these matters of the word and prayer. Our purpose is simply to declare their essential and inseparable nature, and the worthiness of their cherished place in our response as inheritors. It's in Studies 11, 12 and 13 that we will enjoy a more detailed proclamation of these two treasures that are of enormous importance for us all.

the life-giving word of God

We have already spoken of our need for an 'en-worded faith' in order to *remain* fully assured of 'The Great, Redemptive Reality' of our death, burial, resurrection and ascension with Christ: that declaration of lavishly abundant grace that is always ours in Him. It is an absolute fact that only the life-giving word of God will produce the *responsive faith* required to enjoy our inheritance in the maximum possible way, as we press towards that Final Day.

And it's only as we treasure the word of God in a way that is in keeping with its supreme worth, that we will be those who are always doing all we can to remain fully assured of what it declares. 'Treasuring' and 'remaining' are inseparable terms. We remain in the word that we treasure above all else!

Being the children of God, we actually *live* by His word (Matthew 4:4). He delights to speak directly into our hearts—assuring, strengthening and refreshing us—enlarging our capacity to be with Him in His glorious purpose of love.

The apostle Paul knew that when the word came to the believers at Thessalonica, something very wonderful, powerful and life-giving had entered their lives. He said:

1 Thessalonians 2:13

“You received the word of God ... not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”

This was a word that was, literally, ‘energizing’ within them!

Paul knew that everything recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures—together with all that was now being proclaimed and written by him and the other apostles and prophets—was indispensable for personal maturity and vocational fruitfulness. And so he declared to his young co-worker Timothy:

2 Timothy 3:16–17

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is [profitable] for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that God's servant may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

We'll see in Study 11, ‘On The Way In The Good Of The Word’, precisely how this constant action of the word of God—teaching, rebuking, correcting and training His treasured children in righteousness—does equip us to fulfill our high calling.

God's ‘breathed-out word’ is truly a gift of indescribable value. It is the Father's own good provision to keep us strong, alive and fruitful in His Son—with those glorious, *new creation realities* that are ours to enjoy in Him, filling our heart, captivating our will and governing our thinking each day!

How our Creator and Redeemer yearns for us to receive these things, and in a way that causes complexities we face to, virtually, dissolve into nothing before the wonder of what they declare. Such realities truly are to be treasured. They are beyond *anything else* in their rich promise and urgent appeal. Yes, indeed, *glorious* things that, alone, produce the pure-hearted delight and desire we were created for!

the dynamic-intimacy of prayer

In Study 8 we have already mentioned prayer as the supreme gift of God to His children. And—within the life-giving nature of His word—it most certainly is! In prayer, we may know more than in any other way the reality of His presence and the holy happiness of intimate fellowship with Him. We may be released from personal heaviness, anxiety, fear, anger and frustration as, ‘before His face’ we are renewed and refreshed in the wonders of His grace and call. And it's through this boundless treasure that we may enjoy the privilege of being with Him in His glorious purpose of love for His world!

Again, we are only looking briefly at the subject of prayer here. As mentioned earlier, Studies 12 & 13, ‘On The Way In A Spirit Of Prayer’ and ‘On The Way In The Action Of Divine Love’, are where we'll see in some detail how this priceless gift may be embraced each day.

The term ‘a spirit of prayer’ speaks of an abiding attitude and disposition of prayerfulness. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17 Paul urged those new believers into just that. They were to “pray continually”. When the En-fleshed Son walked among us He was, of course, always in the enjoyment of a prayerful spirit. We could say that prayer was, indeed, ‘the air He breathed’—and the Father desires this to be so for each of His redeemed children to the greatest possible degree. For nothing brings us more *fully* and *immediately* into the riches of our inheritance in the Beloved by the Spirit, than a life of prayerfulness. It is the supreme goal of the word's energizing work within us!

The practical elements of prayer include adoring worship and praise to God, joyous expressions of gratitude for His abundant goodness, mercy and grace, a deep and grace-assured heart-searching in the face of diminished love for Him and those around us—and together with all of this, *believing request* on behalf of both ourselves (petition) and others (intercession).

The habitual presence of such prayerfulness, clearly, may have great redemptive significance for our own and others' lives. Is it any wonder then, that Paul in Colossians 4:2 made that heart-felt appeal: 'Devote yourselves to prayer'.

Of course, maturity in prayer doesn't just happen overnight. And it can be for us all, in some ways, the most difficult thing we do! And yet, as we continue to grow in assurance of our Father's grace to us in the Beloved, it may increasingly become our richest pleasure.

inseparable human essentials

Now we'll seek to establish something of the essential and inseparable nature of these two great treasures—beginning with this significant statement: THE WORD OF GOD IS INDISPENSIBLE TO A FULLY AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE OF PRAYER, AND A SPIRIT OF PRAYER IS INDISPENSIBLE TO A LIFE-GIVING RECEPTION OF THE WORD OF GOD!!!

In prayer we are called into a dynamic engagement with our Creator and Redeemer. But it is, in fact, the *word* of God that gives substance to such engagement, providing an environment of 'life-giving revelation and meditation' in His presence—with the Spirit delighting to facilitate it all!

The fact is that apart from both the word and prayer, that great promise of life in Christ by the power of the Spirit will always be experienced in only a limited way. Regardless of how we may view our spiritual state, if both of these essentials are not dominant in our daily living, there will be much that is lacking in our capacity to *remain* fully assured of the reality of our redemption; and so then, there will also be the tragedy of a limited *embrace* of that one pure-hearted, primary delight, and an equally limited *pursuit* of those three pure-hearted, primary desires.

The word and prayer are definitely to be the two great preoccupations of God's sanctified children: an indispensable pair to be always decisively and wholeheartedly *treasured* by them!

hearing His Voice & knowing His Presence

Having established the inseparable nature of this 'God-given twosome' there is one thing that needs to be made very clear in our mind: WE ARE SPEAKING OF MUCH MORE THAN A 'GIVEN WORD' AND A 'GIVEN PRACTICE OF PRAYER'!!!

There *is* the given word of God: written and proclaimed. But engagement with this is not *merely* about collecting propositions (facts, promises and commands) and making applications. It is, primarily, to do with HEARING HIS LIFE-GIVING VOICE!!!

And there *is* the given practice of prayer. But engagement in this is not *merely* about 'harnessing the power of God'. It is, primarily, to do with KNOWING HIS DYNAMICALLY INTIMATE AND PURPOSEFUL PRESENCE!!!

The objective written word and the prescribed practice of prayer of themselves don't guarantee anything—except to provide the *possibility* of our experiencing the greatest treasure in the world. That is, *hearing* His life-giving Voice and *knowing* His dynamically-intimate Presence, so that, we may 'practically possess' more and more of our lavishly given inheritance in the Son.

How awful if we were to find ourselves with nothing more than a 'given word' and a 'given practice of prayer', regardless of how disciplined our engagement with these two things were. It is unthinkable that we should merely 'tick the boxes' but miss the treasure: His Voice—without which we cannot truly live! And His Presence—which is the most dynamically intimate reality anyone can know!

provision of the ultimate life-giving & dynamically intimate experience of sociality

Having been created in the image and likeness of the One who is love, social interaction is a very significant part of our daily lives. But the most personally enlivening and powerfully intimate medium

of sociality is Spirit-given fellowship with God: hearing His Voice and enjoying His Presence. It could be humorously described as ‘seeking His Face in the Book’!⁵⁷ Or maybe better put, SEEKING HIS FACE IN THE LIGHT OF THAT REVEALED GOODNESS, MERCY AND GRACE WHICH HE DELIGHTS TO GO ON SPEAKING INTO OUR HEART!!!

The enjoyment of social interaction on a human level is a wonderful gift of God, and there are, indeed, many means of communication towards that end. But to pursue such interaction as a primary delight and desire—and as the dominantly sustaining principle of our relational life—is a folly that will lock us out of THAT PRIMARY PLEASURE FOR WHICH WE WERE CREATED: TO LIVE IN THE LOVE OF GOD!!!

That’s why Jude was so keen to exhort his readers to this very thing:

Jude 21

[My dearly loved] friends, be [all the time] building yourselves up in your most holy faith and [be all the time] praying in the Holy Spirit, [so that as a matter of urgency, you may] keep yourselves in the love of God.

Jude, full of given-wisdom, was deeply aware of our need to be constantly built up in that Object of faith that is like no other: Jesus our Lord and the declared redemption that is in Him; and to be always praying in the Spirit who enables our participation in His Sonship. For Jude had come to know that it is only in such a present indwelling of the word and an abiding prayerfulness, that we may fulfill our most urgent personal, relational and vocational need: to go on living richly in God’s love!

Our daily enjoyment of and participation in *the love of God* is the supreme purpose of both the word and prayer. All we will ever hear of His Voice and know in His Presence will be towards that end—including arresting revelation of those inner personal agendas that *shut us off* from His love’s liberating and enlivening entrance.

Yes, our Creator and Redeemer’s yearning desire is always for our ever-increasing knowledge of His love. That is, that we be enabled to know more and more of the relational and vocational dimensions of THE BLESSÉD DIVINE, TRIUNE COMMUNITY OF LOVE—THAT ULTIMATE LIFE-GIVING AND DYNAMICALLY-INTIMATE REALM OF SOCIALITY!!! For this is what we were primarily created for and redeemed into—that together as His Family we may truly be the image and glory of God in His world.

David’s words provide some colourful imagery of this realm into which we have been brought:

Psalms 36:8

They feast on the abundance of Your house; You give them drink from Your river of delights. In Christ, we may interpret ‘the abundance of the Father’s house upon which we feast’, as the *declared realities* of the glorious Sonship that is present there and held out to us all; and His gift to us of ‘drink from His river of delights’, as the dynamically intimate, Spirit-given *communion* that is ours to enjoy in the Son.

Surely, then, in the light of all we’ve said here, it is no wonder that we are to *treasure* those two inseparable realities that are essential to our humanity: the word of God and prayer. For apart from these we cannot be always decisively and wholeheartedly *remaining* fully assured of our redemption, *embracing* that one pure-hearted, primary delight and *pursuing* those three pure-hearted, primary desires: the very essence of our heritage as the redeemed and sanctified children of God!

So now we are ready to move on to the next indispensable element of our response.

⁵⁷ Yes, this is a bit of a cheeky reference to the many elements of ‘social media’ available in our digital age—such as ‘Face Book’! Things that may have great value as secondary elements of sociality, but which are very poor substitutes for what is at the heart of our personal, relational need.

Fifthly, as present inheritors, we are to be always decisively & wholeheartedly:

- *distinguishing* between the two communities

(the redeemed: the Father's liberated & enlivened community of holy worship & love in Christ; & the world: Satan's desperate community of unholy worship & futile living in Adam; only *of* the first, but called to truly priestly, prophetic & kingly living *in* both)

The whole of humanity is divided into two communities: the community of the redeemed and the community of the world. Regardless of anyone's geography, language or culture, they belong to either one or the other.

As the sanctified children of God we live and relate within both of these, but only *belong* to the community of the redeemed. However, here we'll see that although belonging only to *one*, we may know and enjoy within *both*, the life we've freely and abundantly received in Christ.

For such a life to be maintained, though, we are to see that 'a principle of distinguishing' must always be operating within our mind. Why? Because God Himself is always distinguishing between these two communities—and calls us to do the same.

As we begin this very significant consideration of life within the two communities, we'll speak first of all about that superb 'common reality' enjoyed exclusively by the children of God.

the community of the redeemed

The redeemed community is one that is recognized by its joyous common *assurance* of the redemption that is in Christ, and its subsequent *given-ness* to the word and prayer. And as such, it is one that is able then—within the primary delight and desire to which it has been called—to give witness to God's glorious purpose of love in His world.

Life in the community of the redeemed is a most wonderful gift. Those who experience the true fellowship of a common life in Christ, do know, something that cannot be reproduced in any other human situation. Such fellowship can, indeed, be something of a foretaste of the ultimate Community to come!

This community of course, is presently made up of those—like each of us—who have, definitely, not yet reached perfection! And so there will be difficulties from time to time, and things won't always be ideal—if ever, in this age. But a community of sinners in Christ is, nevertheless, by God's grace, also a community of *saints*: set apart and anointed by the Spirit to know and express the love of God within our common life. We would expect then to see 'the fruit of the Spirit' expressed among us: love, joy, peace, [longsuffering], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23).

By our remaining together in the good of the word and in a spirit of prayer, the liberating and enlivening gifts of salvation in Christ may go on being enjoyed among us. And within such enjoyment, there may be that experience of unique fellowship together in the Son: the rich pleasures of our common life in Him. However, it must be understood that to seek such pleasures outside of a full assurance of grace and the primary delight and desire it produces, will usually bring personal frustration and disappointment—which itself, will contribute to an undermining of the life of the community. In this, one thing must be clear: IT IS NEVER MERE 'COMMUNITY LIVING' THAT WE ARE TO SEEK, BUT THE CHRIST, IN WHOM IS ALL OF OUR COMMON LIFE!!!

the intimate and dynamic nature of post-Pentecost community living

We saw in Study 6 how after the Day of Pentecost, believers—in glad assurance of the wonders of divine grace they had received—richly enjoyed the life of the kingdom of God together.

Luke shows us that as a natural consequence of all they had been freely given, they were constantly drawn together by the Spirit's work among them. He said:

Acts 2:42

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

As a community freshly renewed in the grace of God they couldn't get enough of His word. They constantly sought fellowship with one another, celebrated the Lord's Supper whenever they could and were always lifting up their hearts together in prayer!

Luke further described the life of the redeemed community in this way:

Acts 2:46

“Everyday they continued to meet together ... They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God ... And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Again we see that they were constantly drawn together in joyous fellowship. And in this, every day the Lord Himself was bringing more and more people to know the riches of His grace—with each of these new believers, now united forever with the Son and welcomed into the Family of the Redeemed!

Jesus told his disciples of a wonderful, invisible reality that exists within every situation of fellowship:

Matthew 18:20

Where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them.

This is what makes the community of Christ to be the remarkably unique thing it is. It is the coming together of the redeemed in the direct presence of their Redeemer: a liberated and enlivened community of holy worship and love in Him!

not neglecting the gift & the giving

It's no wonder, then, that the writer to the Hebrews exhorted an embattled and discouraged community of believers in this way:

Hebrews 10:25

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

To not have fellowship with other brothers and sisters in Christ—missing out on encouragement in the word and prayer—is a sad and, indeed, dangerous practice. Personal assurance of God's grace can quickly be diminished and conformity to 'the pattern of this world' may steadily take place (Romans 12:2). Actually, to 'give up meeting together' can easily become a spiritually detrimental 'habit'. How much better it is to form a 'holy habit' of fellowship with other believers. As 'the saints in the Son' we need to spend time with one another as we press towards the coming Day!

Such fellowship is, of course, not merely for one's own benefit. King Saul's son Jonathon certainly understood this:

1 Samuel 23:18

Jonathon went to David ... and helped him find strength in God.

When we go into situations of fellowship, we may do so expecting to receive from the Lord what He will give us both *for* and *from* others. Unlike in many situations of 'fleshly sociality' we are not merely

going there to 'get' from other people. For we are the children of God who have *come to know His love* (the love we've always longed for and now delight to share with others) rather than a gathering of people who are still desperately *looking for love* from those around us.

The community of the redeemed truly is the Father's marvelous gift to us, upon whom, He has lavished His grace! But, once again, here we have only a brief description of this grand reality. It will be in Study 17, 'On The Way Within The Redeemed Community', that very much more will be proclaimed of its intimate and dynamic nature.

the community of the world

Now we come to what is a direct contrast to the redeemed community just described. In Study 4 and beyond we have already spoken much of 'the world'. We've seen that it is part of that tragic triad within the dominion of darkness: the world, the flesh and the devil. The term refers to the world not merely as 'people' or a 'planet' but as a 'power'. It is a powerful anti-God system that can be described as: society set up and organized against the Creator and His truth: opposing His will, perverting His way and despising His redemption.

The world has its own insistent mode of operating: its own way of thinking (a creationally dysfunctional wisdom), its own life promising 'priests', brilliant 'prophets' and majestic 'kings' and 'queens' of all kinds (often with priestly and prophetic status). It will never *embrace* as the primary expression of human authenticity, the pure-hearted and delight-filled worship of the True and Living God. Nor will it *pursue* the pure-hearted, primary desires that such worship produces.

We are recognizing here then, the world as a system that forms itself into a community of people with a common culture: opposition to the Living and True God and His way. It has no authentic knowledge of the abundance of the Creator (even if reveling in the wonders of His creation), and it certainly knows nothing His Redeeming grace. And so, it is a community that is shaped by a relentless drive to find freedom of spirit, significance, security, enlivenment and destiny apart from Him.

Satan's desperate community of unholy worship & futile living in Adam

The primary delights and desires that the world declares to be indispensable—things to be sacrificially pursued—make the community it produces to be, by nature, both unholy in its worship and futile in its living.

To say that this is a community that lives in futility doesn't mean that there are not magnificent and noble expressions of human action to be seen within it. It's just that all comes out of a *futile pursuit* of freedom and fullness, rather than, the life-giving liberty and abundance that is alone to be found in the Son, by the Spirit, in the Father's presence and purpose of love!

Above all, behind every element of constant striving within the community of the world, is an unseen, malevolent ('evil-wishing') power. All who embrace this community's way of expending their personal, relational and vocational energies are, actually, enslaved to its sinister author: that ultimate champion of corruption and futility, 'the devil'; that one who (with his myriads of fallen demonic spirits) torments through accusation, incites fear, self-pity, bitterness, rage and rebellion, blinding the mind through inflamed passion and false promise of life—and masterfully masquerading as 'an angel of light', bringing powerful deception (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Such deception may even bring delusions of great intimacy with 'a god of love', accompanied by all kinds of sacrificial benevolence. But this has nothing to do with 'the Kingdom of the Son', and a *free and full participation with Him* in His own joyous communion with His Father, and the glorious purposes of His Father's holy love. Even when the gospel of grace is proclaimed such devotees, of

themselves, remain resolute in their deception—refusing to flee from their darkness into the light of the Son!

Satan, that dark intruder into the realm of glorious human vocation, is obsessed with fulfilling his one heinous purpose to, in every way, deform a noble humanity into his own likeness: a magnificent yet degraded creature. He is one who knows nothing of the blessedness for which he was brought into being, and ever seeks to bring the objects of his deception into his same desperate and dismal existence—even, as himself, with exalted delusions of personal grandeur. How he would delight to see his servants attributing to ‘God’ all manner of overwhelming esoteric experiences, which he himself has engendered. He has never given up on his mad passion to be worshipped in the place of the Holy One!

And so the community of the world is that expression of common human living by which the servants of the evil one, *seek to sustain* the sense of personal freedom, significance, security, enlivenment and destiny they were created to enjoy. But its desperate pursuit of these things is always within the tragic context of that endless, restless struggle described in Study 4.

clearly not a community that should hold promise of life for the redeemed

Because of the nature of the community of the world, it is certainly not one that the saints should look to for their own sense of personal freedom and significance, circumstantial security, human enlivenment or future hope. Such things are to be found in a truly primary way, only in Christ and nurtured within His beloved community—in the midst of which He so gloriously dwells!

This doesn’t mean that we don’t—out of our primary fullness in the Lord—gratefully receive the provision of ‘secondary delights and desires’ from within the community of the world. There is an authentic dependence in terms of such secondary things that is part of all true common life together in any context. It’s just that we don’t look to the world for what is *primary*, or pursue what is *secondary* outside of the primary delight and desire that is ours in the Son.

The fact is that we have been ‘delivered from the dominion and darkness’! And so we no longer have any need to look to its ‘prince’ (the devil) and his counterfeit promises of life. That is, all that he insidiously and relentlessly holds out to us within his ultimately doomed, desperately idolatrous and self-serving community—which knows nothing of the eternal life promised in the Beloved.

a clear-cut distinction to be maintained

If there is one thing that distinguishes the community of the redeemed from the community of the world, it is that authentic human quality which is the most ennobling and enlivening thing we may know as the image of God: *holiness*—apart from which any true likeness to the Holy One is, of course, totally absent.

We’ve spoken throughout the series of personal holiness as our being different to, separate from and other than whatever makes us to be less than truly human. That is, our being those who enjoy an intimate communion with God and who reflect His own glory in the desires of our heart, the thoughts of our mind, the words of our mouth and the actions of our body—and separating ourselves from whatever could dissipate this in any way.

Yes, it is holiness—expressed in that righteousness of fulfilling the two great commands—that is above all else the distinguishing feature of the community of the redeemed.

the old covenant ‘principle of distinguishing’

We saw that if Israel was to possess their inheritance in the land the LORD was giving them, it was indispensable that they be always decisively and wholeheartedly *distinguishing* between themselves

and the idolatrous nations around them. This meant that they were to do all that was needful to completely separate themselves from every element of idolatry that existed in the land. When it came to worship, there was to be ‘no agreement’ between them and what was established round about them. The reason for this was plain:

Deuteronomy 7:6

You are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession.

Before the final plague preceding the Exodus from Egypt, the LORD said to Moses:

Exodus 11:7

You will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Israel and Egypt.

They were to distinguish between themselves and the idolatrous nations around them because the LORD Himself had made such a distinction. Their response was simply to live consistently with that—choosing the righteousness to which they’d been called. And as they did, they would experience blessing from their Redeemer’s hand, which also would distinguish them from all others. As Malachi, said:

Malachi 3:17–18

[They] will be My treasured possession ... You will see again the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

Furthermore, in order to impress upon the psyche of Israel the absolute importance of maintaining their distinctiveness as His truly worshipping people—and to emphasize the ‘given-ness’ of the worship they’d received—the LORD built into their everyday lives ‘a principle of distinguishing’. They were to know that their worship was different altogether to that of the nations around them.

This principle of distinguishing, then, was to be always held before the people by the priests:

Ezekiel 44:23

They are to teach My people the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the clean and the unclean.

As we saw in Study 5, Israel was to be each day faced with things designated as either ‘clean’ or ‘unclean’. Such distinction didn’t necessarily have to do with what was ‘*morally* clean or unclean’, but what made a person to be ‘*ceremonially* clean or unclean’: that is, something that would either enable them to enjoy the access God had given them to Himself, or which would exclude them from it. So—within the old covenant—by only having to do with what was ceremonially clean, they could keep themselves in a place of being able to worship.

Then there were those things that were either ‘holy’ or ‘common’. What was holy had to do with the ‘given worship’ the LORD had prescribed. And what was common was something that was ‘clean’ but had nothing to do with the worship that had been provided. They needed to distinguish between these two, so as to not give what is common a holy status.

This principle of distinguishing that the LORD meticulously built into Israel’s daily living, certainly, underlined their need to remain separate from whatever would pervert, or exclude them from, the most important element of their inheritance as His people: the supreme gift and enormous privilege of worship.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ There were of course, other lists of prohibitions (such as in Leviticus 20) that had to do not merely with ceremonial uncleanness, but with issues that were against creational functionality. As God’s people they were certainly to be distinguished by the absence of such things among them.

the principle of distinguishing continued in the new covenant

When it comes to us as people of the new covenant in Christ, the old principles of ceremonial cleanness or uncleanness no longer apply. And, as we'll see, in one way neither does the need to distinguish between what is holy and common.

However, the principle of distinguishing, itself, clearly does remain. It's just that what was foreshadowed in the old covenant is now brought to a dynamic fulfillment in the new. We are now to be always decisively and wholeheartedly, distinguishing between, what enables enjoyment of our *surpassingly glorious access* into the Father's presence, in the Son—and what in effect, shuts us out!

Paul made this very clear when writing to the Corinthians, living as they were in the midst of idolatrous surroundings and a lifestyle that such false worship produced. Affirming their incredible nature as the holy dwelling place of God in Christ, he then also affirmed the ongoing relevance of the old covenant principle of distinguishing, quoting from, Leviticus, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and 2 Kings: 2 Corinthians 6:16–18

[We] are the temple of the Living God. As God has said, "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they will be My people." Therefore, "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you." And "I will be a Father to you and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

So, with the Corinthians, we too must know what is required if we are to go on enjoying every privilege that belongs to the children of God. It is absolutely essential that we maintain 'the difference' between ourselves as the community of the redeemed and those who belong to the community of the world—to distinguish between what will facilitate holiness of life and what will prevent it.

discernment through constant attentiveness to the word

The writer to the Hebrews—appealing to Jewish Christians who were struggling to maintain a holy life under persecution—tells us what is the key to true discernment.

He spoke to them of the word of the old covenant as 'milk' for infants in the faith, and the word of the new covenant as 'solid food' for those who have come to covenantal maturity. He said that these believers, having lazy minds, did not now even understand the teaching of the old covenant scriptures—with all that they foreshadowed of the coming of the Son for our salvation. So he brought a particularly strong word to them:

Hebrews 5:11–14

We have much to say to you about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish between good and evil.

Because of the hostility of those around them, these people had become so preoccupied with their difficulties, that they were allowing their minds to drift back to old (more socially acceptable) Jewish ways of thinking—rather than allowing the truths of the gospel to impact them as they ought. And so in the midst of what they were facing, they were losing confidence in the very word that would release them into the righteousness of holy living.

They needed to see that it is only by constantly feeding upon the 'solid food' (the new covenant 'teaching about righteousness') that their minds would be trained to distinguish between good and evil. That is, they would have discernment, if they remained focused upon the teaching that

proclaimed their sanctified and justified place with the Son in His Father's very presence—gloriously able, then, to keep the two great commands.

For these people at this time 'the community of the world' took the form of gospel refusing Jews, who were telling them that their urgent need was to come back to Judaism. And together with this, their faithless and fearful reaction to social (and even life-threatening) circumstances had begun to shut their hearts to the word of God—robbing them of the discernment they needed in order to think wisely as part of the community of the redeemed.

Whatever the particular circumstances we face, none of us will be truly able to distinguish between what is of the truth and what is not, without a constant, undistracted attention to the word of God: that revelation which alone, by the Spirit, joyously sustains us in the Son's love for His Father and for every other person. For apart from this we are at the mercy of every 'logical' worldly indication of 'the way things are' (false indicative), and 'what we must do now' (false imperative) in order to have what is desperately required. And although being very wrong, it will all seem so right at the time!

The result? We begin to worship, feel, think, speak and act as if we were part of the community of the world, rather than of the Father's liberated and enlivened community of holy worship and love in Christ.

This, as we saw in Study 8, was precisely what robbed Adam of the discernment he needed as that first false word came: telling him 'the way things really were' (the false indicative) and 'the only logical thing for him to do' (the false imperative). And so through his ceasing to be attentive to the LORD'S word and his reception of the serpent's, 'the community of the world' was born—which with all of its brilliance is, to this day, still tragically unable to distinguish between good and evil according to the wisdom of its Creator.

Yes, only revelation of the Redeeming Father's lavish abundance to us in His Son, and joyous participation in His Sonship, will keep us in that place of *pristine, God-given wisdom*. That is, where we are always decisively and wholeheartedly embracing the one pure-hearted, primary delight: God Himself; and pursuing the three pure-hearted, primary desires: His pleasure, glory and praise, our own conformity to the likeness of the Son and the human freedom and fullness of others.

Only in such response will there always be the discernment we need: the ability to distinguish between good and evil and between what is 'the way of the world' and 'the way of our Redeemer', regardless of the circumstances we face. We may, in fact, say that the *presence* of such response is, itself, what is 'good' (creationally functional) and its *absence* what is 'evil' (creationally dysfunctional).

pure-hearted primary delight & desire —sanctifying all else that it embraces & pursues

This matter of distinguishing between the two communities often causes complexity in our mind, particularly, when it comes to our delighting in and desiring things that have become part of the system of the world. But this complexity is unnecessary if we remember what has already been mentioned in the section on *the one primary delight* (under the heading of 'maintaining the vertical in regard to the horizontal').

Apart from what is prohibited by God's word (or is clearly against the nature of the kingdom of God) the 'secondary delights and desires' that are enjoyed by the community of the world do not impede our access to Him—as long as He remains *primary* in our engagement with them. When we enjoy them within the one pure-hearted, primary delight and the three pure-hearted, primary desires, they are for us not merely 'common', but holy!

As was shown from 1 Timothy 4:4–5 such enjoyments are consecrated by 'the word' (that declares all things in the creation to be 'good') and 'the prayer of thanksgiving' (that expresses a heart lifted

up in love to the Creator). These may, then, be not only legitimate but also SANCTIFIED: enjoyed in a spirit of worship that comes from the heart of the Son, and is part of what is offered up in His name—for the Father’s pleasure!

And, so, although there are things that are objects of idolatrous delight and desire within the community of the world, they may be for us entirely different: contexts of holy worship and an environment in which the love of Christ may also be made known.

**maintaining the distinction because
although *in* the world, we are not *of* it**

As said previously, although we live and relate within the community of the world we belong only to the community of the redeemed. Jesus made this very clear as He prayed for His disciples towards the close of the Last Supper, saying to His Father:

John 17:15

“They are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one.”

He Himself was not *of* the world and neither were those whom He had set apart to Himself. He belonged to His Father and they belonged to Him.

And for us, now, through our having been made one with Jesus in His Death, Burial, Resurrection and Ascension, we are no longer in Adam and the community he created, but in Christ and the new community created in Him. We live, then, *within* the system of this world but are by no means *of* it.

So although our Lord had no desire for us to be taken out of the world, His prayer was certainly for us to be protected from the evil one as we continue in it. This world system is never something within which we may ‘feel at home’—for to, at any moment, embrace its godless and idolatrous ways will set us against the way of our Creator and Redeemer.

The evil one (with his army of spiritual powers) is all the time attempting to open our heart to the world as a place of belonging, where our deep inner cries may be satisfied. That’s why the apostle John brought the earnest exhortation:

1 John 2:15–16

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.

James spoke of such an opening of our heart to the world as a spiritually disastrous friendship:

James 4:4

Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

Then there is Paul’s urgent appeal to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 6:14

What do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

The two communities represent two realms: the dominion and darkness and the kingdom of the Son. We have been delivered from the one so that we may be transformed as the redeemed children of God within the other. And so always a clear distinction in our mind must be maintained between the two.

The truth is that whatever causes our treasuring of God’s life-giving Voice and His dynamically intimate Presence to be diminished in any way, is an intrusion of the world into the realm of our redeemed humanity.

And so through the word and prayer—and the holy delight and desire these produce—we are to live in this world of sight and sense within the atmosphere of the unseen heavenly realm. For it is only then that we may clearly distinguish between what belongs to the old in Adam and the new in Christ—and so choose wisely and faithfully within the moments of our days.

the rightness of living in the world

We saw above that our Lord had no desire for us to be taken out of the world but to be kept faithful within it. And now we are to see the glorious reason for our remaining.

In His prayer after the Lord's Supper, Jesus also affirmed before His Father the *nature* of our continued presence within the community of the world, saying:

John 17:18–19

[Father, as] You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”

Being en-fleshed among us Jesus was sent into the system of this world—the environment of Satan's dark and oppressive dominion. And just as His Father had sent Him into that community to redeem those within it, so He in the same way sent His disciples—and us today—into that same community with a grand purpose: to live, speak and act redemptively for its sake.

doing what is entirely natural for us as the redeemed and sanctified children of God

For sanctified people in Christ, it must be said that to be engaged in one of these two communities to the exclusion—or neglect—of the other is an extremely dysfunctional way of living. For fellowship within the community of the redeemed and redemptive engagement within the community of the world, are both, *entirely natural* in Christ.

Fellowship within the *redeemed* community is natural, because there we are strengthened in and find rich expression of our life together in the word of God and prayer—that we may go on embracing each day, the one pure-hearted, primary delight and be pursuing the three pure-hearted, primary desires.

And redemptive engagement within the community of the *world* is also natural for us, because our hearts are one with our Redeemer! We know how godless communities everywhere need to have Christ's people among them—liberated and enlivened friends—who are unencumbered by false primary delight and desire, with the love of God dwelling in our hearts and being manifested in all that we are, say and do!⁶¹

To live out our days only within the confines of the church would be a very strange thing indeed. For if we are not one with the heart of God in reaching out to the world in His love, then it is difficult to see how we would be, actually, with Him in His love for one another in the church—and a 'holy huddle' there, may soon become a 'worldly huddle', full of self-serving—albeit religious—passion.

We are to be separate from what those in the world desire, think, say and do that is against the way of our Maker, but we are not to be separate from *them*. It is so obvious that although we don't belong *to* the world, we certainly do belong *in* the world—because of the redemptive calling we've received and the redemptive passion that stirs within us!

⁶¹ Later, the studies entitled, 'On the Way In the Community of the Redeemed' and 'On The Way With God In His Mission', will deal with this dynamic matter of redemptive engagement within the community of the world.

in the world ... yes, but ...

Although we are to be engaged within the community of the world, it must always be understood that the world is not a 'safe' place to be if great care is not taken. That's why Jesus said to His disciples when He commissioned them:

Luke 10:3

Go! I am sending you out as lambs among wolves.

It is also why Jude spoke of the great care to be taken when reaching out to those who either belong to the world or are believers caught within its grip:

Jude 22–23

Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

Being in the world is, indeed, most appropriate. And yet we must always be aware that careless engagement within that realm is neither appropriate nor spiritually safe.

Maybe the following illustration will be helpful for our understanding:

The ocean would never be a place to build a boat. But once it has been built on the land, it would be extremely odd if it were not to spend a lot of time in the ocean, where it belongs! But although a boat belongs in the ocean, much care must be taken when it is there—for if the ocean gets in the boat, it will soon become part of the ocean itself!

Clearly it is the same also with us. The world is not a safe place if great care is not taken as we are engaged within it. We do belong in the world, but if it gets in us—we're sunk!

It was not without good cause that Jesus prayed that we be protected as we operate within that realm of the evil one's dark dominion.

regardless of the context—always priestly, prophetic and kingly

It was seen in Study 8 that we've not only been made one with Jesus in His *personal status* as Beloved Son and Heir, but are also one with Him in His *vocational status* as Priest, Prophet and King. And that through the indwelling of the Spirit we may now fulfill this given status, by living in a priestly, prophetic and kingly way—as we *participate* with Him in His love for His Father and all others.

It is our vocational status, and the *capacity* we have by the Spirit to *fulfill* it, that is central to this fifth statement of our response as inheritors: to be those who are to be always *distinguishing* between the two communities.

Whether within the community of the redeemed or the community of the world, our calling is to share in the priestly heart, prophetic mind and kingly action of Jesus—within every aspect of our lives, as a natural part of daily living.

Jesus has, indeed, sent us into the world as the Father sent Him, and with the same purpose: to live always with Him in His joyous communion with His Father and in His love for every person. And within this, to bring a priestly, prophetic and kingly revelation of His Sonship for the strengthening of His people and the redemption of the nations.⁶²

⁶² Unlike Jesus, our calling is not to *create* the redemption but to *proclaim* it, and have its transforming powers *manifested* within and through us each day. It is a tragic thing when those who take the name of the Lord seek to form a version of the gospel that will be attractive to the world, rather than proclaim the one that has been clearly revealed within the New Testament 'apostolic witness': that divinely accomplished and gloriously powerful redemption in Christ!

priestly living

We saw in Study 8 that within the new covenant there is no such thing as a ‘priest’, for only Jesus is that—our Great High Priest! But as His people we are to participate with him today in the ‘priestly living’ that He manifested in Study 6 as He walked among us: being one with Him in ‘His priestly heart in His Father’s presence and purpose of love’. As mentioned a number of times already, in His being ‘the True Worshipper’, every desire of His heart, thought of His mind, word from His mouth and action of His body was a fragrant, pleasure-giving offering to the Father (a reality that can’t be mentioned often enough!). His priestly living—expressed in ‘adoring communion’ and ‘full personal offering’, with ‘a full measure of holy affections, specific petition and yearning intercession’—was the very ‘way and aroma of the kingdom’.

Our participation in the priestly heart of Jesus, will then, include everything that expresses and flows out of the one pure-hearted, primary delight and those three pure-hearted, primary desires that are the essence of our life in Him—each element of which is, always, a fragrant, pleasure-giving offering to the Father.

In Study 17 we’ll look in more detail at the priestly nature of the redeemed community, but this statement from Hebrews summarizes the vertical and horizontal outworking of it nicely:

Hebrews 13:15–16

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess His name. And do not forget to do good and share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

And further to this, the intrepid apostle Paul gave witness to the constant, priestly vocational action that he and Timothy enjoyed—boldly declaring in an exalted spirit of gratitude:

2 Corinthians 2:14–15

Thanks be to God, who ... uses us to spread the knowledge of Him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

Paul knew that as he and Timothy lived richly in the indwelling life of the Son and manifested His love in word and deed, *then* the aroma of their lives, that brought such pleasure to the Father, also spread the knowledge of Him *everywhere* they went—within the community of the redeemed and the community of the world! What better example could we have?

prophetic speaking

Again, there is only one Prophet—Jesus! And we are called to be those who are one with Him in ‘His *prophetic mind* in His Father’s presence and purpose of love’. As such, we may speak in His name to those around us in the communities of both the redeemed and the world.

To be prophetic is basically to always have the word of God shaping our thoughts according to the reality of His kingdom, and for our words to be consistent with this as we speak to others. This is how it was for Jesus as He revealed ‘the words and wisdom of the kingdom’ among us, having ‘communion-born thinking’ and ‘incessant holy perception’, with ‘authentic verbal communication’ and ‘arresting proclamation’.

On the Day of Pentecost Peter quoted Joel, declaring that with the Spirit having been poured out, a new era of every day prophetic activity had now arrived:

Acts 2:17

“God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy.”

Later in the series it will be seen that to speak prophetically has to do with bringing a word that is a direct proclamation of the Lord in a particular situation—which is also a significant part of what preaching is to be. As Peter said later to a number of scattered believing communities:

1 Peter 4:11

If you speak, you should do so as one who speaks the very words of God.

Here he is, of course, referring to more formal proclamation. And yet, this—in principle—ought also to be the aim of each of us when we talk to others at any time. If we can't speak in the Lord's name we have no real right to speak at all. Our tongues have been sanctified: set apart to be vehicles only of the truth. That is, in love, to give witness to things as they really are, according to the Father's creational and redemptive purpose ('authentic verbal communication').

Paul makes this very point when referring to both our speech and actions, saying:

Colossians 3:17

"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

This is, of course, the verbal fruit of constantly maintained, pure-hearted, primary delight and desire—and will be naturally expressive of Paul's further appeal for speech that is generous spirited and 'relationally tasty':

Colossians 4:6

"Let your conversation always be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

We all have different temperaments and verbal capacities, but what comes from the 'priestly heart' and 'prophetic mind' of the Son will always be speech that touches the heart of a hearer. That doesn't mean we are to be always 'speaking theologically' or 'quoting the bible'—or being 'nauseatingly spiritual'! Just lovingly and naturally giving expression to the truth of the way things are within God's good world and glorious redemption. And this may include humour as much as anything else.

What an incredible thing it is to be those who are called to speak always in the name of Jesus! We're not all to exercise the particular gift of 'a prophet'. But we all are certainly to be prophetic: *indwelt* by the life-giving word of God (as we habitually dwell in His dynamically intimate presence), and *speaking* wisely and purposefully out of the pure-hearted delight and desire this brings.

Study 13, 'On The Way In The Action Of Divine Love', will deal extensively with the matter of 'verbal service'. And as is always the case with what is prophetic, this will be seen to be in a much broader setting than just what is 'spoken'. Other studies will also speak of the prophetic proclamation of God's word.

kingly action

Again, although there are many who are given authority in the communities of both the redeemed and the world, there is only one King—Jesus!⁶³ And here we are affirming that all who are in Him are called to exercise the authority they have been given to 'reign in life' in His name (Romans 5:17). This is an awesome capacity that will be dealt with, in principle, in this study's sixth and final response, and in detail in Study 10: 'On The Way Living A Holy Life—In Righteousness Overcoming In The Kingdom Of The Son'.

Study 6 spoke of our Lord's 'kingly action', and the 'works and signs' of the kingdom which were manifestations of this; all performed within a 'joyous future expectation' and 'present authority and

⁶³ In a later study we will speak of the functional nature of responding to those who are given authority over us. We are not saying here that Jesus is the only authority we are to obey, only that He is 'the King of kings and the Lord of lords' to whom supreme obedience is to be given by all.

power’, and with ‘an undeniable dominion’ and ‘triune, holy vocation made visible’. And then Study 8 spoke of our own expression of His kingly action as, by the Spirit, in His name, we participate in His ongoing works and signs in various ways. We won’t revisit those here, as they will each be dealt with throughout the remaining studies.

It will be seen as we proceed through the series that living in a kingly way in the authority of Jesus takes many shapes. It has nothing to do with a domination of other people. But it certainly does have to do with our not being personally dominated by what is false: free in holy delight and desire to be always one with the Son in ‘His kingly action in His Father’s presence and purpose of love’ (within both the community of the redeemed and the community of the world).

So we have come to the end of our fifth indispensable element of response as inheritors. And it must surely now be evident that the Father is, indeed, always *distinguishing* between what is *His* liberated and enlivened community of holy worship and love in Christ, and *Satan’s* desperate community of idolatry and futile living in Adam.⁶⁵ And that as His treasured possession we too are rightly called to be always decisively and wholeheartedly distinguishing between them—that we may be with Him in His gloriously redemptive action of divine love in the midst of both!

Having established, then, the dynamic nature of our vocational calling within the two communities (in the light of the four previous elements of response) it is no surprise that we should now immediately need to speak of this final matter: *contending*.

Sixthly, as present inheritors, we are to be always decisively & wholeheartedly:

- *contending* in a relentless spiritual battle

(against the world, the flesh & the devil—in a war already won)

As participants in the incredible redemption that has been accomplished, there is nothing that can keep us from a present enjoyment of our freedom and fullness in Christ. And *that* even includes what has been allowed to continue according to the Father’s purpose: those three elements of the dominion of darkness: the world, the flesh and the devil. However, the fact does remain that although our Lord has triumphed over these three mighty foes, we do continue to be engaged every day of our life in a relentless battle against them.

The apostle Paul gave some very clear insight into the nature of this, saying:

Ephesians 6:12

For our [wrestling match] is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

There are many things that come against us in life. But fundamentally the greatest battle we face each day—particularly in our reactions to what happens to us—doesn’t have to do with flesh and blood. People may well be involved, but what is so often behind it all is dark, unseen, spiritual power. Within this physical world we all live in a spiritual environment that is *against* the way of God for His image—and definitely against the redemption He has accomplished!

⁶⁵ Although ‘the community of the world’ is characterized by ‘idolatrous and futile living’, we saw in the Study 3 outline that within the ‘corruption’ of its daily relational activity, there may well be much ‘nobility’.

a relentlessly contested vocation

Study 8 spoke of our baptism into Christ as being an act that included a *consecration to His service*, forever setting us apart to be with Him in His ongoing priestly, prophetic and kingly action. In this, each one of us—according to the gifting we have received—is called to be involved in a grand manifestation of the kingdom of God. And so, at the heart of the spiritual battle we are speaking of is the whole matter of ‘vocation’. And, more specifically, THAT MOST VOCATIONAL THING OF ALL: WORSHIP!!! And let us make no mistake: This conflict is both constant and intense—one that is fueled by a fierce satanic and demonic hatred for God and His people.

Throughout the Story of Redemption we’ve seen that Satan has always been seeking to destroy, prevent or pervert the authentic worship that arises in the heart of the image of God. The first couple were tempted to give ‘worth-ship’ to the word of the serpent rather than the word of the LORD: to destroy their capacity for enjoyment of the intimate communion they were created for in their Maker’s presence. And since that tragic day of deception, there has been and will continue to be a battle between the two ‘words’ and the two ‘worships’ they produce.

From the Fall onwards, the devil’s vehement and vicious opposition to any possibility of authentic worship has, indeed, been relentless. Even within that first human family we saw the tragedy of the first murder; and it was all about an immediate clash between the true worship of godly Abel and the false worship of godless Cain (‘who belonged to the evil one’—1 John 3:12). This was the manifest beginning of a violent opposition to any true lifting up of the human heart to our Creator: a dark, God-refusing atmosphere that would pervade fallen-human history.

Moses experienced the relentless nature of this opposition. After all the events of the Exodus, and with Pharaoh’s satanically-charged and brutal opposition to the LORD’S people and His purpose for them (together with Israel’s own tendency to respond to demonic incitement throughout their wilderness journey) this old ‘worship warrior’ clearly understood what was needed. He knew that if God’s ‘treasured possession’ were to possess their inheritance in the land of Canaan, they would have ‘to be always decisively and wholeheartedly *contending* against fierce and relentless opposition to the purpose of the LORD’—whether from without or within.

Of course, the same is true for us as the new covenant people of God—maybe even more so! For the worship into which we’ve been called is ‘surpassingly more glorious’ than what the old covenant saints knew—with every dark power arrayed in wild desperation against it!

Above all, the devil works incessantly to keep us from our greatest need and responsibility: to be always decisively and wholeheartedly *embracing* the one pure-hearted, primary delight and *pursuing* the three pure-hearted, primary desires. His own perverse delight is in preventing us from *remaining* fully and joyously assured of the lavish abundance that is ours in the Son, and in inciting within us that idolatrous passion which will lock us back into a life of embracing and pursuing what is futile. His relentless campaign is, really, about nothing else.

‘Worldliness’ is often caricatured through an emphasis upon certain things that Christians ‘shouldn’t do’. But it is really about the absence of pure-hearted, primary delight and desire: seeking to find our hour-by-hour promise of life in anything other than God Himself. The devil is not particularly concerned with our pursuit of self-authenticating fulfillment through religion—even if it is on the basis of impeccable Christian theology, principle and practice (or ‘personally satisfying’ worship services). Just so long as it doesn’t bring a daily participation in the intimate communion and self-emptying love of the Triune Community! Yes, the battle is always centred in the realm of the *heart*, and its response to God and His word.

The apostle Peter was very much aware of our need to be always decisively and wholeheartedly *contending* against this persistent onslaught we’re speaking of. In this, he earnestly warned some

who were experiencing persecution on account of their faith of what was, for them, an even more dangerous, ever-present reality:

1 Peter 5:8

“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Given the slightest opportunity Satan will do all he can to overcome God’s people with his deceits—hoping to make a mockery of their consecrated status.

Paul, too, was always aware of this great danger that faced believing communities, knowing that the subtlety that brought such tragedy in the beginning, was still, an ever-present danger for the saints:

2 Corinthians 11:3

“I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”

However, he declared that no one, in the Lord, need be outwitted by the devil, for:

2 Corinthians 2:11

“We are not unaware of his schemes.”

Satan only has a limited number of approaches: deceptions that have to do with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. But he uses them craftily and well! And sadly, there are all too often *casualties* in the battle, even among those who seem most unlikely to fall. Paul lamented the vocational demise of one of his dearly loved and trusted fellow-workers, saying:

2 Timothy 4:10

“Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me.”

Others may not have thought Demas had fallen into grievous sin. But he had clearly lost his true primary Object of delight. And this was, surely, a tragic outcome for a servant of the King.

Everything in the rest of the series assumes that this battle is always a present factor. Although our personal, spiritual environment in Christ is ‘the kingdom of the Son (the liberating and life-giving realm of Jesus’ Lordship)’, the spiritual background scenery round about us is still ‘the dominion of darkness (the oppressive realm of the world, the flesh and the devil)’: an environment that is always seeking to distract us from those glorious ‘new creation realities’ which are ours to exalt in every day of our life.

And so, in regard to each element of our calling to be highlighted as we move through the studies, THERE WILL BE BATTLES THAT NEED TO BE WON!!! And this, by *contending* against the pressure of the world, the idolatrous passions of the flesh, and the devil who is the author of both.

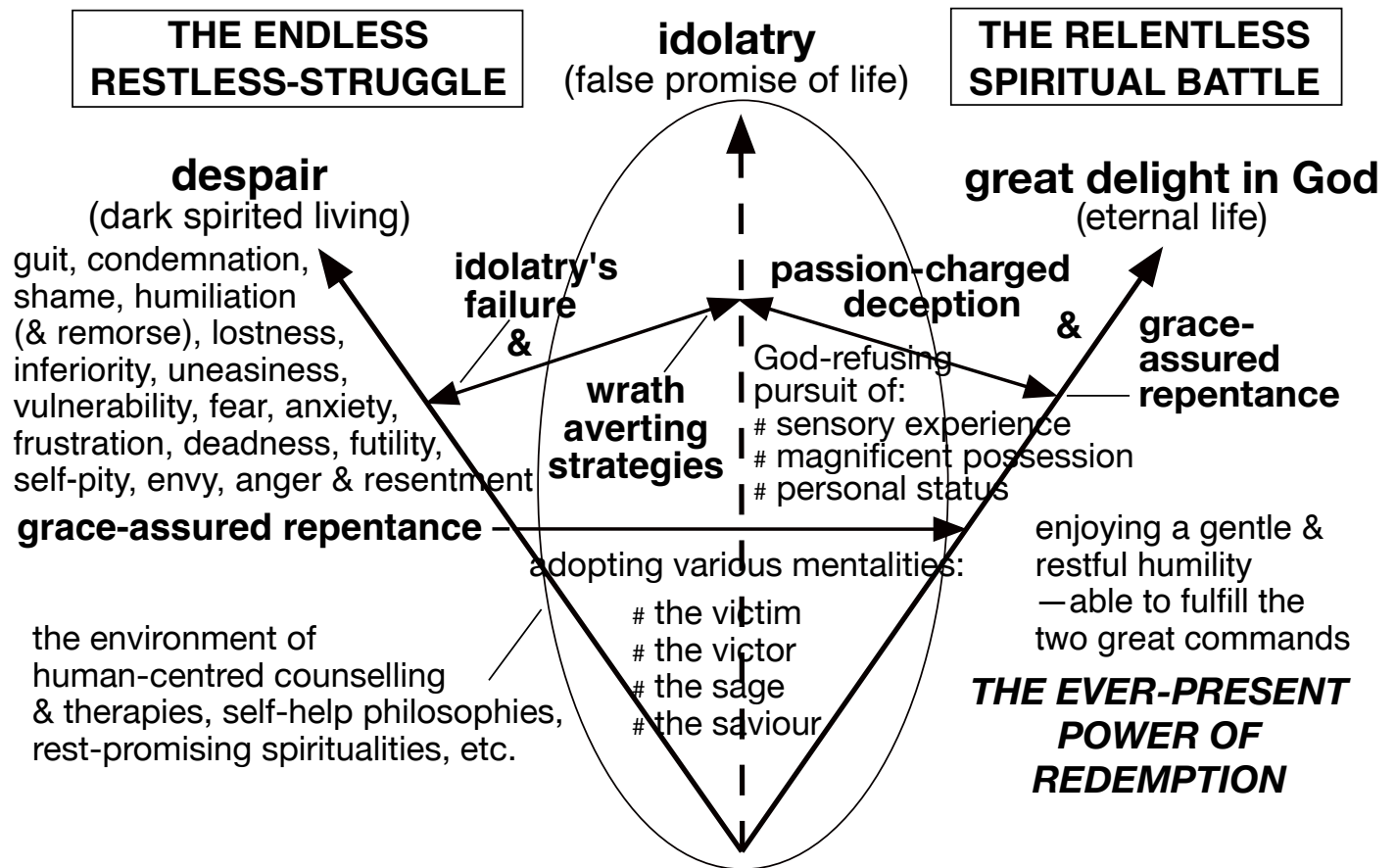
Indeed, the path we tread on the way to the Final Day is through enemy territory! And the battle is always on. If it’s not one thing it will be another. But THE FATHER’S PURPOSE IS TO MANIFEST, BY THE SPIRIT, THE GLORY OF HIS SON WITHIN AND THROUGH US IN THE MIDST OF IT ALL—LET US NEVER FORGET THAT FOR A MOMENT!!!

And how is all this possible? It will be seen as we continue that it’s because WE ARE CONTENDING IN A WAR ALREADY WON!!! We need only to *relentlessly respond* to our great and glorious Conquering-King on the basis of *that fact*, as each particular circumstance unfolds before us.

the nature of the battle we face

It will be helpful now to view this battle in the light of a further development of the Study 4 diagram, which retains the content of the earlier one that portrays the ‘endless, restless struggle’, but also includes the nature of our present subject, the ‘relentless, spiritual battle’. Both themes are, of course, very much related—because to fail in the latter is to find oneself in the former. Failure in the ‘holy battle’ immediately sets us up for the dark-spirited torments of the ‘fleshly struggle’.

And so now we'll proceed to describe the basic content of the diagram, with the substance of it indicated by inverted commas throughout.



As we've already established, it is *worship* that is at the heart of the spiritual battle in which we are all engaged. The agenda of dark powers is always to intrude idolatrous passions into our heart (even with strong biblical themes) which reduce or eliminate our experience of 'eternal life': that 'great delight in God' we've been redeemed and called into in His Son. In this we are deceived—yes, even with bible texts in hand—into pursuing outcomes that have become to us a 'false promise of life'.

As the diagram shows, all this has to do with those three universal areas of fallen-human desire: a 'God-refusing pursuit' of 'sensory experience' (what I must do), 'magnificent things' (what I must have) and 'personal status' (what I must be)—always, in fact, the result of our embracing a false indicative ('this is the way things are') and a false imperative ('therefore this is how I must respond'). We find ourselves, then—through 'passion-charged deception'—drawn away from authentic worship (that one pure-hearted primary delight) into a place of *idolatrous pursuit* with those falsely life-promising themes preoccupying our mind. As established in Study 3, 'our thinking is shaped by what our passions demand', whether these be holy or fleshly.

But as with the Study 4 diagram this one also shows that idolatry—although promising much—is never truly substantial (indicated by a broken rather than a solid line). Idolatry inevitably fails, and when this happens (or at least threatens to) we find ourselves not only without the great delight in God that is our heritage, but in a place of 'despair' or, at least, anxiously seeking to keep ourselves from moving in that direction.

Failed idolatry, with its dashing (or shaking) of some non-negotiable false promise of life, brings what is the *exact opposite* of the eternal life that is ours in the Son: an experience of 'dark-spirited living', characterized by fleshly and self-obsessed feelings such as 'guilt, condemnation, shame, humiliation / remorse, lostness, inferiority, uneasiness, vulnerability, fear, anxiety, frustration, deadness, futility,

self-pity, envy, anger and resentment’—all part of our tasting what the Holy One, in the wrath of His love, is personally giving us over to.

In all of this, believing that our cause is right and that whatever is frustrating it is very wrong, we are usually convinced that what we’re experiencing is completely unfair; that if only people, situations and things had not conspired against us, all would be well. Although a sense of personal responsibility is not always absent, there is no sweet fellowship with our dear and awesome Maker. However, we cannot bear the despair! And so with our thinking still very much shaped by what our non-negotiable passion is demanding, our *mind* immediately tends to move towards some kind of strategic solution to the problem: a ‘wrath-averting strategy’. This may be a re-shaped or re-energized version of our previous approach or something entirely new (even with a bible verse attached)—either way, it brings a *re-vitalized* ‘false promise of life’! The problem is, though, that those old personally debilitating emotions are only a disappointment (or threat of it) away.

And so, we find ourselves endlessly moving back and forth between the false hope of idolatry—with its fragile delights—and the despair that is its inevitable consequence. Full-blown despair, of course, may not always be the result. But its ever-looming presence desperately drives us back into a renewed place of strategic solution to our unsettledness. Whenever this is the case the ‘holy battle’ to which we are called has been well and truly lost, and we now find ourselves in the midst of the ‘unholy struggle’, which is nothing more than the due consequence of such defeat.

The only authentic solution to be found, then, is in a renewed liberation into those awesome and enlivening *new creation realities* we’ve been declaring. And this, through a ‘grace-assured repentance’ that brings us immediately back into that supreme place of our heritage: the ‘great delight in God’ that is the wellspring of the eternal life we were created for. This beautiful renewal can be embraced either from that place of ‘despair’ or from within any place outside of ‘great delight in God’—whenever there is recognition of the folly of our wicked refusal of Him. And in *that*, the holy battle has been once more engaged in, and won!

The result is that we are restored into a ‘gentle and restful humility’, which enables us ‘to fulfill the two great commands’, and so to *truly live!* This action of grace-assured repentance and immediate restoration to personal blessedness, truly is, as the illustration declares, ‘THE EVER-PRESENT POWER OF REDEMPTION’!!!

The whole ellipse section of the diagram is where strongly focused *wrath-averting activity* takes place, and so, is understandably also ‘the environment of human-centred counseling, therapies, self-help philosophies and rest promising spiritualities etc.’ For in a fallen world such things will always abound—often being quite brilliant devices created to serve desperately pursued idolatrous agendas.

There is an unquenchable quest for personal wellbeing that drives a magnificently created humanity on. And the world system will, indeed, relentlessly utilize every rich resource of intuition and analysis to arrive at new solutions to the fallen human dilemma—in an attempt to eliminate or at least reduce its impact. But these are, of course, never able to deal with the primary issue of human wellbeing: the freedom of spirit and fullness of life that exists only within the pure-hearted, primary delight and desire we were created for.

And also within the ellipse of the diagram, we have those four ‘mentalities’ spoken of in Study 4 that are adopted to varying degrees—according to personal experience and temperament, as well as the influence of various human-centred solutions available. Those mentalities of the ‘victim’, the ‘victor’, the ‘sage and the ‘saviour’ will be further spoken of as the series progresses.

a definition, in personal terms, of those three major elements of experience

*great delight in God*

'Life is, above all else, about *knowing the blessedness* of the one pure-hearted, primary delight and its subsequent three pure-hearted, primary desires.'

*idolatry*

'Life is all about me being happy and not being unhappy—diligently investing and managing for a good return.'

*despair*

'Life is all about me being hopelessly unhappy and desperate for the happiness I crave.'

contrasting the 'endless restless-struggle' and the 'relentless spiritual battle'

*the endless struggle*

- *cruel bondage* to the dominion of darkness;
- *dominated* by the world, the flesh and the devil;
- *idolatrously pursuing* false promise of life—and desperately implementing wrath-averting strategies;
- *knowing* the futility of unrighteous, fleshly living.

*the relentless battle*

- *fierce conflict* with the dominion of darkness;
- *under attack* from the world, the flesh and the devil;
- *embracing* holy delight in God by taking hold of 'the word of His grace'—enjoying the present gift of eternal life;
- *knowing* the blessedness of righteous, Spirit-enabled living;

wisdom within the battle

In conclusion, it needs to be underlined that whenever we find ourselves in any of those *guilt-charged emotional states* on the despair side of the diagram, we are, without doubt, presently in the grip of some idolatrous pursuit—regardless of how authentic the context may be. For we have at that point tragically attached to the object of our attention some *false, non-negotiable personal promise of life*.

In order to not be deceived in these ways, one must remain sharply aware that IT IS IN THE MIDST OF ALL THE VERY BEST THINGS—LIKE MARRIAGE, FAMILY, FRIENDSHIP, WORK AND MINISTRY—THAT THERE IS THE PERPETUAL DANGER OF OUR BEING DRAWN INTO A PURSUIT OF SOME FALSE PROMISE OF LIFE!!! And actually, this will inevitably be what happens whenever we are diverted from a full and joyous assurance of—and delighted preoccupation with—that new *liberty, identity, security, capacity* and *destiny* that is ours in Christ. Yes, this really is what the relentless, spiritual battle is all about!

The passion-charged deception we're speaking of can, indeed, be very subtle—with what we are pursuing often made to sound like 'the right biblical thing to expect'. But whenever those debilitating emotions described above are present, we may be sure that the shift has taken place from what is authentic into what is now illicit. And it is then that we must immediately move into 'contending mode'.

being always ready to contend

Readiness for battle is a very obvious need of anyone who knows they are about to be engaged in warfare. To go into such a situation without all the preparation required would be both foolish and disastrous. In the same way, before we speak of the *action of contending* in the relentless conflict we face, this matter of *readiness* needs to be addressed.

wise to the ways of ‘the wily one’

As was said earlier in regard to maintaining discernment within the world, the imagery of that first couple in the Garden of Eden is always a good place to begin.

Satan is a great communicator of information—but, as in Genesis 3, it always has the kiss of death in it! And the reality is that through the agency of relentless demonic activity he never ceases to do what he did there in the Garden.

In Study 8 we saw that the evil one comes with his *false indicative*, with its false promise, saying, “This is the way things *are* (not good) and how they can *be* (glorious).” And then on the basis of that he gives his *false imperative*: “So this is what you *must do*. The logic is clear, the promise is before you—so follow your heart!”

Of course, the Spirit does the same thing by bringing his *true indicative* statement of the way things *are* and the way they may *be* according to divine promise; and with this His *true imperative command*. He never brings an *imperative urging* without an *indicative basis*—and neither does that callous counterfeiter. The communications of both the Spirit and the deceiver are always the same: ‘On the basis of the way things are, “do this” or “don’t do that” ’.

As we saw in 2 Corinthians 2:11, ‘we are not unaware of his schemes’. He does only have those three universal areas of false, primary passion. But he also has enormous subtlety and guile in communicating our need of them. So his communications are always to be *tested* against the word of God and immediately *contested* if they are at variance with it.

The information the evil one brings will either condemn, discourage or exalt. When it is *condemning* and *discouraging* it is only with a view to driving us into his death-dealing, false solutions. When it is *exalting* it’s to inflame us with an ever-increasing, self-elevating passion: ‘This is the way things are for you—go for it!’

Whenever our heart responds to the information he brings—thus giving it legitimacy—straight away our passions are aroused in the direction he initiates, our will is subjected and our thinking is shaped according to his way. Satan’s words have no authority or power. He can create nothing. The only real power he has is what we give him when we listen to what he says—and respond to it. Then we give him governance in our life.

A lot of what he says, of course, is ‘true’. We may well be in a dark-spirited place and desperately in need of a solution. But his insistence on both the nature of the dilemma we face and the deliverance we need is never ‘the truth’. The truth is the way things are in Jesus, in the face of all else!

that urgent priority of ‘guarding our heart’

We spoke earlier of the absolute need of an ‘inner purity’: establishing as an urgent priority the guarding of our heart, for it is from there that all else flows. Indeed, without such vigilance an authentic, battle-winning delight and desire cannot be maintained.

In foreshadowing this section, it was also previously said that contending has nothing to do with ‘gritting our teeth’ and ‘surviving’. Instead ‘victory in the battle’ is simply the triumph of A **MAINTAINED WORSHIP THAT IS STRONGER THAN WHATEVER ELSE WE FACE—THE FRUIT OF A HEART THAT HAS DISCOVERED WHAT IS MORE WONDERFUL THAN LIFE ITSELF!!!**

It is within a sanctified heart that every humanly longed-for treasure may dwell: those gloriously *life-giving* and dynamically *intimate* realities of our heritage in the Son, which produce the *triumphant worship* that prevails in any circumstance! And so, in speaking of ‘readiness to contend’ we must begin by dealing with this most central matter. For the heart is where the battle is always centred.

We’ve seen earlier that our heart is ‘the enormously powerful engine of our humanity’. It was created to be the spring of a ‘life-giving purity of delight, desire and resolve’ within us, making the guarding of it to be our most pressing and critical need as the image of God! He has given us the great dignity of being ‘the stewards of our heart’: entrusting us with the responsibility of maintaining its holy function.⁶⁷

We really must be aware of the devices of the evil one. He—being ever bitter, angry and frustrated, and caught within his own endless, restless struggle—is always seeking to incite us to idolatrous passion in order to make us just like him! He is that vile intruder who is perpetually at work together with His legions of demonic powers, to defile and desecrate—obsessed with hatred for the purity of any sanctified human heart.

Satan delights to see us ensnared in a legal-spirited bitterness over what has happened to us through the failures of others; or to have us caught in smoldering self-pity over any sense of personal deprivation. In all kinds of ways, he will attempt to inflame illicit passion within us—counting on the fact that, like him, we really do (in our human fallen-ness) live for ourselves, and the fulfillment of self-seeking, fleshly, non-negotiable agendas. And to this end he will exploit our every point of personal vulnerability—as demonic powers keep us obsessed with our passion-driven perception of ‘what should be’ and what ‘should not be’, and the intolerable nature of it being otherwise!

Yes, all of THE EVIL ONE’S POWERS ARE PRIMARILY EXERTED IN THE DIRECTION OF FRUSTRATING THAT GREATEST OF ALL MIRACLES: THE PURIFICATION OF A HUMAN HEART TO SEEK ITS PRIMARY SOURCE OF HAPPINESS IN GOD HIMSELF!!!

Regenerate children of God do want to love Him and be with Him in His love for every other person. It’s just that we can so often be inflamed and deceived into thinking that we actually want something else more than that. And it’s then that we need to be able to *contend* against such serious folly—within the thrilling realities of God’s liberating and enlivening grace to us in His Son.

the critical need for a mind renewed in the gospel of grace

Jesus, speaking of His intention to lay down His life for His flock as the Good Shepherd-Son, and His authority to take His life up again (John 10:14–15, 18), contrasted Himself with the devil, ‘the father of lies’ (John 8:44–45), saying:

John 10:9–10

The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

He was comparing here the vast difference between the plight of those belonging to the evil one, and the destiny in time and eternity of those who become one with Himself. That is, either having been stolen away into an ongoing death and destruction, or enjoying the abundance of His own peerless life!

In his letter to the Romans Paul brought the same kind of contrast:

Romans 6:23

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

⁶⁷ This is in fact, the central element of the stewardship spoken of in the Study 2 outline.

Then—as we saw in Study 8—after eleven chapters of proclaiming the stunning realities of the mercy and grace of God, he brought this strong and confident exhortation:

Romans 12:1–22

Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God [as your spiritual service of worship]. Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

With our mind focused upon the mercy of God (that has come to us through the grace of the gospel and the regenerating power of the Spirit towards us) we are able to respond to this exhortation to fulfill our priestly vocation in Christ: every day, offering our very body as a pleasure-giving sacrifice to the Father, in the name of the Son.

Paul’s words here are of huge significance when it comes to this matter of contending. For in the *full light of that total contrast* between what was true of us within the dominion of darkness, and what our situation is now in the kingdom of the Son, we may in fact, be TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF OUR MIND—AS OUR WHOLE LIFE IS VIEWED THROUGH THE LENS OF THE MERCY AND GRACE OF GOD TOWARDS US IN CHRIST!!!

Through such gripping revelation we may have *an entirely new personal perspective* as we live in this darkened world each day, so that we are not conformed to its ways. We are, indeed, able to ‘reign in life’ with a kingly overcoming—in the midst of that very realm in which we were once only able to endlessly struggle under a hopeless domination.

Yes, at any moment of any day, we may celebrate the reality of being *no longer* held in slavery by the one who stole us away from our Maker, holding us in bondage to sin, death and the ruin of our humanity. For we’ve now been *transferred* into that awesome place of free-spirited participation with the Son—in the eternal life that has always been His!

It will be seen in the next study (and particularly in Study 14) that from our earliest days within a fallen world, the things that have or have not happened to us—with the various pains and passions then aroused—have largely shaped the way we feel, think, speak and act. And, of course, to this very day the powers of darkness are determined to continue that reactionary process: delighting to use our experiences of life to perversely conform our way of living to the pattern of this world.

The tragedy is, that unless that process is terminated through a radical renewal of our mind in accordance with the ‘saving and renewing truth of the gospel’ (so that all is now seen in a different light altogether), our passions and reactions will substantially continue as they always have. The possibility of our body being a ‘living sacrifice of worship’ in the midst of the battle will be continually frustrated, and our life may then merely take the shape of a ‘heavily christianized worldliness’—which, tragically, has little of the holy delight and desire that is integral to redeemed living in Christ.

Surely, then, as the sanctified children of God, we could never be content with anything less than a heart that daily celebrates the wonders of His grace to us in His Son: having a mind that *enables* us to *see all else* in this light. And with that, enjoying a new capacity to *respond authentically* in our Redeemer to whatever comes our way day after day!

the supreme place of the word and prayer

We’ve seen that it is through the *life-giving word of God* and the *dynamic-intimacy of prayer*, that we are sustained and strengthened in those foundational elements spoken of thus far: to be always decisively and wholeheartedly **remaining** fully assured of our redemption and the grace it brings, **embracing** the one pure-hearted primary delight, **pursuing** the three pure-hearted primary desires and **distinguishing** between the true and the false community. And it’s through this *life-giving and dynamic duo* of the word and prayer, that we are also made ready to *contend* in the battle which

these other holy responses create! And so we are to be constantly *treasuring* them both: living as joyously assured warriors of proclamation and prayer.

It is easy to understand that anyone who is in 'extremely difficult circumstances', would need to be focused upon the word of God and His presence every day. But it is, actually, the constant need of us all; for the battle that determines the extent of our vocational capacity in Christ is always raging.

In regard to the word of God, let it be affirmed again that nobody can overcome in this relentless battle apart from being 'strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus' (2 Timothy 2:1). It is 'the word of His grace' (Acts 20:32) that liberates us into free-spirited and pure-hearted worship—and so into desire, thought, speech and action that is in accordance with the truth!

Paul knew that the saints' enjoyment of their liberty in Christ is very much dependent upon them being 'on guard' against deception. So he said to the Colossians and the Ephesians:

Colossians 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

Acts 20:31

Be on your guard. Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you day and night with tears.

The two main areas of focus within the Redeemed Community must indeed always be, firstly, the wonders of God's grace that have come to us in Christ and, secondly, the ever-present danger of our being drawn away from a position where these have the supreme place in our heart.

In writing to the Ephesian believers, Paul had spoken of the riches of God's grace in Christ and the grand dimensions of their calling in Him. And knowing that all this would be fiercely contested by the evil one, he exhorted them in the following way:

Ephesians 6:10–13

"Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you may take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

They would have to be fortified by 'the armour of God' if their calling was to be fulfilled in godless Ephesus—because with vast forces of darkness arrayed against them in the unseen spiritual realm, **THEY WOULD CONSISTENTLY FIND THEMSELVES IN THE MIDST OF 'THE DAY OF EVIL'!!!**

At such times, when the onslaught of dark powers is most intense, only the *full* armour of God would enable them to *stand* in the truth.

Paul then went on to spell out the nature of this armour. And—no surprise—it was all centred in response to the word of God! He said:

Ephesians 6:14–17

"Stand firm, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the [firm foundation] which comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

In Isaiah 59:16–17 we are figuratively told that God acts on behalf of His sin-ravaged people to achieve the deliverance He has for them, by 'wrapping Himself in zeal' and putting on His armour:

His ‘garments of vengeance’ against all that resists His holy purpose as Redeemer! And it is said here in Ephesians 6, that we are to be with Him in contending against all unrighteousness in the same way.

More will be said of the armour later in this study (which Paul illustrates through the imagery of a Roman soldier’s armoury) and then further on in the series (Study 17) we’ll speak of its corporate nature, as we think of God’s people as ‘an army of love’. But just now we may say that fortification by the armour of God has to do with each of us having *constant mental diligence* in relation to His word.

And, of course, *prayer* is also absolutely essential for our overcoming in the face of the warfare we’re engaged in. That’s why Paul concluded his exhortation to put on the whole ‘en-worded armour’ with these strong encouragements to pray:

Ephesians 6:18–20

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the [saints]. Pray also for me that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it [with boldness], as I should.

Overcoming in the battle involves constant alertness in prayer for both oneself and others. And it is such prayerfulness that enables a wisdom-filled, fearless and bold *proclamation* of the all-conquering word!

Yes, we can never overstate the supreme place that both the word and prayer have in our calling to be, ‘always decisively and wholeheartedly *contending* against the world, the flesh and the devil’. In the midst of the battle, these two—as we’ll see—may truly become the sword of the Spirit in our hand and the conquering cry of faith in our heart!

contending in a war already won

God Himself has always been the Great Contender on behalf of His people. As He said through Isaiah:

Isaiah 49:25

“I will contend with those who contend against you.”

Having delivered Israel from their dreadful bondage in Egypt, their Great Contender then promised to go on overcoming in all the battles they faced in the process of possessing their promised inheritance.

But, as Study 5 briefly described, just when they were poised to enter the land, those who had gone in to spy out the situation came back and spread a ‘bad report’. They spoke in strong and terrifying ways, describing the impossible circumstances that would be faced in attempting to overcome forces that would be arrayed against them. And they said to each other:

Numbers 14:4

“We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

They wanted someone who would affirm their faithless word and lead them out of the conflict set before them, back into what now seemed the more pleasing alternative—Egypt. Strong voices, indeed, proclaiming the impossibility of the promises of God being fulfilled!

But Joshua and Caleb who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the whole community of Israel:

Numbers 14:7–9

“The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us He will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”

Joshua and Caleb affirmed that according to the word of the LORD the victory was already theirs—and gave strong voice to the reality of this fact! And, as we know, it was only these two who forty years later entered their inheritance with a new generation.

We today also have the word of a victory already ours through THE ONE WHO HAS COME AS OUR GREAT CONTENDER IN THE NAME OF HIS FATHER!!!

During His Life and Ministry Jesus day by day overcame the dominion of darkness—personally. He could say during His teaching after the Lord’s Supper: ‘I have overcome the world’ (John 16:33). But then, in the Cross, through His body and blood He has overcome for *us*—supremely!

a war well and truly won by the Great Contender

We’ve seen many times in Studies 6–9 (and will see in even greater detail in Study 10) that our old humanity in Adam—condemned, accursed and under the power of the devil—has been put to death with Jesus in His Death. And by the mercy and grace of God we have been made alive with Him in His Resurrection and Ascension, *as total participants with Him in that new and glorious humanity of which He is the Head.*

Yes, by faith, we know that the old person we were in Adam is no more: DEAD!!! And NOW IT IS ONLY *JESUS*—US IN HIM AND HIM IN US!!! In Him we’ve been given His own *free-spirited* moral status of righteousness in His Father’s presence, the blessedness of His own communion of love with His Father and His love for all others—and with this, His own *authority* by which we may overcome every element of the dominion of darkness!

We are, indeed, called to be always decisively and wholeheartedly *contending* against the world, the flesh and the devil. But we do so ‘in a war already won’, as those who are **CONTENDING TOGETHER WITH HIM WHO HAS *CONTENDED* ON OUR BEHALF—AND OVERCOME!!!**

He who is the En-fleshed, Divine Son reigning in His glorified humanity at His Father’s right hand, **HAS GAINED A *TOTAL DOMINION* OVER THE WORLD, THE FLESH AND THE DEVIL—OVER EVERY DARK POWER IN HEAVEN OR ON EARTH THAT IS AGAINST THE GLORIOUS, DIVINE KINGDOM OF LOVE!!!**

Yes, in this One who reigns as Lord over all, the war has indeed already been won. And the continuation of ‘redemption history’ is now to bring revelation of this as the saints, by the poured-out Spirit, participate in His reign: living upon the earth freely, fully and fruitfully (and with plenty of ‘fight’!) *in His name* (Ephesians 1:19–23; 3:10–11).

Paul earnestly desired the Roman believers to know of the authority they had each received to reign in life in Christ, and—within that triumphant passage of Romans 8:31–39—made this powerful declaration of what is true of us all, even in the midst of the darkest circumstances:

Romans 8:37

[In] all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

The words ‘more than conquerors’ may be translated ‘super-conquerors’ or ‘super-overcomers’! This, of course, has nothing to do with a ‘proud and heady triumphalism’. But it is a magnificent reality that may see us participating humbly, joyfully and grandly in the kingly authority and action of Jesus in His glorious Sonship—with Him, in the relentless manifestation of His love for His Father and for all others. And this, within all the many circumstances of our life, in both the community of the redeemed and the community of the world.

Our *contending*, then, truly is on the basis of His having *contended* on our behalf and overcome. But it is also in regard to the fact that He *continues to contend* on our behalf. And this, as He intercedes and intervenes for us—and pours the heart-enlightening, *son-ship-revealing* and *kingdom-manifesting* Spirit upon us in His name!

Our Great Warrior King says, ‘Come, join Me in the battle that I have already well and truly won!’ And so, with Him we may be always decisively and wholeheartedly contending against the world, the flesh and the devil—FULLY ASSURED OF OUR GREAT CONTENDER’S DELIGHT IN MANIFESTING HIS VICTORY IN US AND THROUGH US, AS WE EACH DAY GIVE STRONG VOICE TO THIS REALITY!!!

strong in the One who is stronger than the strong man

When those who opposed Jesus sought to minimize the significance of His manifest authority over the kingdom of darkness (after casting out a demon), He announced the nature of what He’d come to accomplish:

Luke 11:21–22

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armour in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder.

Jesus, acknowledging the strength of the evil one, declared Himself to be the One who was stronger—serving notice that He had come to overcome this ‘strong man’, and strip him of every weapon he has ever trusted in to secure his dark domain.

And having done so, He will ‘divide up the plunder’—sharing the benefit of His great victory with all who have been chosen to be part of His own kingdom!

And so today with all of his strength Satan is *unable* to overcome Christ—and we, being fully armed in Him, are *able* to overcome all that this dark intruder into God’s world brings against us.

It is in the light of this certain outcome that we have Jesus’ exalted response to the disciples’ report: “Even demons submit to us in Your name!” We are told that:

Luke 10:21

At that time Jesus, full of joy though the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise You Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was Your good pleasure.

Although the reality of His joy would have always been obvious to all, we actually only have one explicit recorded occasion of His showing the greatness of it. And that’s here in Luke 10. He could not restrain such an open expression of delight in His Father’s presence when hearing of the disciples’ great overcoming in His Name—which was a pledge of His people’s coming, grand capacity to strongly triumph over the dominion of darkness!

the nature of our contending—*standing* in the truth

We have said that overcoming in this relentless spiritual battle has nothing to do with ‘gritting our teeth’ and ‘surviving’. And that is very true. For it is all worked out within the environment of those free-spirited, present tense responses of the heart: *remaining, embracing, pursuing, treasuring and distinguishing*.

However, contending does require a concentration of all our personal energies of heart and mind. The word for ‘contending’ in the Greek of the New Testament was used to describe two wrestlers in the Greek Games—battling for the upper hand! It certainly does mean to strive and to wrestle and struggle with all our might: a fully engaged combat! Indeed, none of us can overcome without such total concentration of our personal energies in the midst of the relentless battle we face.

But the wrestling here is never to be about a frantic, teeth-gritting survival against what may well be the end of us. We could say that it is to be a wrestling *from* Victory rather than *for* victory. One that is characterized above all else by *A SPIRIT OF WORSHIP*, IN THE LIGHT OF THAT GREAT, UNSEEN AND UNCHANGING REDEMPTIVE REALITY—WHICH MAY NOW BECOME A PART OF THE WAY WE SEE ALL THINGS, EVERY DAY OF OUR LIFE!!!

We were told in Ephesians 6:10–14 that our task in the battle is to ‘STAND’. The word is used four times in those verses, together with the word ‘AGAINST’, which occurs five times. We are never told to ‘go after’ the devil—only to *stand against* his schemes whenever they become apparent.

Of course, unless our heart and mind are always decisively and wholeheartedly set upon the wonders of God’s grace that have come to us, we may well, feel *deeply* our inability to stand against temptation and sin. And we may wish for the development of some ‘personal inner resource’ to face temptation and testing. But this is not what is required. For in Ephesians 6:10 we were commanded to, ‘Be strong in the Lord and His mighty power’.

The words ‘be strong’ have nothing to do with building up personal strength in oneself. They are better translated, ‘be made strong’, or ‘be empowered’—in the Lord! And the words ‘in His mighty power’ (or, more literally, ‘in the power of His might’, v.10) are also significant, for they both mean virtually the same thing: ‘the power of His power’ or ‘the might of His might’. Used together they are a declaration of the enormous *strengthening* we have in Christ.

None of us in the Lord need ever say, “I just don’t have the power to stand against temptation and sin.” Of ourselves, of course, we don’t! But ‘being made strong and empowered in the Lord by the might of His might’ we may, indeed, emerge from any battle as an overcomer!

Although we must never diminish or underestimate the might of the devil and his dark army, it is nothing compared to THE ALMIGHTINESS OF GOD—IN HIS ABILITY AND DESIRE TO REINFORCE OUR WHOLE BEING WITH THE REALITIES OF HIS GRACE!!! In Christ we need never quake in the face of the evil one’s assaults, but simply remain alert to his schemes, ‘strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus’. And with our heart and mind fully engaged, be JOYOUSLY STANDING AGAINST THE LIE—IN THE TRUTH!!!

Paul brought this decisive word to his co-worker Timothy:

1 Timothy 6:12

[You must all the time be fighting] the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.

‘The faith’ is that apostolic proclamation of all that has been accomplished in Christ and all that is true of us in Him in this world! And Timothy was to be ‘*always* fighting the good fight of the faith’. That is, he was to relentlessly contend against whatever would cause a diminishing of this word’s transforming power in his own heart, and in the hearts of his hearers.

The word ‘fight’ is the same one used for contending, wrestling, striving and struggling. He is to ‘battle the *good* battle’. For to be a *contender* in that indispensable contending that is ours in Christ is a *good* thing! That is, it is a fight that is functionally excellent and profitable—towards what is to be THE SUPREME GOAL OF EVERY REDEEMED CHILD OF GOD EVERY DAY: TO ‘TAKE HOLD OF THE ETERNAL LIFE TO WHICH WE ARE CALLED’!!!

Peter, after warning persecuted believers about the devil ‘prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour’, simply said:

1 Peter 5:9

Resist him, standing firm in the faith.

Also, James, when urging battling believers to choose against ‘friendship with the world’, said:

James 4:7

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Having already exhorted them in 1:21 to humbly receive the 'saving word' that had been 'implanted' within them, and in 3:15, having warned them against a 'wisdom' that is 'earthly, unspiritual and of the devil', James then tells his readers to 'submit themselves to God'. That is, to submit to the word He has implanted within them and the wisdom they have received 'from heaven' (3:17). And in **ALLOWING THIS WORD AND WISDOM TO HAVE ITS PLACE WITHIN THEM, THEY WILL 'RESIST THE DEVIL'—AND HE WILL FLEE FROM THEM!!!**

We can see that 'the fight of the faith', then, is not about directly 'fighting the devil'. It is simply resisting his deception—standing joyously in the truth of our glorious Overcomer! And the deceiver, being one who finds any 'loss of ground' to be unbearable, will quickly disappear!

It's significant to note that both Peter and James preceded their exhortation to resist Satan with the statement: 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'. He gives His people over to the evil one in their grasping pursuit of proud, self-serving and self-exalting agendas. But He enables them to overcome when they *humbly exalt* in the saving word they have received.

the En-fleshed Son among us contending in 'the day of evil'

We've seen how in Ephesians 6 Paul spoke of our being able to stand 'in the day of evil'. That is, when the crisis of satanic assault is upon us, we may remain in the reality of all that is ours in the Son: maintaining pure-hearted, primary delight and desire. So now, we'll focus our attention on those recorded occasions of 'the day of evil' during our Lord's time among us, and His response within them.

the Temptation

In His Temptation Jesus answered the devil's deception on each occasion by quoting from the Scriptures—insisting that He lived only by the word of His Father (who had declared His love for Him in His Baptism). And after those three 'one-line affirmations' we're told that:

Luke 4:13

[The devil decisively departed from Him] until an opportune time.

Here we have an extremely significant happening within fallen-human history. For we see in it how that 'edenic serpent' has no other recourse than to *retreat* when the image of God holds firmly to the word of God!

This underlines the fact that the deceiver's only real power against any of us is a 'false word' heard and received. And whenever we 'resist' and 'stand against him in the truth' he does what can only ever be the case with him. He decisively backs off—frustrated and humiliated and hoping for a better day, when his prey may be more vulnerable and open to deception.

And notice that Jesus didn't argue with the devil or engage in any kind of to and fro with him. He just quoted the word of God, knowing that this thrust of 'the sword of the Spirit' was all that was required.

The evil one—in his scandalous and frantically maintained ego—loves us to talk and argue with him (even when we're telling him of his demise). The attention probably spurs him on! But Jesus never gave him the dignity of such an engagement. A simple statement of the truth and our obedience to it (which is equal to 'NO!!!') is all that is required to stand against his assault and render him powerless.

eviction of ‘manifesting demonic powers’

In principle, the evil day also came whenever Jesus was confronted with a person who was manifestly ‘demonized’: a defiant assault upon His authority as the Son.

And so, with a word, He would cast the spirit out of the person. Again there was no ‘ranting and raving’ against the devil or the spirit. Just a rebuke, ‘Come out!’ And it came out.

Time after time we see the reaction of demonic powers to His presence, as in the synagogue at Capernaum:

Luke 4:33–35

[A man who had a demon, an evil spirit] cried out at the top of his voice, “Go away! What do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

“Be quiet,” Jesus said sternly. “Come out of him!” Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.

How true was Jesus’ word to His opponents before, when He referred to Himself as the One stronger than the strong man:

Luke 11:20

If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

It takes only ‘the finger of God’ to deal with the devil!

We gain even further insight from the account of the two demonized men in the region of the Gadarenes, who powerlessly gave voice to their indwelling tormentors:

Matthew 8:29

“What do you want with us, Son of God?” they shouted. “Have You come here to torture us before the appointed time?”

These dark powers—knowing the certainty of their impending doom—were absolutely terrified of Jesus. And there’s a lesson we can learn from this for ourselves: They, and their master, are also terrified by the *indwelling reality of Jesus* in us—as we rejoice in the truth of ourselves in Him!

the Great Day of Evil approaching —preoccupied with His Father’s Name

Earlier, reference was made to when Jesus heard of certain Greeks who were seeking to see Him, and His attention was immediately turned towards the dreadful ‘baptism of suffering’ that was before Him, for the redemption of the nations (Luke 12:50). And contemplation of the untellable terrors of such an immersion into the depths of human accursedness under the assault of dark powers, brought this response:

John 12:27–28

My soul is greatly troubled, and what shall I say? “Father, save Me from this hour?” No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your Name.

Here we see His unrelenting preoccupation with one thing above all else: the Name of His Father.

In this moment of personal vulnerability, any assault of the devil and his forces was not going to dominate His affections. How they would have delighted to see Him obsessed with their devices—but it was the glory of His Father’s name in the accomplishment of His will that remained the supreme Only passion of His heart, the focus of His mind, the expression of His speech and the object of His expended energies!

The Great Day of Evil approaching —relentless in love for His Father

Then when the time drew even closer for our Lord to enter His darkest and most vulnerable hour, He said to His disciples:

John 14:31

[The] prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over Me, but he comes so that the world may know that I love the Father and do exactly what My Father has commanded Me.

Jesus knew that ‘the hour when darkness reigns’ was about to arrive (Luke 22:53), and was well aware of the satanic onslaught that was ahead. But although this world’s prince was coming against Him, he had no hold on Him. Literally, he had ‘nothing in Him’: no accusation he could use as a lever against Him.

And so for the sake of His disciples Jesus gave strong voice to what His heart was full of: that in the freedom of His Father’s love—in the darkest of hours—He would continue to *manifest to the world* the glory of His Sonship, in an unrelenting love for His Father, in obedience to Him.

The Great Day of Evil approaching —total clarity within crushing perplexity

And then on the very threshold of that greatest of evil days we see the supreme test of His will in the Garden of Gethsemane, as His Father gave Him up to an all-out assault of dark powers upon His heart, mind and body. And as the Holy Spirit powerfully identified Him with the sorrows of an accursed humanity (in His anguished grief even sweating drops of blood) He felt that He would surely die there in the garden (Hebrews 5:7).

Yet in the midst of such absolute physical weakness and crushing personal perplexity He maintained clarity of purpose—out of His own inner spring of holy desire, saying on three separate occasions:

Luke 22:42

Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.

And having been strengthened by an angel, the awful trauma finally passed—and He moved on towards the goal that had been set before Him (Luke 22:43; 17:22).

As in the wilderness, the devil was decisively overcome by the Son’s complete surrender of His will in love for His Father—in submission to *Him* whose will always, remains ‘good, pleasing and perfect’, regardless of all else that is sensed or experienced (Romans 12:2).

The Great Day of Evil itself

And finally, that ultimate Day of Contending that lies hidden under a veil of awesome and terrible mystery. When, in bearing the horrendous judgment of divine holiness upon our sins, He was, by the Spirit, abandoned up to the demonically heightened terrors of an absolute identification with our fallen-human accursedness—this time with no intervention, unto death.

And within the total injustice of all that was being virulently leveled against Him by human taunters, He gave utterance to what His heart was full of, saying:

Luke 23:34

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

And what a frenzy of demonic fury *that* would have further incited as the time of noonday darkness approached, during which, for three hours the awful ‘striking of the Rock’ took place (Exodus 17:6; 1 Corinthians 10:4; Matthew 26:31).

But this was the very means of our liberation from the hands of that great enemy of our soul—and from every foul capacity he has ever had to deface the image of God within our humanity!

And so we, indeed, do exalt in this revelation of the En-fleshed Son among us, contending so gloriously in the midst of every expression of ‘the day of evil’ that He faced for our sake.

some Old Testament examples of contending in ‘the day of evil’

The grace Israel received to respond authentically to the LORD’S faithfulness in times of great crisis, is most instructive.

Moses, Aaron & Hur Attacked by the Amalekites

After Moses obediently struck the rock in the desert and torrents of water flowed out to refresh the LORD’S people, it was *most significant* that there was immediately an attack upon them by the Amalekites (who can be seen as a continuing ‘type’ throughout the Old Testament of our arch-enemy the devil).

This outflowing of water from the rock is a powerful picture of the great torrent of ‘the water of life’ that was poured out on the Day of Pentecost, as a result of ‘the striking of the Son’ (John 4:13–14; 7:37–39; Revelation 22:1).

Here we see the enemy immediately attacking Israel after their time of refreshment and assurance of the LORD’S mercy and grace towards them. And in it, we have a *foreshadowing* of the devil’s pattern of viciously taking every opportunity to come against, us, who have been refreshed and renewed in the truth by the Spirit.

So it is instructive to see how Moses responded to this attack upon a recently refreshed and assured Israel, and what the outcome was (Exodus 17: 1–17). He began by sending Joshua and his men out against the Amalekites, while he himself stood on top of a hill overlooking the place of battle with his staff raised-up high. That is, the staff God had given Him to perform those miraculous signs in Egypt: mighty actions that would enable the fulfillment of His promise to deliver Israel and bring them into the land of Canaan.

But as the battle ensued, Israel prevailed over their enemy only as long as Moses kept the staff raised high; for as soon as his arms grew tired and the staff was lowered, the enemy prevailed. And so, for the rest of the day Aaron and Hur stood either side of Moses on the mountain supporting his arms—until the victory was won.

The point is, that as within the redeemed community we relentlessly *raise high* all we’ve been given for deliverance from the bondage of our old life in Adam, so too, we will mightily prevail over the enemy of our souls!

Later, Moses declared that Israel’s enemy—the Amalekites—had in fact lifted up their hands against the throne of the LORD! And so the LORD would from then on be at war against them—eventually blotting out the name of Amalek from under heaven.

And it is no different with our enemy the devil. Relentlessly opposing his Enemy, the Creator, he in fact has no place of present rest, and neither does he have a future presence within the creation. Throughout what is still left of fallen-human history—in the midst of all his vile exploits—he will remain wildly insecure in the face of divine mercy and grace towards humanity, and hopelessly enraged as his *imminent doom* stands relentlessly before him.

When victory over the Amalekites was complete, the LORD said to Moses regarding the whole event: Exodus 17:14

Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it.

We saw in Study 5 that Moses was told to literally ‘put this in Joshua’s ears’. As Joshua led the next generation, the realities of ‘warfare within the mercy and grace of God’ were to be firmly fixed in his mind! And, yes, so it is to be with us.

Joshua bringing ‘the big picture’ & a call to ‘radical primary decision’

After having led Israel to possess much of Canaan, Joshua—now very old—reminded them of all the LORD had done according to His promise to drive out those who were great and powerful before them.

But he also warned that if they failed to ‘be careful’ to love the LORD their God then they would fail to drive out others, who were enemies of His purpose for them. These would then become snares and traps, whips on their backs and thorns in their eyes: a vocationally debilitating presence among them that would rob them of their inheritance.

Anticipating his imminent death, Joshua reminded them that they ‘knew with all their heart and soul’ that over their many years of *contending*, not one good promise of the LORD had failed. But he also reminded them that they must equally know that if they strayed into idolatrous behaviour, He would fulfill every warning of devastating judgment upon them.

So in Joshua 24 we read that he assembled them all at Shechem—the place where (in Genesis 12) Abraham had received from the LORD the first *promise* of an inheritance in the land, and where (in Genesis 35) Jacob had *purified* his sons of the false gods they’d embraced. And there in the Holy One’s presence, Joshua recounted all that the LORD had done for them from the time of Abraham to that very day—THE ‘BIG PICTURE’ OF HIS REDEMPTIVE ACTION ON THEIR BEHALF!!!

Then he made what can only be considered an astounding announcement. In order to fear the LORD and serve Him with all faithfulness, they would have to *throw away the gods* that Abraham’s ancestors had worshipped! Joshua was about to leave this world but ISRAEL HAD IDOLS IN THEIR MIDST—FALSE OBJECTS OF REVERENCE, TRUST, AFFECTION AND ALLEGIANCE!!! This truly was for them ‘a day of evil’!

Declaring his own resolve to be faithful—and that of his own household—Joshua called them to decide whether or not they would continue to give place among them to these gods. THEY MUST DECIDE NOW! JOSHUA WAS *CONTENDING WITH THEM!!!*

In the light of all they’d just heard of the LORD’S faithfulness over the centuries right up to the present day, they declared their renewed resolve to respond faithfully to Him, saying:

Joshua 24:16, 18

“Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to [worship and] serve other gods! ... We too [like you and your household] will [worship and] serve the LORD because He is our God.”

But in spite of their affirmation, Joshua continued to contend with them. He said:

Joshua 24:19

“You are not able to [worship and] serve the LORD.”

He was reminding them of the way that they as a people had rebelled throughout their history—and of their tendency even now to allow false worship to intrude into their lives. He was not going to let them make some shallow response that soon dissipated into nothing: ‘No! Your very history tells you that you are not able to continue in faithfulness!’

And He warned them that the Holy One was jealous for them; and that if after all His goodness towards them they were to rebelliously forsake Him there would be no forgiveness—only disastrous judgment!

With the people now galvanized into a place of even sharper resolve, the dialogue continued:

Joshua 24:21–24

[They said,] “No! We will [worship and] serve the LORD.”

Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to [worship and] serve the LORD.”

“Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied.

“Now then,” Joshua said, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your heart to the LORD the God of Israel.”

And the people said to Joshua, “We will [worship and] serve the LORD our God and obey Him.”

So Joshua then led the people into a reaffirmation of the covenant within which they’d been embraced—with all the promise it held. And then he took a large stone and set it up under the oak at Shechem, where the LORD had made that first promise of the land to Abraham, and where Jacob had led his sons into purification from their idolatry.

The large stone was a witness to them of both their pledge to ongoing obedience and an assurance of covenant promise if they remained faithful. And we also assume that there under that old oak they, also like Jacob’s sons, buried their objects of idolatry.

And so in that historical place of both *promise* and *purification* Joshua had *contended* with Israel—bringing them ‘the big picture’ of the LORD’S redemptive action towards them as His people, and decisively calling them to a renewed place of ‘radical primary decision’.

Shechem then was for *them also*, a place of *promise* and *purification*—which is always the place of renewed victory in the battle against any intrusion of false worship! And it is a place to which we must always be returning as we *stand* against the deceptive schemes of that ‘old serpent’, the devil.

In Study 10 we will look in detail at the simple biblical process of renewal in both ‘divine promise’ and ‘heart purification’, as we ourselves are renewed in both the ‘big picture’ and ‘radical primary decision’.

To be ‘radical’ is ‘to cut back to the root’. And the radical primary decision before us in the new covenant is one of cutting back to the root of our life in the Son. That is, in the full light of the great redemptive reality that has dawned upon us in Him, to be always decisively and wholeheartedly *refusing* anything that seeks to displace that one pure-hearted, *primary delight* and those three pure-hearted, *primary desires*.

Jehoshaphat & the people strong against the mighty foe

In 2 Chronicles 20 we are told of how Jehoshaphat the king of Judah faced what must have been to him and his people at the time the ‘most evil day’ they could have imagined. A ‘vast army’ from Edom was coming against them, made up of the people from Ammon, Moab and Mount Sier.

So Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast and sought the LORD in the temple, declaring His might and power over all nations—and reminding Him that it was He, Himself, who had told Israel not to drive these particular people from the land those many years ago. And he also recalled in the LORD’S presence that He had promised to be always with them, and to heal and save them in times of distress when they called upon Him—that they may possess the inheritance they’d been given.

And with all the men of Judah, their wives, children and little ones there before the LORD, he said:

2 Chronicles 20:12

We have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You.

Jehoshaphat may not have felt it, but he had been brought to a wonderful place where he was able, from his deepest parts, to give witness in the LORD’S presence to both an utter helplessness and

unqualified dependence: NO POWER, NO STRATEGY—BUT EYES FIXED ON THE HOLY ONE!
IT'S ALWAYS A GOOD DAY WHEN THIS HAPPENS!!!

Then the Spirit of the LORD came on a Levite named Haziël, who proclaimed:

2 Chronicles 20:15, 17

Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours but God's ... You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions, stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you ... Go out and face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.

So early the next day Jehoshaphat encouraged the people to have faith in the word of the LORD—who had declared the battle already won—and then appointed men to go out at the head of the army to *sing* to the LORD and praise Him as the Holy One, saying, 'Give thanks to the LORD, for His [unfailing covenant] love endures forever.'

And it was as they began to sing and praise, that the LORD set up ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab and Mount Sier, and they rose up against each other and destroyed one another!

Then Jehoshaphat led the men back to Jerusalem—with more plunder than they could carry—where they, with all their instruments, rejoiced together in the LORD'S presence for the great victory He had accomplished!

The relevance of this for us in the new covenant is crystal clear. We too have received the word that the battle is not ours—for indeed, it has already been won! We engage in it, then, with a song of praise in our heart, *standing* fully assured of that great, unseen and unchanging redemptive reality: the lavishly abundant grace of God in Christ!

And we may *know* that even where our Redeemer has allowed certain strongholds to remain, HE ALWAYS HAS A DAY WHEN HE WILL SHOW THAT HE—AS THE GREAT CONTENDER—IS THE ONE WHO IS STRONGER THAN THE STRONGEST FOE AGAINST US!!!

Ahaz refusing the LORD'S grace towards him, & so, tragically failing to stand in 'the evil day'

Now finally, we are to give our attention to another king of Judah, Ahaz. Jehoshaphat had followed in the way of his father, 'the good king Asa'. But although Ahaz had inherited his family throne from four consecutively good and faithful kings, he sadly, did not follow in their way. Even still, when he found himself in 'an evil day', he was, graciously given an opportunity by the LORD to contend and overcome.

The situation was that Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel were planning to come against little Judah, which had only recently lost significant territory and was generally vulnerable to all kinds of bad outcomes in the region. And when Ahaz and his royal court heard news of these present plans they were thrown into an absolute panic, for the combined armies were now only three days away.

Then the LORD told Isaiah to go with his three-year old son Shear-Jashub to see Ahaz. Shear-Jashub means 'a remnant will return'—indicating that there would be hope for Judah if Ahaz listened to the LORD'S word.

Isaiah was told to say to Ahaz:

Isaiah 7:4–5, 7, 9

"Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood ... [They] have plotted your ruin ... [yet] it will not take place, it will not happen ... If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."

There was no cause for alarm. Ahaz was to be careful, to keep calm and not be afraid. What he was terrified of would not eventuate. As a king of Judah—a descendent of David—he must have

unwavering trust in the LORD. But if he refused to wholeheartedly believe the LORD'S word, then he would have no good future—and his many fears would prove to be well-founded.

Then Ahaz was told:

“Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or the highest heights.”

This was a gracious approach of the LORD through Isaiah. Ahaz was honoured as a descendent of David with the words, ‘Ask “your God”’. He was being given an opportunity to exercise faith, calling upon the LORD for a sign—which could take the shape of anything at all within the entire creation. He was to just ask.

When Gideon, In Judges 6, was feeling that the LORD had abandoned His people into the hands of the Midianites, and was told by Him to go out and gain a deliverance, he boldly asked for a sign—and the LORD mercifully gave it to him so that he could stand in faith and overcome.

In Genesis 32 the LORD delighted in *Jacob's* contending with Him for the blessing; and in response He gave him the name ‘Israel’: ‘a prince’ or ‘contender’ or ‘striver with God’. He always delights to see His people rise up in His presence and take hold of His willingness to have them engage with Him in His purpose. And in this, to know His abundant overcoming and blessing in the face of all kinds of odds!

And now Ahaz is being invited by the LORD Himself to ask for a sign—anything he wanted! His response, however, was a dismal one indeed:

Isaiah 7:12

But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”

Of course, this was nothing other than a hard-hearted refusal to respond to the call of the LORD to strive with Him, on behalf of both himself and the people of Judah. And so Isaiah answered:

Isaiah 7:13

Hear now you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of human beings? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the LORD Himself will give you a sign.

It was no longer ‘your God’ but ‘my God’. Ahaz had just excluded himself from knowing deliverance by the mercy of the LORD! He had chosen to act as if the LORD was, in fact, not his God.

If *he* wouldn't ask for a sign the LORD would give him one: A child would soon be born in Judah with the name ‘Immanuel’, meaning ‘God is with us’. And by the time he was old enough to know what is good or bad he would be living on a ‘famine diet’. The kings that Ahaz had dreaded would, indeed, be ‘laid to waste’. But now there would be something even more threatening. Isaiah continued:

Isaiah 7:17

[Ahaz], the LORD will bring on you and your people ... the king of Assyria.

Because he would not contend with the LORD in faith, he and his people—who could name one of their children ‘God is with us’—would be without experience of such blessing in ‘the day of evil’. They would know little or nothing of the mighty provision that could have been theirs.⁸⁴

Ahaz refused to contend with the LORD in faith for the same reason that any faithless person does. He had his own fleshly, non-negotiable personal agenda. Although he would be very happy to have an unconditional deliverance from the LORD on his own terms, the thought of fully engaging with the Holy One—surrendering his will to the divine purpose in faith and obedience—met an immediate resistance within his heart.

⁸⁴ Of course, there would later, be One to come among us who was called Immanuel—‘God with us’—who would deliver us from the evil one and bring us into the blessing of His own glorious Sonship! (Matthew 1:23; Ephesians 1:3).

Whatever the agenda of Ahaz was, it was not to find his life in faithfulness to the LORD—as his subsequent actions would show. He was clearly desperate for a divine power to serve his own interests, but had no desire to know and serve the purpose of the Living and True God.

And what were those subsequent actions? According to his own ‘evil day strategy’ he offered sacrifices to the gods of the armies that had defeated him and, even worse, brought an altar for sacrifice to a false god into the temple—eventually shutting down the temple itself and setting up altars to false gods throughout Jerusalem and Judah. And he even sacrificed his son to the Assyrian god *Molech* (2 Kings 16 & 2 Chronicles 28)!

His pursuits showed the impurity of delight and desire that remained dominant within him. And he became, in fact, an extreme and tragic example of how God ‘opposes the proud’ (‘the word of grace refusers’)—giving them up to the ‘opposer’ (the devil).

abounding in the truth—contending with strong and immediate *affirmation*

The key to our capacity to be always decisively and wholeheartedly contending, clearly has to do with ‘standing in the truth’ of the redemption that has been accomplished in Christ; just as we saw earlier in what Paul said to the Colossians:

Colossians 2:6–7

[Therefore], as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, [having been] rooted [in Him] and [now being] built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and [being those who are always abounding in and] overflowing with thankfulness.

To stand in the truth is not to simply agree with it, but to be always *personally abounding in (abundantly celebrating)* its wonders with a thanksgiving that wells-up and overflows. And it’s, then, that we are able to have a strong and immediate affirmation of it all—with these things ready on our lips in the midst of the battle.

It’s incredible but entirely true to say that in our always celebrating the wonder of being ‘in the Son’ and He ‘in us’, *we may be*, in principle, just as strong against the evil one as *He* was when He walked among us—overcoming in our Great Overcomer!

We might protest though that contrary to how it was with Jesus, ‘the prince of this world’ *does* have plenty ‘in us’ (John 14:31): being able to bring accusations of inner and outer failure that we’re very much aware of. But such protest ignores the *liberating truth* that is now to be part of the air we breathe: WE HAVE ‘GAINED ACCESS BY FAITH INTO THIS GRACE IN WHICH WE NOW STAND’!!! (Romans 5:2).

Although the world, the flesh and the devil are always ready to assert their insidious powers towards and within us, (and regardless of how often we may stumble through their deception and incitement), the fact is that in standing firm in the word of grace we’ve received WE MAY, AT ANY TIME, BE RENEWED IN A FREE-SPIRITED ASSURANCE THAT THE EVIL ONE HAS NOTHING EITHER ‘ON US’ OR ‘IN US’!!!

So then! Let’s affirm the incredible nature of that grace yet again: Having been exalted to the Father’s right hand in the Son, we are one with Him in the *free-spirited* moral status of His own righteousness in His Father’s presence; one with Him in His Father’s love; and so then, having *full ability* to be one with Him in His love for His Father, and for all others—at all times!

These are THE REALITIES THAT MUST ALWAYS BE WITHIN OUR HEART — NEVER LESS THAN READY TO RECALL AND STRONGLY AFFIRM!!!

Of course, within the battle, whenever impurity gains access into our heart, our ability to exalt in these wonders of grace towards us may be tragically diminished. That is, those times when we have

become obsessed with *ourselves*, and the way that other people, situations and things are frustrating false promises of life that we have embraced.

Also, that old flesh-bound enemy, self-righteousness, is always ready to kill the ‘song’ within us. A lot of the personal debilitation we experience through our failures, is simply, a result of our being humiliated by the awareness of our not being as good as we *want* to be. Often it is that we insist on being overcomers so we can have a proud place to stand in the sight of others—and be as wonderful as we’ve always thought we are (or could be in the right circumstances). If that were not the case, we’d be so much more concentrated upon rejoicing in a wonderful Saviour than upon ourselves!

The devil delights to get us obsessed with sin and failure—our own and others’. But the Spirit yearns for us to be besotted with the God of all grace, and to be free to go on finding our primary, personal delight in Him, Himself—not even in victory over sin. *Authentic joy in overcoming* is always the fruit of pure-hearted, primary delight and desire, with the gentleness and humility before God and others that it produces.

Yes, we do indeed, need to be very much aware of the ‘song-killers’—and be always decisively and wholeheartedly evicting them from the sanctuary of our heart, whenever their intrusive presence is recognized. Again we anticipate that simple, biblical process to be seen in Study 10: of liberating renewal in both ‘divine promise’ and ‘heart purification’.

In spite of the complexities that inevitably arise within the battle, the magnificent fact remains that the prince of this world can have ‘nothing in us’ as we stand against him ‘firm in the faith’. It’s only as we wallow in our failures (and others’ sense of them) that he has anything *in us* at all. THE EVIL ONE HAS NEVER HAD ANY HOLD OVER A GRACE-CELEBRATING, RIGHTEOUSNESS-LOVING WORSHIPPER!!!

affirmation that is decisively defensive

Ephesians 6 tells us that our capacity to stand against the evil one ‘firm in the faith’ has to do with putting on ‘the full armour of God’. And we are to see now that the fourth, fifth and sixth parts of this armour actually involve *strong and immediate affirmation* through a *decisive action* of ‘taking up’:

Ephesians 6:16

Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

We’ll look just now at only the first two of these, beginning with ‘*the shield of faith*’.

It is in our defensively *taking up* the shield of faith, that we extinguish every flaming arrow of *accusation*.

A blazing missile flies. But up goes the shield—enabling this faith-filled affirmation:

“Thank You Father that You love me! I stumbled, but I am in Christ, forgiven, cleansed and not condemned! Apart from Your mercy and grace I was—and still would be today—100% sinner and 0% righteous. And yet, now in Your Son—put to death and made alive with Him—I have this glorious moral status of being, in Him, 0% sinner and 100% righteous! I hate what has just been manifested in me, but I praise You with all my heart that You have made me, *so free*, in Your presence in the righteousness of Jesus my Lord—and I thank You that in Him I have *every capacity* to overcome as you lead me on into the future You’ve set before me!”

Well, that flaming arrow didn’t hurt. The thickly padded shield of faith took it, and immediately extinguished it!⁸⁸

⁸⁸ The shield of the Roman soldier had layers of material that would extinguish such flaming arrows when they pierced the fabric. There are other elements of this shield’s construction that will be considered when we speak about the corporate nature of the armour in that future study mentioned previously.

Then there is *'the helmet of salvation'*. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8 Paul calls it *'the helmet of the hope of salvation'*. It's that defensive piece of our armour that guards our mind from being overwhelmed by the relentless nature of the battle, day after day and year after year.

In the midst of weariness and personal discouragement, then, we *decisively* affirm in the Father's presence:

"Although I am so tempted to be downcast and disheartened, I thank You that there is set before me throughout the endless ages of eternity, nothing less than the blessedness of a perfect participation in the glorified humanity of Your Son! So that I, together with all the saints, may be with Him in the totality of His own relational intimacy and vocational partnership with You—in a renewed creation in which only righteousness is present, and where there will be *forever* absolutely nothing of the world, the flesh and the devil! WHAT AN AMAZING FUTURE I HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO PRESS TOWARDS!!! Thank You Father that in such a salvation, present discouragement and disheartenment can have no place in me!"

So, everything is fine. Our mind is clear again from *'devilish noise'*. And just like Jesus, we are now able to endure all that comes our way *'because of the hope that is set before us'* (Hebrews 12:2).

Accusation and discouragement then, cannot cloud the atmosphere of our days. For as Study 8 has repeatably shown, with our being fully assured of the lavishly abundant grace of God, WE ARE *'NOW ABLE TO SAY' INCREDIBLE THINGS* IN THE MIDST OF THE DAILY BATTLE WE FACE!!!

affirmation that is primarily God-wards

The strong and immediate affirmations we make are primarily spoken as expressions of worship within our communion with God. Although they are uttered within the hearing of dark powers (and are witnessed with frustration and even terror by them) such things are not spoken directly *to* them. Our contending then, is not in a direct, verbal communication with the evil one, himself, or the demonic powers he commands.

As was seen with our Lord in the Temptation, He didn't argue with the devil or engage in any kind of to and fro with him. He just brought a simple, *'one-line affirmation'* of the truth—knowing that this decisive thrust of *'the sword of the Spirit'* was all that was required.

We saw that He did also decisively evict demonic spirits from those cruelly afflicted by them—and this with a simple word of command. But He didn't go around the land *'brawling with demons'* and engaging in extended exertions of *'verbal spiritual warfare'* with them. Whenever they defiantly manifested themselves in His presence, He, with a word, commanded them to be gone—and they went.

Spiritual warfare certainly is a reality in which we are to be engaged. It is most appropriate—out of a holy and jealous zeal for the honour of God and the prevailing of His purpose of love—to have a spirit of flaming indignation against the deceiver's vile, terrorist activity in the midst of a good creation! And there are times in this when direct confrontation of dark powers is required. But that is not the usual way of standing against our adversary.

'Talking to the devil' is, actually, a very strange thing to do. We have no cause to speak with him—only to resist him, by submitting to the word that declares the truth of our redemption and holy calling in the Son. And then he flees from the scene of his humiliation!

One would imagine that the evil one delights to see the redeemed children of God caught up in desperate and often abusive verbal encounters with him, giving him, all the dark-spirited attention he loves to get—so long as we can be kept from joyously making those simple, strong and immediate, *prayerful affirmations* that, at once, render Him powerless.

The more our conscience remains *untroubled* and our spirit *free* (to be, always decisively and wholeheartedly *embracing* the one pure-hearted, primary delight, and *pursuing* the three pure-hearted, primary desires) the less intensely preoccupied we may be with ‘battling the dark powers’. And, in this, the more able we are to ‘stand firm in the faith’ AS GRACE-CELEBRATING AND RIGHTEOUSNESS-LOVING WORSHIPPERS—KNOWING, INDEED, THAT THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD HAS NOTHING IN US!!!

affirmation that keeps us remaining ‘firm in the faith’

All this is certainly why we are to heed Jude’s urging to ‘keep ourselves in the love of God’—by all the time building ourselves up ‘in our most holy faith’ (treasuring His life-giving word), and all the time ‘praying in the Holy Spirit’ (treasuring His dynamically-intimate presence).

The reason Jude gave this exhortation is seen in the strong and immediate affirmation he then made out of the fullness of his own heart:

Jude 24–25

To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Ours truly is ‘a most holy faith’: one that is like no other in this world. It enables us to at all times freely participate in the glorious Sonship of the Son Himself, with His own joyous cry in our heart in His Father’s presence. And this, (through that *strong and immediate affirmation* of His accomplished redemption) in the midst of every moment of encroaching darkness!

The fact is that the more experience we have of ‘being made strong in the Lord and the power of His might’, the more ‘strong and immediate’ our affirmation may be. For example, when Deborah and her military commander Barak, celebrated the great victory the LORD had given against the enemy of His people, they sang in celebration:

Judges 5:21

March on, my soul; be strong.

Through both the ‘the faith once and for all delivered to us’ (Jude 3) and our experience of overcoming on the basis of that, we may indeed, recall and celebrate the mighty works of God on our behalf. And in this we are made strong to ‘march on’—always decisively and wholeheartedly *contending* against whatever seeks to contend against us!

On the other hand, though, the ever-present danger is that we become so overwhelmed by the sensory nature of our circumstances, that—as it was so often with Israel—all else may be forgotten:

Ps 78:9, 11

[Though armed, they] turned back on the day of battle; they did not keep God’s covenant [to remain faithful within His faithfulness] ... They forgot what He had done, the wonders He had shown them.

This is why we must always be ‘alert’ and of ‘sober mind’ that we may remain ‘firm in the faith’, as contenders in the battle that every child of God faces in this world (1 Peter 5:8–9).

And so now we come to our next expression of a life lived abounding in the truth.

abounding in the truth—contending with strong & immediate *primary moral choice*

Together with strong and immediate ‘affirmation’ we need always to contend by maintaining strong and immediate ‘primary moral choice’. In this, of course, we are speaking of choosing to maintain an *active righteousness* in the midst of our daily living.⁹¹

primary moral choice centred in righteousness

A pursuit of righteousness is, indeed, that *primary* choice which the image of God is to be constantly making every day! This is the fruit of that second pure-hearted, primary desire: pursuing ‘our own conformity to the likeness of the Son’: a hungering and thirsting for the righteousness which is expressed in loving God with the whole of our being and loving every other person as ourselves.

Earlier we spoke from 2 Corinthians 5:17, of how within the *new creation* in Christ ‘old things have passed away’ and that these old things, themselves, have actually become new. And so now, *within the new humanity that is ours in Jesus*, our old idolatrous primary delights and desires have been *superseded* by His own ‘one pure-hearted, primary delight’ and ‘three pure-hearted, primary desires’!

And within this amazing fact of the new creation there is a dynamic, personal reality to be known every day: our old complacency and compliance in regard to the community of the world (the community of ‘Cain and his kind’) may now be replaced by a *holy inner disturbance* and *resolute resistance* in regard to its ways. Hunger and thirst for righteousness always leads to such a ‘contending spirit’.⁹²

As we’ve been seeing, it is righteousness—in all of its vertical and horizontal fullness—that is the essence of our inheritance in Christ to be presently possessed more and more. And it is not surprising at all, that such primary moral choice is strongly and immediately contested by the dark powers arrayed against us! It is, of course, the *vertical* fullness that is contested above all else—for without this the horizontal battles can never be won.

With all of the natural demands of life (and the spiritual wrestling involved within these), it is that *vertical* expression of righteousness, ‘keeping ourselves in the love of God’, which is always the most urgent priority we have.

David gave strong witness to this supreme priority within the battle, saying:

Ps 27:2–4

Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident. One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek Him in His temple.

He was convinced that in the midst of all that might come against him he could *prevail* by boldly seeking what was the LORD’S superlative gift to him: to have access to that *place* of sheer personal pleasure in the presence of the One who was his ‘very life’ (Deuteronomy 30:20).

The righteousness of God expressed in the daily living of His people, is certainly at the heart of any mighty manifestation of the victory of the Son. Paul, speaking of himself and his co-workers’ said:

⁹¹ What we defined in an earlier footnote as: ‘moral action that has to do with right relational choice’.

⁹² It is important to say here that a ‘contending spirit’ is one that in the love of God rightly resists and opposes what is against the truth. But it is not a ‘contentious spirit’: one that is insecurely combative and prickly.

2 Corinthians 6:7

[We commend ourselves] in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left.

Integral to their powerfully authentic engagement in the battle was, a life lived every day with the weapons of righteousness in each hand. That is, in everything they set themselves to do they were consciously living in the love of God, and relating in His love towards every person around them. Powerful weaponry, indeed, for the battle! And clearly, an undeniable proclamation of the victory of Christ, manifested in the life of His free-spirited and pure-hearted servants.

Paul also clearly declared *the awesome purpose of God* in regard to His sanctified people in this darkened world: those who live under the constant stare of their unseen spiritual adversaries:

Ephesians 3:10

God's purpose was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose that He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Both our *joyous affirmations* and the ongoing *primary moral choices* these enable, are witnessed at all times with riveted attention by dark powers. And in every moment of such glorious manifestation of the Son's victory, THESE RULERS AND AUTHORITIES IN THE HEAVENLY REALMS, ARE NERVOUSLY BEHOLDING THE WISDOM OF GOD IN HIS ACCOMPLISHED REDEMPTION—WHICH THEY HAVE NO POWER TO PREVAIL AGAINST!!!

Our every act of resisting the evil one, through strong and immediate *affirmation of the truth*, together with strong and immediate *primary moral choice*, reduces the powers of darkness to a terrifying and infuriating impotence—driving them into wild and wily strategies for their next opportunity.

primary moral choice

to do with the 'armour' of righteousness

We've spoken of the fourth and fifth pieces of the full armour in Ephesians 6. But now we are to look at the first three. These are three foundational things to be 'put on': 'the belt of truth', 'the breastplate of righteousness' and 'feet that are fitted with the firm foundation of the gospel of peace'.

In the Roman soldier's armour there was the strong stabilizing belt around the waist, from which the sword may have also been hung. The breastplate protected all those critical parts of the body from the neck to the abdomen; and the shoes, were 'armoured sandals' that enabled Roman armies to travel very quickly over rough terrains, and also kept them stable in the heat of battle.

These three were items of a soldier's armour that remained in place during their whole time of encampment in a war zone. It was only in the crisis of battle itself that they 'took up' the shield, helmet and sword.

The reason why the first three were 'put on' and kept on is that when an 'evil day' of battle suddenly came upon them, there would be no time to buckle on the strong belt, or attach the breastplate and bind on the armoured sandals. With these kept always in place, a soldier could quickly 'take up' the shield, helmet and sword: ready in moments to face any sudden crisis of warfare. Without this being the case, they would be extremely likely to become casualties of war.

The first and third pieces of the armour (the belt of truth and the armoured sandals of peace) have very much to do with the second: *the breastplate of righteousness*. 'The truth' (the faith once for all delivered to the saints) and 'the firm foundation of the gospel of peace' (being at peace with God, oneself and others), are of course, inseparably related to righteousness—which, itself, must always be present within the battle zone that is ours in this world.

Active righteousness (as we've seen in Study 8) is above all, based upon of the *moral status* of righteousness that has been credited to us in the Son. This status is part of 'the truth' that liberates

us into the daily action of *righteous living*. And ‘the firm foundation of the gospel of peace’ is also a dynamic part of that same ‘truth’—bringing the *personal mobility and stability* needed in the presence of God and others within the crises of battle.

Apart from these three—‘assurance of the truth’, ‘a spirit of active righteousness’ and ‘personal and relational peace’—not one of us is ready to contend at any moment in the warfare we face each day. Other studies will continue to show their inseparability.

primary moral choice through offensive affirmation

We’ve spoken of the fourth and fifth parts of the armour (the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation) as having to do with ‘affirmation that is strong and immediately *defensive*’. But now it’s time to look at the *sixth* piece, which has to do with ‘affirmation that is strong and immediately *offensive*’: ‘the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God’.

The shield and the helmet were clearly defensive, whereas the Roman soldier’s short sword designed for close, life-threatening encounters was, naturally, a weapon of offense. And so, we are dealing with it here because the goal of such *offensive* action, is to ‘stop dead’ an assault upon our soul that would attempt to lure us into any element of unrighteousness.

This is precisely what we saw in the response of Jesus during the Temptation. In the face of each close quarters assault of the evil one, it was a quick thrust of the sword of the Spirit (strong and immediate offensive affirmations of the word of God) that stopped the devil short!

And so when we find ourselves in the heat of the battle, inflamed with some wrong passion, thinking some wrong thought or being tempted to say or do some wrong thing, here is the strong and immediate ‘sword thrust’ we may inflict—or, more specifically, the *offensive affirmation* we may make:

“Lord Jesus, this unrighteousness does not belong to the new humanity that is now mine in You. It belongs to Adam—and ‘the old me in Adam’ has been damned to death and is no more! In His great mercy the Father has made me alive with You, and by His grace has made me to be one with You in Your own moral status of righteousness in His presence (as free as You are in His love!) and one with You in Your love for Your Father, and one with You in Your love for every other person! And so I thank You that all that stirs in Your own heart in Your Father’s presence and towards all others, is now able to be stirring in mine; that Your thoughts may be formed in my mind, Your words in my mouth and Your own actions of love manifested through my body! I AM A PERSON OF RIGHTEOUSNESS—AT LAST FREE FROM THE OLD ME!—WHAT A REDEEMER YOU ARE!!!”

And then on the basis of this strong and immediate, offensive affirmation, we may straightaway step out into the holy delight, desire, words and actions that are gloriously ours in Him—and allow nothing less! AND THE SPIRIT DELIGHTS TO ABUNDANTLY FACILITATE IT ALL!!!

Ah, now, we’ve snuck in a little of that liberating process to be fully spelt out in Study 10!

abounding in the truth—contending with strong & immediate *proclamation*

The nature of our calling to contend in regard to the proclamation of the word of God will be filled out in other studies. But there are some foundational things that need to be said at this point.

Pressed with a strong sense of urgency, Jude declared:

Jude: verse 3

Although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to [be continually contending] for the faith that the Lord has once for all entrusted to us, His [holy] people.

We've seen that 'the faith' is what was proclaimed by the apostles: all that has been accomplished in Christ and all that is true of us in Him, in this world.

And it was 'the faith' that was dominating Jude's thinking as he wrote to these fellow believers. Desirable as it was for him to celebrate the awesome nature of the common salvation he enjoyed with them, at this particular time he was inwardly compelled to highlight something more immediately urgent: the ongoing *vocational responsibility* which they had, to be 'contenders for the faith'.

They were to be always engaged in that 'wrestling' which was involved in proclaiming the word that had been 'deposited' with them. As God's holy people in this world, they were to be ready to stand against whatever would diminish in any way the clarity and power of this proclamation. Nothing was to hinder the purity of its life-giving entrance into—and permanent presence within—their own or others' heart and mind.

What was at stake was that inner working of the saving and redeeming word of God, transforming them and others into the likeness of the Son (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Paul too, knew that in order to see the saints brought to maturity in the midst of the world, the flesh and the devil, there was always for him and Timothy an urgent calling to *contend* against all resistance to this glorious outcome—through *incessant proclamation of Christ*. He said:

Colossians 1:28–29

We [very carefully go on proclaiming Him everywhere; being those who are all the time] admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end [I am strenuously exerting myself, all the time contending] with all the energy Christ [is so powerfully working] in me.”

A continual and very careful proclamation of Christ, with constant wisdom-filled warning and teaching (as those who themselves lived dynamically in Him in midst of all they faced). And with this one all-consuming goal: EVERYONE FULLY MATURE—BEING JUST AS YOU'D EXPECT A PERSON IN CHRIST TO BE!!!

Yes, Paul could settle for nothing less. And he knew that nothing less than a relentless proclamation of the saving and redeeming love of Christ would enable this. So with 'all wisdom' there was held before every hearer the implications of the Redeemer's *great overcoming*, in regard to every aspect of their daily living in this world!

To this end he and Timothy were like wrestlers in the ring, expending every element of their personal being as they were incessantly and powerfully participating in the dynamic indwelling life of Jesus: the deep stirrings of His heart, the wisdom of His mind, and the strong and life-giving utterance this enabled in His name!

In principle, all the people of God are called—in one way or another, according to their gifts and present maturity—to be always engaged in this same kind of full-hearted, prophetic proclamation: contending in Jesus' name in the zeal and power of the Contending Spirit.

Then in writing to the Corinthians, Paul spoke further of the nature of his and Timothy's contending on behalf of the saints in the midst of the relentless battle. Appealing to those in Corinth 'in the meekness (non-reactiveness) and gentleness of Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:1), he said:

2 Corinthians 10:3–5

For though we live in the world we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every [high sounding thing that rises up] against the knowledge of God, and we [are those who are all the time taking] every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ.

He knew that because of the fierce nature of the battle raging in a believer's life, there would often be some deceptively 'high sounding thing' rising up against the knowledge of God. This then, by ongoing demonic deception, becoming a stronghold in a person's mind: a strongly engrained false way of thinking and believing, that would inevitably determine a person's choices in regard to their speech and behaviour.

And so the nature of his and Timothy's proclamation was to be one of always, taking captive, every alien thought that arose in their own or another's mind, to make it obedient to Christ. That is, to completely conform every thought to the very mind of the All-conquering Redeemer-Son!

Giving witness to the concentrated energy expended in his contending as a herald of the gospel, that love-constrained apostle said:

1 Corinthians 9:26

I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.

Not a wrestler but now a boxer in the ring, who as he competes in the games is not just 'beating the air' ('shadow boxing') without landing punches!

Then we have the witness of the prophet Jeremiah, who as he stood against all that sought to undermine the purpose of God for His people, could say with holy fire burning within (20:9):

Jeremiah 20:11

[The] LORD is with me like a Mighty Warrior.

Jeremiah was well aware that in all of his contending, he spoke in the very presence and power of the Great Contender Himself!

abounding in the truth—contending with strong & immediate *supplication*

Supplication is specific and earnest petition on behalf of oneself or others. We saw earlier from Ephesians 6 that Paul concluded his exhortation in regard to standing fully armed in the battle, by calling us to be always praying in the Spirit with all kinds of 'prayer and supplication'.

Much more will be said as we continue on in the series regarding the various kinds of prayer we are called into (particularly in Studies 12, 13, 17, 20 & 21). So just now we'll simply mention a couple of occasions where the word 'contending' is specifically used.

As one would expect, it was with 'an ongoing contending prayerfulness' that Paul himself engaged in battle on behalf of his brothers and sisters in the Lord. His pastoral zeal was very much expressed with 'a warrior heart of love', in the face of all that contended against their being gloriously transformed into the likeness of the Son.

Yearning for the Colossians to be a community that abounded in the truth, he gives witness to his strong and immediate supplication for them, saying:

Colossians 2:1–3, 5

I want you to know how hard I am [continually] contending for you and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have [all the] riches of complete, [fully assured] understanding, in order that they may [have a full knowledge of] the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ... [Though] I am absent in body, I am present with you in spirit.

He was always *contending* in prayer for other believers, many of whom he'd never met. For he knew that they would struggle to come to maturity apart from others striving in this way on their behalf.

And what was the burden of his prayers? That they would know ‘the truth’ (Ephesians 4:21): the mind and the life-transforming revelation of Christ! For when they saw Him *as He is* by the Spirit’s ‘enlightening of their heart’ (Ephesians 1:18) strongholds of false thinking would be demolished!

And let us not think that such praying had any kind of wistful or whining uncertainty about it. For it is prayed in the full assurance of Christ—and the Father’s absolute intention to answer all such full-hearted supplication in His name (John 16:24). But more of that in later studies!

Paul, then, also gladly reported that his fellow-worker Epaphras who knew the Colossians well, was doing the very same thing that he was:

Colossians 4:12

[Epaphras] is always wrestling [and contending] in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Yes, for the Lord’s people to ‘stand firm, abounding in the truth’ in the midst of the relentless spiritual battle they face, requires such ongoing contending in prayer—not only for others but also for oneself.

breathing the air of the kingdom in our calling to relentlessly contend

It is very evident from all we’ve seen, that part of our rich personal and vocational heritage is to be participating every day in *the heart of our Great Warrior King*. And in this, to be those who are contending against all that seeks to *eliminate* or *diminish* our own, or others’, capacity to be always decisively and wholeheartedly:

- *remaining* fully assured of the great reality of our redemption
- *embracing* the one pure-hearted, primary delight
- *pursuing* the three pure-hearted, primary desires
- *treasuring* the life-giving word of God and the dynamic-intimacy of prayer
- *distinguishing* between the community of the redeemed and the community of the world

Such are, ever, to be the issues that fire our heart and settle in the forefront of our mind—these, rather than various illicit personal agendas, or any kind of ‘wrath-averting strategy’. We are to be always decisively and wholeheartedly refusing those fleshly energies of heart and mind, that *displace* the ‘strong and immediate affirmation’ and ‘strong and immediate, primary moral choice’ we’ve been speaking of.

Our contending—on our own behalf or others—will always be in regard to personal assurance of the grace of God towards us in Christ, and righteous living in accordance with our high and holy calling in Him. And such wrestling must be nothing less than a mobilization of our entire being against everything that has to do with ‘the lie’. The spiritual battle that rages is, indeed, relentlessly *strong* and *immediate*, and so our holy contending in the name of the Holy-Contender needs to be equally the case!

Here, we are now to see that such contending has, in fact, to do with our ‘incessantly breathing the air of God’s glorious kingdom of love’. The nature of that atmosphere will become more and more evident as we continue through the various studies of our series—although basically it is, in principle, everything contained here, in Study 9. Just now, we may reduce it to this: *the assurance of all that is ours in the Son—in lavish abundance—together with the holy delight and desire that such assurance creates within us*.

Let’s see then, something of what it looks like to be those who are breathing the invigorating air of the kingdom, as we contend each day against the world, the flesh and the devil—in a war already won.

freedom of spirit within ‘the legal courtroom’ & upon ‘the performance platform’

In Study 8 we spoke of the two relational environments in which we all find ourselves throughout the days of our life: environments that have to do with the attitude of others towards us.

Firstly, ‘the legal courtroom’, where our *moral status* in the eyes of others is based upon their perception of either the ‘rightness’ or ‘wrongness’ of the *choices* we make. It is where we find ourselves in a ‘moral dock’ awaiting the verdict of those who are ‘examining the evidence’: a situation that will result in our being either morally *commended* and *honoured*, or morally *condemned* and *dishonoured*.

And secondly, there is ‘the performance platform’, where our *personal* and *vocational status* is based upon others’ assessment of *who* we are and what we are *able* to achieve. It is where we find ourselves to be in ‘the relational spotlight’, with our performance gaining us either *acceptance* and *esteem*, or *rejection* and *scorn*: the social status of being either liked or disliked, delighted in or despised, or just being seen as irrelevant to others’ personal agendas.

It is within these two environments that we so often experience tormenting, spiritual onslaught. For within them, that assurance of our moral, personal and vocational *status* in Christ can be so quickly undermined—and our moral, personal and vocational *capacity* in Him then tragically diminished. But as was seen in Study 8, we may consistently know freedom of spirit within both realms.

With our being *fully armed in the battle*: with strong and immediate affirmation of our breathtaking oneness with the Son in His own righteousness in His Father’s presence, the *legal courtroom* can bring us no pain of *moral* condemnation and dishonor (even where we may need to freely acknowledge wrong personal choices that have been made). And with strong and immediate affirmation of our absolute oneness with the Son in His Father’s love and purpose, the *performance platform* can bring no painful alarm in regard to possible rejection and scorn.

Dark powers most certainly do seek to make the most of any difficult experience we may have within these two relational contexts. But regardless of the attitudes, opinions and pronouncements of others, we may be free to breathe the invigorating air of the kingdom of the Son: that atmosphere which is so different to the smog of the dominion of darkness. And we may then be exhilarated to go on freely pursuing the righteousness of the kingdom—within every courtroom environment of this world and upon every performance platform!

fearless residence in ‘death row’

Here we have another environment in which all in Christ, in this world, actually live—at least, that is, in principle. ‘Death row’ is a place where prisoners who have been sentenced to death live out their final days.

This may seem to be a rather extreme environment to identify us all with. And yet, it is precisely what the Scriptures give witness to. Firstly, they speak of the sentence of physical death upon all people:

Romans 5:12

[Sin] entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people.

Hebrews 9:27

People are destined to die.

But although a sentence of physical death has been passed upon us and we all live in the light of its inevitable approach, we also, know what Study 8 has declared. There, we saw that ‘Jesus has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel’, so that death for us has now ‘lost its victory and its sting’—and we have been freed from the devil’s mighty hold upon us through the fear that death once brought (2 Timothy 1:10b; 1 Corinthians 15:55; Hebrews 2:14–15).

So much, then, for that universal sentence of physical death! But there is another element to what we may call the 'death row' environment of a sanctified child of God in this world, which Paul also gave strong witness to. That is, the hostility of others towards our Lord, which at any time may fall upon us:

Romans 8:36

As it is written: "For Your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

The world, the flesh and the devil are in vehement opposition to the saints who—by the word they proclaim and the life they live—*relentlessly contend* against the intrusive operation of the dominion of darkness.

Jesus said to His disciples, whom He was sending out into the environment of this world's dark system that is hostile to the truth:

Matthew 10:21–22

"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death."

Luke 21:16–19

[Relatives and friends] will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of Me. But not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm and you will win life.

And even under such a shadow of potential hostility at every turn, Paul declares:

Romans 8:25–39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There may always be the joy of being with the Son in His Father's love—regardless of how dark and deadly our environment becomes!

And then the crowning proclamation we have as death row residents, is declared by the loud voice that came from heaven in the apostle John's vision:

Revelation 12:11

"They triumphed over [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."

Now this is what we need urgently to hear as we think about living in triumph over the devil and his dark powers in this world! We do so, 'by the blood of the Lamb' (who, bearing our judgment, has taken down into death our condemned, accursed and morally vandalized humanity in Adam) and, also then, 'by the word of our testimony' (which declares the absolute freedom we have from the devil's dark dominion by the blood of Jesus). But then, most importantly, on the basis of these two, we overcome as those who '*do not love our lives in this world so much as to shrink from death*' (John 12:25)!

The evil one—from his perverse perspective—is actually convinced that we do love our lives more than God and His will. He believes that all he needs to do is to bring death to our mind as an *impending prospect*, in order to shunt us out of communion with God into a dark and obsessive realm of self-preservation or self-enlivening passion. Apart from accusation, inciting the fear of death again within us is the evil one's favourite means of holding us in slavery to his deceptions. For when he is able to do this, we have limited overcoming power.

But as we stand in the love of God—maintaining a joyous anticipation of our glorious eternal inheritance in the Son—then neither the world, the flesh, nor the devil may overcome us. The, exact opposite may be the case. Being driven by an experience of *assault* into a strong and immediate affirmation of *the truth*, the Lord may strengthen us even beyond where we were before the attack came!

Yes, within that ‘death row environment’ which is part of what we face in Christ, we may always be decisively and wholeheartedly remaining, embracing, pursuing, treasuring, distinguishing and contending—breathing the air of the kingdom as the Father’s beloved and sanctified children.

freedom from an oppressive personal atmosphere of ‘spiritual paranoia’

Paranoia, in the way it is being described here, may be defined as a dark and tormenting experience of ‘knowing’ that we are ‘being opposed’: a kind of obsession with ‘the opposition that is always there’.

It is very true that dark spiritual powers are insidiously involved within the various circumstances of our life, and that other people may have opposing agendas in regard to us (often demonically incited). But it is also possible for us to be so ‘darkness conscious’ that our mind becomes fretfully focused upon such things—so that we are oppressively preoccupied with what seem to be ‘unmistakable patterns of unfair opposition’. And so, the mental and emotional battle is always on!

However, when our conscience is clear and our spirit is free in the truth, we may actually have a deep personal serenity when ‘trouble’ is present. And whether or not it is the direct influence of dark powers or a result of the devising of others (or just the circumstances of life in a fallen world), we may know that in the worst of it there is no cause for alarm. We know that Jesus is Lord over every circumstance, to manifest the glory of His Sonship within us in the midst of it!

What must always be understood (that is, what we must be ‘knowing’ about the ‘opposition’) is that the powers of darkness delight to seize upon any opportunity to incite ‘obsessive thoughts’ and ‘emotional reactions’ within us, which distract us from the truth that keeps us free! We can be sure that dark powers do, in fact, thrive upon any anxiety in the heart of a child of God—seeing it as a *direct invitation* to increasingly create a sense of hopelessness and dread, one way or another (and with this, of course, all those other dark-spirited emotions spoken of in our diagram earlier—together with that persistently self-justifying ‘oppressed victim’ mentality).

If we’re not careful we may find ourselves consistently in states of distress and alarm. And in this, having a tendency to be regularly ‘asking for prayer’ when what is actually needed above, all else, is to be refreshed in *the truth* that ‘protects us from the evil one’ (John 17:15).

This doesn’t mean, of course, that there is no need to request the support of others in prayer. Fellowship in this way is an excellent provision in face of our struggles. Such oneness together in the battle is a good and functional thing. It only becomes less than this when asking for prayer is an immediate substitute for one’s own choice to stand firm in the truth.

We should never underestimate the great power of Satan and his demonic forces, nor should we be mindlessly dismissive of others’ opposition. But although acknowledging the *reality* of spiritual and relational mischief, we must in no way give way to *anxiety* in regard to it—let alone allow ourselves to be gripped by a fearful or defensively antagonistic spirit. Rather, we are to overcome any such sense with strong, immediate and joyous affirmation of the truth—which will be much to the evil one’s dismay!

Yes, our Lord has told us that as we press on towards the ultimate coming of the kingdom, there will ‘in this world be trouble’ (John 16:33).

Acts 14:22

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

Such experience is to be expected, but it is never to be our personal focus—and not allowed for a moment to distract us from the wonders of ‘the truth that is in Jesus’ (Ephesians 4:21), or from the pure-hearted delight and desire that is our heritage in Him. Most certainly, we are to *decisively resist* any obsessive preoccupation with ‘an opposition that is always there’.

The point for us all is that our eyes are to be lifted above our difficulties, as we go on *breathing the pure and life-giving air of the kingdom* in the midst of the battle!

a joy which is more than perpetual cheerfulness

We have spoken in much detail of the joy that is found within the one pure-hearted, primary delight that is ours in the Son. But in a footnote, it was also said that in this study and others to come, it would be seen that there is, as well, a deep, personal *anguish* to be known in a sinful and suffering world.

To have God Himself as the primary delight of our life, will surely result in joy being the persistent atmosphere of our days. But this does not mean that we will always live in a perpetual state of ‘cheerfulness’.

In the Gospels it’s recorded that Jesus experienced emotions that would appear to have nothing of joy in them. For example, in John 11 at the tomb of Lazarus, in the midst of the people’s virtual ‘groveling in the face of death’, we’re told that He ‘groaned with indignation’. And we saw earlier in John 12, His being ‘greatly troubled’ at the prospect of the redemptive terrors set before Him; as well as in Luke 22, which speaks of the anguished grief and sorrow that came upon Him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

None of these emotions, however, indicate the absence of joy. As we saw in Study 1, regarding the blessedness of God, they are in fact indispensable manifestations of its presence: the grief and anguish of a *divine and holy joy* in the face of a sinful and darkened world.

For Jesus there were at times indignation, a troubled spirit, anguished grief and sorrow—as well as the deep, visceral compassion witnessed to in ‘the Parable of the True Neighbour’. These were the overflow of a heart that longed for *all* to know the joy that was His own perpetual inner spring—as He was confronted with situations where this was not so.

And, of course, for Jesus those horrible intimations and foretastes of personally bearing the sins of the world would, naturally, bring a holy terror and abhorrence—in the face of becoming Himself the Accursed One. And yet even on the Cross as those three dark hours of absolute redemptive accursedness approached, his deepest cry was one of love for those whom He had come to liberate into the blessedness that was His: ‘Father forgive them.’ In this there was nothing of a ‘cheerful spirit’. But there was certainly everything of a heart that exalted in His Father’s love—and yearned for all to know it with Him! In such utterances we truly do see the supreme manifestation of the contending heart of our Redeemer.

All these intense stirrings within Him had nothing in them of fleshly, dark-spirited and self-obsessed emotion: the manifestation of failed idolatrous pursuit. For Him what remained constant above all else was this: the relentlessly strong and immediate *affirmation* of His Father’s total worthiness to be loved, worshipped, honoured and adored! The deep spring of joy in His Father’s love that was ever within Him, would never allow such holy affirmation to be absent! The ‘holy affections’ of His priestly heart (the fruit of His ‘spirit of adoring communion’) clearly produced a whole range of strong personal emotion.

Every anguished feeling expressed by our Lord then, was a manifestation of divine, pure-hearted primary delight, in the face of all who knew nothing of it. And so it may be true of us also (to the

degree that the holy spring of joy is present within us) that we, experience those same emotional fruits of love within this darkened and sinful world.

We've seen how Jesus said that no one would take away our joy (although we of course, can throw it away through the pursuit of idolatrous passion). But even with joy's holy presence sustained within us, it will inevitably find expression in ways other than a mere perpetual cheerfulness.

There is indeed, no greater holy happiness than that which is found in being one with the Son in His Father's love. And in this the general demeanor of our days may be as Proverbs describes, the 'good medicine' and 'continual feast' of a cheerful heart; and a 'happy heart that makes the face cheerful'—rather than living with those dark and bitter fruits of self-obsession: a 'crushed spirit' and having 'wretched days' (Proverbs 15:13, 15; 17:22). But even then, the joy that is in Jesus may have far more deeply divine dimensions than the mere maintenance of a happy and cheerful disposition.

As we've seen so far in this study, the blessedness of those who breathe the air of the kingdom includes 'poverty of spirit', 'mourning' and 'hunger and thirst for righteousness' (Matthew 5:3-4, 6). An authentic engagement in the battle will include each of these fruits of a holy joy.

No, there may not always be a perpetual cheerfulness. But there may be an adoring spirit of reverent awe, child-like trust, grateful affection and unwavering obedience: the worship that belongs always within the hearts of the sanctified children of God!

the daily personal atmosphere of an awesome destiny

We surely do look to that Final Day, when the war already won will never again require our *contending* in order to manifest its great Victory. For then, the dominion of darkness will be no more!

All of our contested, Spirit-enabled participation in the priestly living, prophetic speaking and kingly action of the Son, truly is, with a view to what is nothing less than a glorious, eternal human destiny. For when Jesus Appears at the close of history, all who are His will come into the full possession of their inheritance: with each one receiving eternal reward for their vocational labours of love in His name.

Yes, as Study 8 declared, there is set before us 'the blessedness of a visible, uncontested and perfect participation in the Son's glorified humanity'. NO MORE CONTENDING—ONLY REIGNING IN LOVE WITHIN THE BLESSÉDNESS OF THE TRIUNE COMMUNION, WITHIN A RENEWED CREATION, TOGETHER, FOREVER!!! Such hope is, surely, to be a significant part of the atmosphere of the kingdom that we breathe throughout every day of our life.

Like our Lord when He walked the earth, we most certainly do have an awesome destiny set before us. That is, a glorious future that in the midst of relentless wrestling, rightly *impassions* a human heart, *fills* a human mind and *inspires* lavish investment of human energies! We really can say that we are never more manifestly the image of God on the earth, as when we are joyously anticipating and pressing towards that Coming Day!

So now we've covered all six indispensable and non-negotiable elements of our response as inheritors on the way to final freedom. All that is left to do now is to look at an ennobling, promised outcome of it all—one that is increasingly available to every present-possessor of the ultimate inheritance to come.

always decisively & wholeheartedly *remaining, embracing, pursuing, treasuring, distinguishing & contending*—& so, enjoying more & more our holy, ‘shalomic’ heritage of:
- personal rest & peace—free to live wisely & fruitfully
(the *inheriting saint’s* foretaste of a final, eternal blessedness)

We’ve seen that the six elements of response described in this study (centred in our having only the one pure-hearted, primary delight and the three pure-hearted, primary desires) all really amount to one thing: a personal agenda of *righteousness: making right relational choices (vertically and horizontally)*. And what we are to see now is that the fruit of having such a personal agenda is always the presence of *rest* and *peace*—and with these, a freedom to go on living wisely and fruitfully in the name of Jesus, in fulfillment of our holy calling.

The *righteousness* into which we are called in Christ and the presence of personal rest and peace are actually inseparable. These come to us by those ‘grand indicatives’ of God’s grace towards us in His Son. They are then sustained in our experience, through enjoyment of the vertical and horizontal righteousness that the Spirit of God enables. They are the fruit firstly, of remaining in the WOW!!! of our Creator and Redeemer, and secondly, of choosing to live accordingly.

BASICALLY, REST AND PEACE ARE ENJOYED IN THEIR FULLEST MEASURE, WHEN (BY THE SHEER GRACE OF GOD) WE KNOW THAT WE ARE ONE WITH THE SON IN HIS FATHER’S LOVE, AND ONE WITH HIM IN HIS LOVE FOR HIS FATHER—AND SO THEN, ABLE TO BE, ONE WITH HIM IN HIS LOVE FOR EVERY OTHER PERSON!!!

A little further on we will examine in some detail those words of Jesus:

Matthew 11:28–30

“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Here we have what is a supreme call to righteousness. With a yearning heart of love, Jesus was not inviting but *commanding* all to come to Him and take the yoke of His own Sonship upon them. That is, to be with Him in all that He knew in joyous yielded-ness to His Father’s love and purpose—so that they may be with Him in that beautiful place of *rest* in which He lived each day.

Similarly, Paul declared to the Romans what ‘the big things’ of the kingdom are:

Romans 14:17

The kingdom of God is [a matter of] ... righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

It is these three that are at the heart of life in the kingdom of the Son. They are all that the Father wants for us—and all that the evil one seeks to eliminate from our experience at every opportunity! Again, we say it is in fact what the battle is all about.

Then we have the writer to the Hebrews speaking of the great ‘training process’ of the Father towards His sanctified children:

Hebrews 12:10–11

God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Earlier we saw that it is *holiness* (expressed in that righteousness of fulfilling the two great commands) which is, above all else, the distinguishing feature of the community of the redeemed. It is what sets us apart from the community of the world. And here, the writer is telling us that the Father is always at work towards us to facilitate a participation in such holiness of life (often through

His ‘painful disciplines’), with His divine agenda to produce within us ‘a harvest of righteousness and peace’.

In His perfect love, He will do whatever is needful to facilitate the six ‘heart responses’ (holy negotiable, personal agendas) we’ve been speaking of, to bring us into the blessedness of our inheritance!

rest & peace: basic to human wellbeing

The joy of vertical and horizontal righteousness and the personal rest and peace that are its companions, truly are basic to the *wellbeing* we were created to know. And, clearly, it is those *six elements of response* we’ve been speaking of that are crucial to its maintenance.

These expressions of ‘right relational response’ keep us *alive* in the presence of God and *wise* in His will. Apart from them our capacity for life will be limited to external encouragements and our wisdom tainted by fleshly agendas—rather than, the holy and ‘truly humanizing’ agendas these responses have declared. Together, they maintain the promised personal environment of rest and peace that is indispensable to our humanity: an integral part of the air of the kingdom we are to be breathing each day.

An experience of *rest* may be described in many ways. But we could say that its supreme expression is this: to be lovingly responsive in the presence of God, and so, free from what would otherwise be debilitating ‘reactive stress’—enjoying a sense of relief, release and refreshment.

And the *peace* into which we are called may be described as, that stillness and quietness of spirit in the midst of all else, which enables every part of our life to function according to our Creator’s way. The Hebrew word for peace, ‘shalom’, speaks of an inner serenity that brings personal wholeness and integration: enabling us to flourish within the imperfections and complexities of daily living.

True mental and emotional health, then, is basically the gentle fruit of our freedom to be always joyously with the Son in His Father’s love, and with Him in His love for His Father and for all others. Such a personal environment of rest and peace is ‘normal life in Christ’: the lovely *simplicity* of daily living that may be enjoyed in Him! To have lost this is to have, tragically, become a dry well.

Without doubt, the joy of the Lord and the personal and relational freedom it brings is better therapy than anything else! It’s only our self-obsessed, proud resistance to the grace of God—and with it, a stubborn refusal to drop *illicit* primary delights and desires (with their dark-spirited emotional fruits)—that keeps us from the inner rest and peace that our spirit craves.

the theme of rest & peace within Studies 1–8

We may trace the theme of rest and peace throughout the eight studies already covered in the following way:

Study 1

The God of righteousness, rest and peace

Study 2

A life of rest and peace under the good yoke of sonship / righteousness

Study 3

Throwing off the good yoke of righteousness and pursuing a lifeless and restless path of unrestrained idolatry

Study 4

The realm of idolatrous and God-refusing rebellion: a life of endless, restless struggle—with the ceaseless devising of futile ‘coping mechanisms’, bearing the hard yoke of *the deceiver* under the wrath of the Holy One’s love.

Study 5

The God of righteousness and peace—calling His old covenant people into His rest.

Study 6

The Prince of Peace calling all to take His own yoke of Sonship / righteousness upon them; Himself bearing to death *our* accursed yoke of unrighteousness, condemnation and shame, and establishing the new covenant in Himself: securing present and future rest for His people.

Study 7

Revelation, bringing to the restless rebel an intensification of inner turbulence—and the crisis of repentance and faith.

Study 8

The grace that brings us into rest and peace under the Son's good yoke—in the midst of the menacing *pressure* of this world, the persistent *surging* of our own fleshly passions and the oppressive *assaults* of the devil. And this, in the promise of an ultimate eternal rest to come!

the theme of rest & peace throughout the Story of Redemption

As we move towards the Great and Final Day it is always so important to keep 'the big picture' of the Story in mind. And so here, we will revisit some of what was seen in Studies 5 and 6, to show the centrality of 'rest and peace' within the entire, grand Narrative of Redemption.

the Story's Blesséd Author & Central Character

Both the Author and Central Character of the Story is the Living God: the creating and redeeming Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The eternal life within the Divine Triune Community of Love has always been one of *blessedness*, known within a relational environment of perfect rest and peace. A total participation in this is what the Father planned for His image, and is what He has been working towards throughout the Redemption Story He has been telling in history.

a fully ordered & functional creation

'The God of Peace' has always been the One in whom there is no chaos or disorder (1 Corinthians 14:33). When He first created the earth as a barren and watery globe, it was 'formless and empty' (Genesis 1:2). But then He began to *speak* to it, and throughout the following six days His own divine order and fullness was gloriously reflected within 'the work of His hands'. Every part of His creation was 'good and functional'—perfectly suited to fulfill His purpose for it (Genesis 1:31). Then He 'rested' or 'ceased' from His work of creation. There was nothing more to *add* (Genesis 2:3)!

fallen humankind forfeits its Maker's rest

Through their rebellion and corruption, the first couple lost serenity and were banished from the garden—and later, unrighteous Cain became a 'restless wanderer on the earth' (Genesis 3:23–24; 4:12).

The effects of the Fall upon humanity were grievous and heavy—the wise 'preacher' of Ecclesiastes giving heart-felt expression to what is so often the case:

Ecclesiastes 2:23

All their days their work is pain and grief; even at night their minds do not rest.

rest through the judgment of the Flood

We saw in Study 5 that godly Lamech prophetically named his son 'Noah', a word that sounded like 'comfort' or 'rest'. When the world was cleansed from the unbridled wickedness of pre-Flood days,

there would be *rest* in the midst of labour and painful toil—a fresh hope for functional living according to the way of the Redeemer-Creator (Genesis 5:29)!

Israel—a people called out of Egypt into that place of promised rest & peace

Through Moses the LORD made very clear to Israel what they could expect to know, as they responded to His unfailing covenant love and faithfulness towards them.

Exodus 33:14

[The LORD said] “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

Leviticus 26:6

Do not make idols. ... I am the LORD your God. ... I will grant peace in the land.

Moses spoke to them of ‘the resting place and the inheritance’ they were to enter into (Deuteronomy 12:9).

And there was the blessing Aaron was to speak over the Israelites:

Numbers 6:24–26

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn His face toward you and give you peace.”

Then later the LORD told David that as a man of war he would not be able to build the temple. That *place* (where the Creator and Redeemer would be dynamically and personally present to His worshipping people) was to be built by David’s son, Solomon (whose name sounded like the word for ‘peace’] who would be ‘a man of peace and rest’ (1 Chronicles 22:9–10).

the Sabbath rest that the LORD always held before His holy people

When the LORD sanctified Israel He immediately established a principle of ‘sabbath rest’ on their behalf: creating a regular rhythm of rest and refreshment among them, to be enjoyed in the light of His unfailing covenant love and faithfulness.

the Sabbath day

In Study 5 we saw that the principle of a Sabbath day was established even from the creation:

Genesis 2:3

Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all His work of creating that He had done.

Having rested on the seventh day God *blessed* it. That is, He made it to be a day that would fulfill a certain function for His creatures, imparting to them something of the pleasure He Himself enjoyed in it as He rested from His accomplished work.

He also made this seventh day *holy*: setting it apart for all time as a day of blessing to bring rest and refreshment to His creatures. It was only natural then, that the LORD would formally build this day of rest into the fabric of Israel’s life as His holy people.

Exodus 31:12–13, 15, 17

The LORD said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe My Sabbaths. This will be a sign between Me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy ... For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day is to be put to death ... It will be a sign between Me and the Israelites ... for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He [ceased from His] work and [was refreshed].

Deuteronomy 5:14–15

The seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any other or your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

This sign that God was bringing His people into His own rest was central to His covenant with them. To refuse it was to willfully denounce the reality of His good gifts of an accomplished creation and redemption: denying the very nature of His purpose for them (and ultimately the nations) and rightly incurring the penalty of death. The people were no longer slaves in Egypt. So neither they nor their servants should be 'seven-day slaves' in this 'good land'—one that we may now see within the Story of Redemption as being something of a symbol of the new creation to come.

Isaiah understood the enormous significance of the Sabbath for the LORD'S people, and strongly called them into a faithful reception of it as the delightful sign that it was:

Isaiah 58:13–14

If you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD'S holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD.

In every week of Israel's life within the land promised to them, the Sabbath day was a sign of the 'holy rest' into which they had been called within the LORD'S covenant love and faithfulness.¹¹³

the Sabbath Year

Not only was there an enacted proclamation of rest each seventh day but also in each seventh year:

Leviticus 25:4–5, 20–21

[The LORD said through Moses:] In the seventh year the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. ... You may ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?" I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years ... until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.

This resting of the land each seventh year was not only about preserving soil quality. It had also to do with Israel understanding that the land was not theirs; it was the LORD'S, who gave it to them day after day. And every seven years they would be able to realize afresh that the LORD was faithful in providing for them even when they, in obedience to their Landlord, sowed nothing.¹¹⁴ Although not sowing and reaping they could, however, together with the poor and foreigners eat from what grew of itself in the fields (Exodus 23:10–11; Leviticus 25:6–7).

The LORD wanted His people to know that He was the *Giver* who loved them and could always be trusted—so He provided opportunity for them to exercise obedient faith in His faithfulness.

Also during the Sabbath year, all debts were to be cancelled and those who had sold themselves into slavery were to be set free (Deuteronomy 15:1, 12). This was to be a refreshing release every seventh year from debt and slavery!

¹¹³ Within the new covenant most believers have their Sabbath (rest day) on Sunday 'the Lord's Day'—the day of the Resurrection (the first day of the week) which marks the new creation—rather than on Saturday. This is understood to still be the Sabbath that God instituted at Creation.

¹¹⁴ Just as in the desert, on the day before the Sabbath they would be enabled to collect two days-worth of manna, so as to be able to rest on that day each week which was set apart for inactivity (Exodus 16:21–26).

the Jubilee Year

Furthermore, not only was there an enacted proclamation of rest each seven years, but there was also *the Jubilee* celebrated each seventh Sabbath year: the fiftieth year. The word jubilee meant 'ram': a ram's horn or trumpet.

Leviticus 25:8–10

Count off seven Sabbath years ... Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee year for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan.

The same action was to be taken as for the other Sabbath years: resting the land, cancelling debts and releasing slaves—but in addition to that, all land was to be returned to its original owners.

When that ram's horn was sounded in every place, we can imagine the sense of relief and release that all would have felt who had been indebted, enslaved or dispossessed. Indeed, an amazing time of celebrating restoration and rest—at the hand of the Holy One who loved them!

No wonder Moses could say:

Deuteronomy 4:8

What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I'm setting before you today?

Yes, in the Sabbath day, Sabbath year and Jubilee year (as well as other appointed Sabbath days to do with various feasts and celebrations) the LORD was establishing a 'Sabbath principle' to be always held out before His holy people: His calling of them into a rhythm of joyously life-giving recognition that *all is of God*, so that they might be wholly at rest within His creation as His people—in the wonder of His unfailing covenant love and faithfulness towards them.

Israel's witness to the rest & peace they knew

When Israel believed and obeyed the LORD'S word, they knew the rest and peace promised to them and their testimony was rich and full of anticipation.

David gave witness to his own experience of what is, always held out to those who live in the light of the LORD'S unfailing love and faithfulness:

Psalms 23:1–3

The LORD is my Shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores [and refreshes] my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Psalms 62:1

My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him ... Find rest, O my soul, in God alone.

Psalms 131:1–3

My heart is not proud, LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have calmed myself, and quieted my [soul and its] ambitions. I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content. Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and forevermore.

All of Israel could know that the righteousness of decisive and wholehearted trust in and obedience to the LORD would be for them, always, 'the way of rest and peace'.

Psalms 85:10

[Righteousness] and peace kiss each other.

Isaiah 26:3

[LORD] You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in You.

Psalms 29:11

The LORD gives strength to His people; the LORD blesses His people with peace.

Psalms 85:8

I will listen to what God the LORD says: He promises peace to His people, His [saints]—but let them not turn to folly.

Proverbs 3:16

[All the paths of wisdom] are peace.

Proverbs 14:30

A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy [and passion] rots the bones.

Always, authentic response to the covenant love and faithfulness of God, makes the way of rest and peace immediately available to His servants. There is really never a time when they cannot say:

Psalms 116:7

Return to your rest, my soul, for the LORD has been good to you.

rest from their enemies

For Israel, inner rest and peace were often accompanied by external rest from their enemies, as the LORD responded with compassion to their plight.

When Gideon found himself commanded to contend against the Midianites, who were cruelly oppressing his people, he made an offering to the Angel of the LORD who had appeared to him. And then when he was dramatically shown that his 'face to face' worship had been, accepted, we are told:

Judges 6:24

Gideon built an altar to the LORD ... and called it The LORD Is Peace.

And from that place of inner assurance, Gideon went on responding step by step in trust and obedience (as 'a contender against Baal'—Judges 6:32) until Israel was miraculously delivered from both Midianite and Amalekite oppression, bringing rest to the land for forty years.

Similarly, Jehoshaphat's response to the LORD'S word, leading the people to *contend with praise* in the face of Edom's terrifying onslaught, brought the same outcome:

2 Chronicles 20:30

The kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side.

Israel—restless in rebellion

The people of Israel were given *deliverance* from slavery in Egypt and *rest* in the LORD'S presence in the land He had promised (Exodus 3:7–8; Deuteronomy 12:9–12). But before this, when the Exodus generation through unbelief and rebellion forfeited its right to inherit the land, they were forced to *wander* in the desert for forty years.

Psalms 95:10–11

[The LORD said] "For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said they are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known My ways. So I declared on oath in My anger, 'They shall never enter My rest.' "

Then later, when Moses instructed the new generation that was about to enter the land, he warned them that any future rebellion would keep them from enjoyment of the rest that could be theirs. He said:

Deuteronomy 28:1, 48, 65–66

“If you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all His commands ... He will put an iron yoke on your neck ... You will find no repose, no resting place ... The LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life.”

Although thoroughly endowed with all they needed in order to know their Creator’s rest and peace, Israel consistently fell back into unfaithfulness and knew instead, unrest and distress—as He had promised would be the case.

They so often cast off the restful yoke of righteousness to which they had been called, and within the land that had been set apart for true worship they spurned the LORD’S love, prostituting themselves with *shameful ‘adulterous’ idolatry*. And, tragically, this kind of unfaithfulness became the habitual pattern of their ways.

Jeremiah 2:20

[The LORD said], “Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, ‘I will not serve [and worship] You!’ Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute.”

And like all who are given to idolatry, they were caught up in a restless round of futile attempts to cope with its consequences.

Jeremiah 2:36

[The LORD said], “Why do you go about so much, changing your ways? You will be disappointed.”

But confident in their pursuit of what was false and given to the unrighteousness it produced, they closed their minds to the word of God.

Isaiah 28:12

[The LORD] said, “This is the resting-place, let the weary rest”; and, “This is the place of repose”—but they would not listen.

And yet the LORD in His faithfulness kept on bringing the prophetic word to them—time after time exposing their situation for what it was.

Isaiah 57:20–21

“The wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’ ”

Ezekiel 13:10

[False prophets] lead My people astray, saying, “Peace,” when there is no peace.

Isaiah 59:8

The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks along them will know peace.

Jeremiah 6:16

This is what the LORD says: Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, “We will not walk in it.”

Isaiah 30:15

In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength but you would have none of it.

Isaiah 48:18

If only you had paid attention to My commands, your peace would have been like a river, your [righteousness and wellbeing] like waves of the sea.

It is so tragically evident that Israel's history was consistently marked by a *disregard for the word of God*, as they habitually resorted to a pursuit of their own unrighteous agendas.

the LORD'S mercy in the face of restless Israel's refusals

Way back on Mount Sinai the LORD had declared His glory to Moses. And this was, of course, precisely who He still was as the Holy One of Israel:

Exodus 34:6–7

The LORD proclaimed His name ... “The LORD the LORD, the [merciful], compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in [covenant] love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished; He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

In Study 5 we saw how the LORD had promised His people that if they persisted in turning aside to worship other gods, He would eventually *evict* them from the place of their inheritance and send them into exile—where, as the ‘beloved son nation’ of the Living God, they would taste the bitterness of life outside of the true worship into which they'd been called (Exodus 4:22–23; Deuteronomy 4:25–28). And in 586 BCE that's exactly what happened—the Babylonians took them into captivity.

But in the midst of their bondage, anxiety and despair, the LORD rose up His prophets to declare His unfailing covenant love and faithfulness to His languishing people.

Jeremiah 46:27–28

Do not be afraid, Jacob My servant; do not be dismayed Israel. ... I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only in due measure.

Nahum 1:12, 13, 15

Although I have afflicted you, Judah, I will afflict you no more. Now I will break their yoke from your neck and tear your shackles away (Isaiah 10:27) ... Look there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace.

Isaiah 52:7

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

Throughout the 70 years of Israel's servitude, it seemed that the godless nations who had oppressed the LORD'S people were the ones enjoying the rest and peace promised to Israel. But that was never going to be a continuing situation (Zechariah 1:11, 12–16).

The false rest and peace of those enjoying temporary seasons of ‘successful idolatrous strategy’ were, even then, nations that were under divine wrath. The LORD was jealous for His people, and by His mercy He would establish them again under His own glorious rule as full-hearted worshippers; and this, in the joyous assurance of His dynamic, personal presence among them, in the *holy place* that He would again provide.

Ezekiel 37:26

I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant ... and I will put My sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God and they will be My people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when My sanctuary is among them forever.

Isaiah 55:12

You will go out with joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

Isaiah 60:17

I will make peace your governor and wellbeing your ruler.

Isaiah 32:1, 15, 17

“See, a king will reign in righteousness ... till the Spirit is poured on us from on high ... The fruit of [His] righteousness will be peace.”

And clearly in all of this, the LORD’S prophets were pointing forward to the One who would be the Divine, Eternal Son en-fleshed among us—to fulfill everything that the covenants with Abraham and Moses had both promised and foreshadowed (Isaiah 41:8–9, 16; Jeremiah 31:31–34).

Micah 5:5

“Judah, out of you will come for Me One who will be Ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. ... He will stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they will live securely, for then His greatness will reach to the end of the earth. And He will be our peace [when the enemy seeks to plunder our inheritance.]”

On his deathbed Jacob had blessed Judah with these words:

Genesis 49:10

“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until [the Rest-Giver comes] and the obedience of the nations is His.”

Yes, restless Israel would be restored to the land, where ultimately that One who was promised would—by His own righteousness—bring them into the authentic rest and peace that they and all the nations of the earth were created to know!

It must be said that the story of Israel is, on the one hand, a very tragic one. And yet it is, on the other, a glorious proclamation of the great and unfailing covenant love and faithfulness of the LORD for His people. **NO MATTER HOW MUCH THEY REFUSED HIM, HE NEVER TURNED AWAY FROM HIS PURPOSE FOR THEM—AND NEVER WILL!!!**

the new Exodus & the promised rest & peace in the Son

Israel’s exodus from Egypt was a glorious reality for them. But it was only a foreshadowing of that greater Exodus that was to come, which Jesus spoke of on the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah.¹¹⁶ In this Exodus there was to be a freedom of spirit for the people of God, which is far beyond what Israel knew when they were brought out of Egypt into the worship they were given—as wonderful as that was.

Although for Israel the supreme experience of inner rest and peace remained confined to the realm of promise, it was all marvellously fulfilled within the new covenant—through which those, in Christ, are enabled to enter more and more into vast dimensions of refreshment and quietness of spirit!

And so, as mentioned above, we see the Son coming among us as the Prince of Peace, calling all into *His Father’s rest* under His own yoke of Sonship—and then bearing to death on the Cross *our* yoke of unrighteousness, condemnation and shame (Isaiah 53:5). And in that Act, the time had come for humankind’s release from restless servitude to its cruel and tormenting pharaoh, Satan!

This is the liberation so graphically portrayed by Isaiah:

Isa 9:4, 6–7

You have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor ... For to us a child is born, to us a [Son] is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty [Ruler], Everlasting [Shepherd of His people representing His Father’s glory], Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government of peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over His

¹¹⁶ Luke 9:29–31 (where, as we saw in Study 6, the word ‘departure’ is literally ‘exodus’)

kingdom, establishing it and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD will accomplish this.

From the time of Jesus' coming among us, an open proclamation of peace was made to a restlessly, struggling humanity: to all who languish every day under the harsh yoke that is placed upon those who belong to the dominion of darkness.

After the birth of John the Baptist his father Zechariah declared:

Luke 1:79

Because of the tender mercy of our God ... the Rising Sun will come to us from heaven, to shine on those living in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

And this was the very proclamation that the shepherds heard from heaven on the night of His birth:

Luke 2:14

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests.

Jesus announcing the Jubilee!

All that the old covenant Jubilee year foreshadowed—release for those who were indebted, enslaved or dispossessed—was fulfilled in the very presence of Jesus among us. And returning to His hometown of Nazareth after His Baptism and Temptation, He boldly announced this to be so. Having read from Isaiah 61:1–2, which culminated in the Servant of the LORD proclaiming the beginning of the Jubilee year, He said:

Luke 4:21

Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

And so the scene was set for the liberation of all who are *indebted* to sin, *enslaved* to Satan and *dispossessed* of all that is their heritage as the image of God on the earth—a release to be accomplished by the One who was oppressed by none of these accursed realities!

As we've seen, the Jubilee was the culmination of six previous Sabbath years, which were themselves seven-yearly expressions of the weekly Sabbath day of rest: those signs of the promised rest and peace that the Creator and Redeemer was always holding before His people.

Throughout His ministry Jesus acted in a way that exposed Israel's present *misunderstanding* of the Sabbath principle. He did this by violating their leaders' elaborately devised and oppressive Sabbath-day laws, as He brought healing and deliverance on the Sabbath. Subsequently, in the eyes of the leaders Jesus was a Sabbath-breaker and deserving of death. But in actual fact, He was gloriously exemplifying the Sabbath principle: mercifully liberating on that day those who were humanly dispossessed in so many ways.

One of the loveliest examples of this was His healing of a woman who had been 'crippled by a spirit' for eighteen years: bent over and unable to straighten up at all. And being rebuked by an indignant synagogue leader, Jesus said:

Luke 13:16

"Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

All such healings were, indeed, true Sabbath actions—signs of the new creation breaking in and the curse being broken! How He delighted to say, "Go in peace and be freed from your suffering (Mark 5:34)."

***a present heritage of rest & peace
under 'the good yoke'***

On the basis the great Exodus Jesus has accomplished through the Cross, His Resurrection, Ascension and Reign as Lord over all that would oppress us (together with His outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost), there is now, an amazing *present heritage of rest and peace* to be enjoyed—one that is more substantial and personally liberating than has ever been known in fallen human history!

In Christ the old covenant has been fulfilled and superseded, and every sanctified child of God in Him may know they've been freely brought into the *true Sabbath*, which the old covenant signs were all pointing towards. That is, they have been brought into the *rest* and *peace* that has always been part of the Son's own eternal covenant union with His Father—and all that He Himself enjoyed every day as He lived among us!

The writer to the Hebrews was delighted to announce:

Hebrews 4:3

Now we who have believed enter that rest.

This is the simplicity of life that Jesus has both promised and called us into. As we've seen, He said:

Matthew 11:28–29

“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Jesus calls all weary travelers to come to Him. And, yes, the yoke He places upon His servants is His own: THE GOOD AND HOLY YOKE OF HIS ETERNAL SONSHIP!!!

This is what every person was made for! That's why His words, 'Come to Me' and 'Take My yoke' are not *invitations* but *commands*. They would be best translated, 'You must come to Me', 'you must take My yoke upon you'. He could not bear to think that we would continue to live in His Father's world upon any other basis!

Within the oppressive realm of the dominion of darkness 'hard yokes' are made for all of the devil's children. But the redeemed may bear the good yoke for which *they themselves were made!* An 'easy yoke' in Jesus' day was one that fitted the animal perfectly. And the good yoke of the Son that we are called to bear is, without doubt, the easiest of all—fitting to perfection those created to participate in the blessedness of His own life and action, in His Father's amazing love and purpose!

All who are weary and burdened may learn from Him and be with Him in *the secret of His rest*: the fact that He is 'gentle and humble in heart', in His Father's presence and towards everyone else.

In the old covenant, rest was often seen as being the consequence of relief from the oppression of physical enemies and adverse circumstances. But here Jesus gives witness to the nature of *new covenant rest*. It has to do above all with relief from that great enemy within: a guilt-charged, self-obsessed, fearful and *proudly reactive spirit*, in the presence of God and others.

(We've moved now from simply recounting the story of rest and peace in the Scriptures, into an exhortation to possess it as our heritage!)

Apart from full assurance of the grace that has come to us in the Son—and a participation with Him in His own pure-hearted, primary delight and desire—we find ourselves in that dark and restless place of refusing a spirit of worship and thanksgiving. In this we are either full of our own self-focused determination 'to beat the problem', or just grimly anxious because our false, primary delights and desires are being frustrated.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus (speaking of certain valid, everyday desires that tend to wrongly dominate our life) gives beautiful insight into the restful simplicity of His Sonship—and earnestly calls us into it, saying:

Matthew 6:25–34

“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the [unbelieving world runs] after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

As was said earlier in this study, His command to seek first the Father’s kingdom and righteousness is the same as saying, “Embrace the one pure-hearted, primary delight and pursue the three pure-hearted primary desires”, for these are the essence of the righteousness we are called to—and so are indispensable to an experience of the prevailing rest and peace that is our heritage in Him.

Every day Jesus would have seen those around Him so often living as if their Creator and Redeemer didn’t exist, or as if He wasn’t who He had revealed Himself to be—and suffering the impact of their refusal of Him. And how He longed for them to know what He Himself enjoyed each day in His Father’s presence and purpose of love—regardless of what else was or was not happening.

How easy it is to needlessly fall into ‘hard labour’ within the various personal, relational and vocational circumstances we face. As our next study will show, the choice is always ours: either the idolatrous yoke of unrighteousness in the flesh, or the good and holy yoke of sonship in the Spirit.

We all know what it means to ‘serve time’ under the burden—and too often we find ourselves saying with David, ‘There is no [shalom] in my bones because of my sin’ (Psalm 38:3). But there is always the Jubilee to be known! And how the Spirit of God delights to ‘sound the trumpet’ every time we find ourselves having fallen into such states!

***the God of peace imparting His own rest & peace
—in the midst of the wrestling***

We’re speaking now of what the Sabbath was always foreshadowing within Israel, and what is at the heart of the Sabbath principle itself: our participation in God’s own eternal rest and peace.

In this we must first of all declare that as ‘the God of peace’ the Father has acted gloriously through the Son, in order to establish peace in the midst of the alienation, disorder, dysfunction and disharmony that has intruded into His creation.

Colossians 1:20

For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, making peace by His blood, shed on the Cross.

It was the Father's pleasure to do all that is needful in this *one redemptive Act*—to ultimately bring about a total manifestation of His own Sabbath rest and peace, within both the earthly and heavenly realms.

Yes, and He did this by sending that One who is *the Mediator of the creation* to be en-fleshed as *humanity's new Head and Representative*, and to embrace *within Himself* the terrible judgment of the curse that has befallen it—and take it down into death! And then in raising Him from the dead the Father established Him, forever, AS THE HEAD OF A *NEW CREATION* THAT IS DESTINED TO BE FILLED WITH THE GLORY OF HIS ETERNAL SONSHIP!!!

And so now all who are in Christ are the 'first fruits' of this coming, ultimate reconciliation of all things. At last, having 'peace with God' through faith (Romans 5:1), our spirit may now be free to participate more and more in nothing less than the perfect rest and peace of the Triune Community of Love, as we are embraced within its blessedness in the Son. Yes, it is the Father's pleasure each day of our life in Him to bring us into a rich foretaste of this heritage—even as we find ourselves *contending* in the most intense of situations.

This was clearly the strong agenda of Jesus for His disciples in the upper room, as He prepared them for a lifetime of hardship heralding the gospel in this world. He said:

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

John 16:33

I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

And then after the Resurrection with the trauma of the past days having had their impact, we read:

John 20:19

When the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

How appropriate for this blessing to be the first word they heard from the lips of the great Overcomer!

Paul earnestly exhorted the Colossians:

Colossians 3:15

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

This personally governing peace was 'the fruit of righteousness' they would know, as they were one with the Son in His Father's love and in His love for His Father—and His love for every other person (Isaiah 32:17).

The persecuted Thessalonians also needed to know the fruit of their union with Jesus:

2 Thessalonians 3:16

May the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way.

And then we have Peter delighting to close his letter to those suffering 'fiery trials' with these words:

1 Peter 5:14

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

The Sabbath rest that is ours in Him is *clearly* so different to the endless, restless struggle of Study 4. The dark-spirited emotion described there is the exact opposite of the wholeness that is in Christ—and greatly affects our personal wellbeing. It is both foolish and very wrong that we should *refuse to remain* fully assured of what we've freely and fully received in Christ, and so fall into such personally debilitated states.

The writer to the Hebrews gives a sober warning to those Jewish believers who were being tempted to drift away from the faith during times of difficulty. He quotes from Psalm 95:

Hebrews 3:8, 10–11

The Holy Spirit says, “[Do not] harden your hearts as you did ... during the time of testing in the wilderness. ... I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray ... They shall never enter My rest’.”

For them to abandon the faith itself and so show themselves to be those who have no place in the ultimate eternal rest to come was, a serious thing indeed. But for us all there is the ever-present danger that we, as continuing people of faith, can become distracted during the ‘testing’ circumstances of our days, finding our heart ‘going astray’ and ‘becoming hardened’ towards the Father; and so, through unbelief, failing to *presently know* the rest we actually *have* through our eternal union with the Son.

The evil one is all the time promising a false rest and peace through idolatrous strategy. In this there may be some element of *sedation* but never that authentic wellbeing that our humanity craves. If we are deceived into the pursuit of ‘a relaxing life’ there will always be frustration. For the life we long for in that *place of rest* that God has promised is only possessed through ‘fighting the good fight’!

Life in this present age is definitely not without its hardships and struggles. Although we have that richly sustaining hope of all things ultimately being brought into the ‘shalom of God’, we are still until that Day ‘soldiers in a fierce battle’ (Ephesians 6:10–20; 1 Timothy 6:12), ‘labourers with a tough task’ (1 Corinthians 3:9–13; Acts 20:24) and ‘pilgrims who are foreigners and strangers on the earth’ (Hebrews 11:13–16).

So, we have that further exhortation of the writer to the Hebrews:

Hebrews 4:11

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest.

Again, the main focus here is upon those who were in danger of drifting away from the faith itself, and so failing to inherit the rest of God either in time or eternity. However, all who are in fact *pressing on* in faith must understand that a vigorous engagement of heart and mind is, *indispensable*, if we are to joyously press towards the final possession of what is promised—and, so, be able to operate each day in a present foretaste of it.

This is another way of saying that we are to be always decisively and wholeheartedly ‘remaining’, ‘embracing’, ‘pursuing’, ‘treasuring’, ‘distinguishing’ and ‘contending’—in regard to those non-negotiable holy agendas set out in this study.

It must be said then, that the rest into which we are called is an *active participation* in the personal and vocational life of the Son. Rest for the redeemed and sanctified children of God certainly does not mean *passivity*. God rested from His work of creation, but—within that rest—has continued to work towards His goal of a fully ‘worked out’ redemption and a ‘wholly renewed’ creation.

Jesus said when accused of working on the Sabbath:

John 5:17

“My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working.”

Living in His Father’s perfect rest and peace, Jesus was the ‘Lord of the Sabbath’ (Matthew 12:8), who was, in Himself, bringing it to its new covenant fulfillment on our behalf—always within a manifestation of strong and free-spirited Sabbath action!

The writer to the Hebrews finally makes this excellent declaration:

Hebrews 13:20–21

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Having reconciled all things to Himself through the blood of Jesus, the God of peace raised Him from the dead to mediate the life of the new covenant to us forever. And the Father will go on enabling us to be vocationally fruitful through the Shepherd-Son. That One, whose greatest pleasure is to keep us in the stillness and refreshment of His own pure-hearted *delight* and *desire*—in the midst of the *contending* that our circumstances in this world demand.

**our new covenant, Sabbath rest & peace
within the Triune Community in the Son
= a life lived within the holy Sanctuary**

A proclamation of the Sabbath rest and peace that is our heritage in Christ, would be deficient without at least some mention of the holy Sanctuary. This is the grand theme that we have seen runs from Genesis to Revelation and that is central to the biblical Story: the reality of God's provision of a holy PLACE where His AWESOME PRESENCE may be known and enjoyed.

In Study 5 we saw that the old covenant temple / sanctuary was a sign of God's dynamic, personal dwelling among His people. It was a provision that gave them a strong sense of *access into His presence in worship* through the sacrificial system He had given.

And then in Study 6 we saw a glorious fulfillment of this old covenant imagery in the En-fleshed Son, whose own body was the Holy Sanctuary among us: the very dwelling place of the glory of His Father manifested in His peerless Sonship. All that has been said above about Jesus among us is to be seen in the light of this reality.

And so, within the accomplished redemption of the new covenant in Christ, it is now to *Him* that we come rather than to a physical place; and this not merely as *seekers* but as those who in Him, are together, 'a holy temple in the Lord'. Yes, in Him and with Him (the very Dwelling Place of the Father) able to enjoy all that is His in His Father's presence and purpose of love!

Study 17, 'On The Way Within The Redeemed Community', will deal with this major biblical theme in more detail, so nothing else needs to be added at this point. We need only understand that THE REST AND PEACE OF PURE-HEARTED DELIGHT AND DESIRE, IS *THE ETERNAL LIFE OF THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY* THAT IS EVERY MOMENT OUR ABODE—IN THE SON, BY THE SPIRIT, BEFORE THE FATHER'S FACE!!!

the hope of that ultimate, eternal rest for the people of God

As we saw at the close of Study 6, the Final Day will release all of the redeemed into the perfect rest and peace of the Triune Community of Love. They will live in the full and uncontested blessedness of a fulfilled redemption; and this within a creation that was complete from the beginning, but will then, have been entirely renewed. WHAT HAS BEEN KNOWN IN PART—AND RELENTLESSLY OPPOSED BY DARK POWER—WILL BE WHOLLY ENJOYED FOREVER!!!

We are told that the Day will come when just as God rested from His work of creation, so too will His servants enter an ultimate rest from their contested and vocationally rich, redemptive activities.

Hebrews 4:9–10

There remains then a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also rest from their own work, just as God did from His.

Revelation 14:13

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.”

The unrelenting labours of Christ’s servants will, indeed, ultimately cease; and then all the fruit which those expended energies have accomplished will be openly revealed and celebrated! The contest will be over, for the oppressor of the saints will no longer be able to intrude into the Holy One’s good creation.

Romans 16:20

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

In the midst of our present *relentless battle*, there now is *set before* all who are in Christ an eternally unbounded joy and delight and perfect rest and peace. That is, the *hope* of a final participation in the very atmosphere of the Triune Community: a hope which, itself, brings something of a *foretaste* of these very things. And yet such blessing is known in the midst of *love’s present grief and anguish*, and at times *holy indignation*, in the face of all that now resists the Blesséd One’s glorious purpose. Within the imagery of the Book of Revelation, we see that for many who have been killed for the cause of Christ, their rest while awaiting the Final Day is still with an aching anticipation—as they look towards the final elimination of evil from the creation:

Revelation 6:9–11

I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice. “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants and brothers and sisters were killed just as they had been.

These who had sacrificed their lives for the sake of the gospel were at rest in the Lord’s presence. And yet there was still the wrestling—a jealous zeal for God’s holy name, with impatient yearning for an end to blasphemous violence against the testimony of Jesus!

In the Transfiguration, we saw that Moses and Elijah were clearly *full of anticipation* regarding the great Exodus that was to be accomplished in the Son.

For all of the saints—on earth or waiting in the unseen, heavenly realm—redemption is always with a view to the glorious fulfillment that is to come on THE FINAL DAY: THE SABBATH REST AND PEACE ESTABLISHED IN PERFECTION, IN A WHOLLY RENEWED CREATION THAT IS THE MANIFEST DWELLING PLACE OF GOD—WHERE HE IS LOVED, ADORED, HONOURED AND ENJOYED, AND WHERE HIS BELOVED DELIGHT TO PARTICIPATE WITH HIM FOREVER IN HIS GLORIOUS PURPOSE OF LOVE!!!

authentic responders & light travelers —free to live wisely & fruitfully in the fulfillment of our holy calling as we press towards that Final Day

This study was originally entitled ‘On The Way & Travelling Light’. What a good picture that is of life in the Son! As the redeemed children of God, we may all be released from the burden of *excess baggage* that idolatry brings!

Idolaters must travel through life constantly gathering false objects of ‘worth-ship’ that bring some promise of human liberty, identity, serenity, capacity and destiny. Of course, the load of such foolish and futile endeavours weighs heavily upon the spirit of any rebel child, creature and servant. For

they have been structured, through creation, to know the human wellbeing that can come only from the hand of their loving Father, Creator and King.

How different it is to live within those six God-given, non-negotiable and indispensable elements of inheriting response—always decisively and wholeheartedly:

- *remaining* fully assured of the lavishly abundant grace that is ours in Christ;
- *embracing* the one pure-hearted, primary delight;
- *pursuing* the three pure-hearted, primary desires;
- *treasuring* the life-giving word of God and the dynamic-intimacy of prayer;
- *distinguishing* between the two communities: the redeemed and the world;
- *contending* in the relentless spiritual battle against the world, the flesh and the devil.

In this we certainly may know the lovely simplicity of being AUTHENTIC RESPONDERS AND LIGHT TRAVELLERS, ON OUR WAY TO A GLORIOUS ETERNAL INHERITANCE!!!

Such is the joyous freedom of the redeemed humanity into which we have been called, within the supremely-divine *wisdom* and *truth* of that sonship we were created for. As Jesus said:

John 8:32, 36

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set You free ... If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

YES, IN THE LIBERATING SON WE MAY LIVE FREELY UNDER HIS GOOD YOKE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS—AND SO *FULFILL* OUR HIGH HUMAN CALLING, AS WE BEAR THE ETERNAL FRUITS OF HIS OWN HOLY DELIGHT AND DESIRE!!!

CONCLUSION

So there we have it: ‘THE RESPONSE OF INHERITORS ON THE WAY TO FINAL FREEDOM’, and the present outcome that is ours to enjoy each day within the journey.

The remainder of the series will simply fill out the nature of this foretaste of final freedom that we’ve received, and the way it enables us to live wisely and fruitfully within every personal, relational and vocational expression of our humanity—and this, in a beautifully integrated manner within the ‘shalom of God’.

We’re ready now, then, to embark upon Study 10: ON THE WAY LIVING A HOLY LIFE—REMAINING IN THE LIGHT OF ‘THE GREAT REDMPTIVE REALITY’. This will be a further proclamation of the ‘freedom to live wisely and fruitfully’ that we’ve been speaking of—showing even more specifically the provision we’ve received as ‘holy ones, in the Beloved’, for this to be our daily experience!

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