



# **PASTORS' SCHOOL 2000**

**MORNING SESSIONS**



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# CONTENTS

<i>Study 1: Cain and Abel—The Giving and the Not Giving Robin Mitchell</i>	1
<i>Study 2: Israel and Sacrifice—I Deane Meatheringham</i>	6
<i>Study 3: Sacrifice and Thanksgiving Andrew Klynsmith</i>	10
<i>Study 4: The Gift of Propitiation and Its Fruits Randall Lawton</i>	16
<i>Study 5: The Gifts to Israel Ian Pennicook</i>	22
<i>Study 6: God's Giving and Gifts in Creation Grant Thorpe</i>	35
<i>Study 7: New Testament Principles of Giving II Corinthians 8 —9 John Dunn</i>	39
<i>Study 8: Dorea, Domata and Charismata Siew Kiong Tham</i>	46
<i>Study 9: Israel and Sacrifice—II Deane Meatheringham</i>	52
<i>Study 10: The Fullness of the Blessing of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit-I Geoffrey Bingham</i>	55
<i>Study 11: The Blessing of Eternal Life Colin Jones</i>	61
<i>Study 12: The Abundancy of Grace Rod James</i>	69
<i>Study 13: The Fullness of the Blessing of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—II Geoffrey Bingham</i>	75
<i>Study 14: The Gifts in and for Love Forever Martin Bleby</i>	84
<i>Study 15: One Full, Perfect and Sufficient Sacrifice Geoffrey Bingham</i>	93

*Copies of the Evening Studies are available in a separate volume*

## study one

# Cain and Abel—the Giving and the Not Giving

Readings: Genesis 4:1–10; Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:10–13

*Robin Mitchell*

Paul, standing before the Areopagus, spoke to the Athenians of their idol to the unknown God. He declared:

What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, <sup>25</sup>nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things (Acts 17:23b–25, *NRSV*).

God is the giver. He gives ‘life and breath and all things’. We know that he gives because he loves. In fact, ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8). John’s statement only makes sense if we understand God to be triune; Father, Son and Spirit. Each person of the Godhead gives to and serves the other, with delight; each receives from and is blessed by the other. If we understand that we are made in the image of God then it is no surprise to discover that we are called to look beyond ourselves; to give and to serve, both God and one another. We also receive, not grasping selfishly but with delight in the giver, as we receive the love gifts that God and others joyfully give us.

This leads us to the story of Cain and Abel and what Geoffrey Bingham has called ‘The Anti-Gift Mentality’.<sup>1</sup> As we speak of Cain and Abel the question that leaps into our minds is this, ‘why did Yahweh accept the offering of Abel and have no regard for Cain’s offering?’ Is it simply that God likes shepherds and not gardeners, or that animal sacrifices are acceptable and vegetables are not? Is it simply that God always seems to prefer the younger brother over the older brother in the book of Genesis? Is it maybe the different motives of the brothers, known only to God but not revealed to us in Genesis 4? According to Wenham (1987:104) there are many suggestions, the most commonly accepted is that God’s choice relates to the different approaches of the brothers to worship, these differences being reflected in the quality of their gifts.

We must not quickly dismiss Brueggemann (1982:56f.), who says that ‘the trouble comes not from Cain, but from Yahweh, the strange God of Israel. Inexplicably, Yahweh chooses—accepts and rejects.’ He goes on to say that, ‘By his seemingly capricious rejection of Cain, Yahweh has created a crisis. He poses the crisis to Cain and insists that Cain resolve it.’ Cain can either ‘do well’, or suffer the consequences if he responds in a manner that is ‘not well’. The text tells us that the consequences are that sin, waiting like a ferocious beast, will pounce upon him and ambush him. Cain has a choice, God has given Man a mandate to rule over the creation (Gen. 1:28): will Cain now choose to be ruled by his rage and his depression (4:6), and so allow sin to further ravage him, or will he yet rule over/master sin? The choice is his, and his choice will effect the rest of his life.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Bingham, *NCTM Monday Pastors’ Studies*, 4/3/96, pp. 4ff.

Steinbeck bases his play *East of Eden* on the Hebrew word, 'thou mayest rule' (l WmT Qal, imperfect of l Sm 'to rule'), found in Genesis 4:7. One of the characters says:

'. . . It is easy out of laziness, out of weakness, to throw oneself onto the lap of the deity, saying, "I couldn't help it; the way was set." But think of the glory of that choice! That makes a man a man. A cat has no choice, a bee must make honey. There's no godliness there . . . I feel that I am a man. And I feel that a man is a very important thing—maybe more important than a star. This is not theology. I have no bent towards gods. But I have a new love for that glittering instrument, the human soul. It is a lovely and unique thing in the universe. It is always attacked and never destroyed—because 'Thou mayest [rule]'.<sup>2</sup>

We must see that Cain's rage and depression are not psychological infirmities that he has no power over, they are his response to God's actions which he, Cain, has judged to be wrong.<sup>3</sup>

As pastors we recognise that these 'seemingly capricious' acts of God, that bring us to crisis, are not uncommon, and in them we always have to choose 'to do well', or to be pounced on by sin.

While we must not make light of an individual's anguish and suffering in the face of seeming rejection and so-called disaster, we must at the same time remember that God is sovereign, and his ways are higher than our ways. We should also remember that adverse circumstances need not control our response. We can 'do well'. 'Thou mayest rule.' Speaking of Job's early reactions to the disasters that struck him, Thieliicke (1964:193) says that Job, 'went on strike and withdrew into the sulking corner of the religiously disappointed'. Job's wife advised, 'curse God and die'. Job replied, 'You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?' (Job 2:9f.). Job came out of the corner and chose to do right, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him' (Job 13:15, *KJV*).

We easily slip into the 'sulking corner of the religiously disappointed'. There are many lurking in this corner: 'good religious people' like Cain, who devotedly bring their sacrifices to the altar until God, or his servant 'the Church', upsets them. We may even find theological students and pastors among them. Here they nurture their hurts and disappointments until the root of bitterness springs up (Heb. 12:15). Their common cry is, 'how can a God of love allow this?' And if their rage continues long enough they cry out, 'The heavens are silent, God doesn't answer my prayers, there is no God; I am an atheist'. Whatever the event that has triggered the rage, all are angry with God because he has not done what they regard to be right.

And so God came to Cain, as he does to all who walk in his way, and he asks, 'Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?'

What did Cain expect—what was Cain's problem? The text is not very specific and so we need to tread carefully, but most commentators note the emphasis put on the naming of Cain.

Cain means 'I have gotten [gained] a man'. There is a phonetic assonance between the Hebrew words 'Cain', and 'gain' (Wenham:103). Commenting on this, Thieliicke (191f.) says, 'Thus Eve, the proud mother, suggests that this son will bear the dignity of being the first-born and that for her he is to be the quintessence of power and strength'. Abel on the other hand means something like 'nothingness'; 'vapour'; 'frailty'; 'breath'; or 'vanity', and so Thieliicke suggests that, 'From the beginning Cain grew up with the suggestion that first rights in everything were his due . . . "I, Cain, am the star, the privileged one; but Abel is simply an extra on the stage"' (194). And so God, by refusing Cain's offering, cut straight across everything that Cain thought was right, both about himself and about God.

As Cain came to the altar, he expected that God would dance to his tune and bless him. As is commonly said, 'If you do the right thing by God, then God will do the right thing by you'

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<sup>2</sup> J. Steinbeck, *East of Eden*, 1952, pp. 301, 304. Quoted in Brueggemann (59).

<sup>3</sup> That bears thinking about in the counselling room?

(‘I’ll pat your back, you pat mine . . . God’s O.K. ’Cos He’s my mate’<sup>4</sup>). True, God will do the right thing, but who determines what the right thing is? Do we, or does God?

We can see that Cain’s giving and worship were not altruistic. He gave, expecting in return that God would affirm him and do what he, Cain, felt to be right. His continuing worship depended upon what he believed should be God’s ‘right’ response. His giving was not giving, but an attempt to buy God’s favour. When God acted differently to his expectations he felt betrayed, a victim, and he raged against God. Cain’s heart is exposed. He is happy to worship so long as there is something in it for him, such worship is never thanksgiving, it is not the expression of love for God but simply an attempt to prosper from the hand of God in whom all blessing is found.

Perhaps for the first time in his life Cain did not get the pat on the back that he desired. Instead God confronted him, giving him the opportunity to see what was in his heart, and then to change.

The crisis that God brings is always a call to faith; an opportunity for renewal; an invitation to true worship and fellowship where we can joyfully give to God and freely receive from God.

God is not capricious, he gives freely, he longs for fellowship with those whom he has created. He delights in our worship. We are told that he sits enthroned on the praises of his people. Because God is love, he cannot receive worship which, by its selfish, manipulative nature, makes true giving and joyful receiving and the communion of persons impossible.

Unlike Job, whom we have also spoken of, Cain would not do right. Sin then seized him by the throat and filled his mind with poison. He thought that God, who in fact loved him and sought to correct and glorify him, had rejected him. He was convinced in his mind that God hated him and preferred his brother Abel. Cain then hated God with all his being because his worship was not acceptable. His anger turned towards his brother Abel, whom he now hated and despised as one favoured by God. In his eyes Abel was truly the ‘vapour’, the ‘nothing’, the ‘non-person’, whereas he was Cain, the ‘man’, and this man, rejected and wounded, would not tolerate such unfairness and injustice and so, in his great manic depressive rage, Cain planned revenge. He would murder his brother.

As Geoffrey Bingham has discerned, ‘Cain murdered his brother over a matter of worship’. He says, ‘It may be difficult for us to see worship—that is, differences in worship—as the cause of violence and murder, but this is so, and we need to interpret much of violence and killing with this key to its cause’.<sup>5</sup>

Note also that renunciation of God brings with it the renunciation of the brother in whom the image of God is perceived, and especially as the brother is seen to be at one with God.

It is helpful to see how the Cain and Abel story is used in both Jewish and New Testament literature. All of the extant Targums<sup>6</sup> on Genesis 4:8, except one, attribute the actual killing of Cain to an argument between the brothers as to the righteousness of God. Cain complains that the rejection of his offering is proof that God is unjust. Abel argues that the world is governed justly and that God would not receive Cain’s offering because his deeds were unrighteous. Cain eventually cries out, ‘There is no judgment, there is no judge, there is no other world, there is no gift of good reward for the just and no punishment for the wicked’.<sup>7</sup>

The story is a universal story. The cries of the children of Cain are still heard in our streets today.

While we have concentrated on Cain, the writer of Hebrews looks at Abel. He says:

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<sup>4</sup> M. Bleby, ‘I’ll Pat Your Back, You Pat Mine’, *New Creation Hymn Book*, vol. 2, no. 43, NCPI, Blackwood, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> G. Bingham, *ibid.* pp. 4f.

<sup>6</sup> Targums: the Aramaic translations of the *Tanakh* (OT), which were read aloud in the Synagogue as a vernacular aid to understanding the biblical text (Shulam, 1997:xii).

<sup>7</sup> Targums, Pseudo-Jonathan, ‘Neofiti’, in Bauckham (1983:80) and Lane (1991:334).

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts . . . (Heb. 11:4).

For this writer, faith is the key to righteousness. It is not possible to please God apart from faith (11:6). Abel did that which was right and his offering was accepted. We may recall the words of Jesus:

'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent' (John 6:29).

A faith relationship is a primary ingredient for true worship. Abel, along with the other great people of faith in Hebrews 11, sought God, delighted in God, and trusted in God. Their interest was not in what they might get from God but in knowing and fellowshiping with the living God.

The mercenary interests of Cain are again mentioned by the writer of Jude. He speaks of Cain in the context of intruders who pervert the grace of God (v. 4); those who perished because of unbelief and immorality (v. 5); and those who reject authority (v. 8). He then says:

Woe to them! For they go the way of Cain, and abandon themselves to Balaam's error for the sake of gain, and perish in Korah's rebellion (v. 11).

This is not good news for the prosperity gospel teachers. In referring to Cain, John's focus is not on faith but on righteous living and on love:

<sup>9</sup>Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God. <sup>10</sup>The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters. <sup>11</sup>For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. <sup>12</sup>We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous (1 John 3:9–12).

The writer here has understood God's words to Cain, 'if you do well' (Gen. 4:7), as pointing backwards to Cain's attitude and life as he came to God with his offering. His evil heart and evil deeds made it impossible for God to receive his offering. John goes further than any other New Testament writer, putting Cain in the category of those who are 'child[ren] of the devil' (1 John 3:8). While this is so, John's primary concern is to show that because God is love, unless we live in love we do not live in God. He continues:

<sup>14</sup>We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. <sup>15</sup>All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. <sup>16</sup>We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. <sup>17</sup>How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? (1 John 3:14–17).

For John, righteousness, is obedience to the love command and is the content of the good news heard from the beginning. We understand that such love results from the fact that God's seed (v. 9) abides in us. Love then is the demonstration of our 'divine origin' (Smalley 1984:181).

Brueggemann may again help us to see what is at the heart of the matter:

By joining *brother-love to resurrection* ('We know that we have passed out of death into *life*, because we love the brethren' [1 John 3:14]), and by linking *brother hate to death* ('he who does not love remains in *death*' [1 John 3:14]), the issue of the brother is made the ultimate theological crisis . . . The miracle of new life, the wonder of resurrection, is linked to brotherly reconciliation. That is what passing from death to life is about (1 John 3:14).<sup>8</sup>

We have come full circle. God is love, and within the Godhead there is true worship; true giving; true receiving. Made in the image of God, recreated in Christ, God's seed is in us, we are

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<sup>8</sup> Brueggemann, p. 64.

called to participate fully in the life of the Godhead; living in rich communion with God and each other.

The story of Cain shows us giving that is not true giving; receiving that is mere grasping for personal gain; worship that is self-centred, attempting to manipulate God. True and free giving, joyful receiving and genuine thanksgiving and worship, cannot exist apart from a faith/love relationship with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We can be sure that the ‘strange God of Israel who inexplicably chooses’ will be standing at the altar as we bring our gifts. At times, his ‘seemingly capricious’ rejection may plunge us into crisis. He will do so in love, calling us to leave the way of Cain and stand with faithful Abel. When we think it is too hard, he will simply say, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? . . . sin is lurking at the door . . . you must rule over it.’ And if we do, then God the giver, the true lover, will teach us what true giving and receiving and thanksgiving and life are all about.

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## study two

# Israel and Sacrifice—I

## *Sacrifice from the Other Side*

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### THE BURNT OFFERING

Leviticus was the first book to be studied by Jewish children in the synagogue. It gave the instructions (Law) for the worship of the Lord. Today it is probably the last book of the Bible that anyone in the modern Church reads seriously. Yet when Leviticus is expounded to a Christian congregation, it not only connects people up with the fulfilling gift of God for us in Jesus Christ, but also interprets for us some of our most archaic needs. The liturgy for sacrificial worship described in Leviticus may appear to be more barbarous and archaic than Enlightenment rationalism will allow. But we are more archaic than the myths of modernity let us believe.

#### **Leviticus Commences with the Prescribed Liturgy for the Burnt Offering, Leviticus 1:1–9**

The burnt offering was the commonest of all the sacrifices. In a personal act of devotion a drama is enacted before the presence of the Lord. The worshipper brings an unblemished domestic animal, slaughters it, skins it, and butchers it. The officiating priest collects the blood and sprinkles it around the altar. Then the dismembered carcass is placed upon the fire. The oblation ascends to Yahweh in the fire and/or smoke as an ascending sacrifice.

### SACRIFICE AND COVENANT

The worshipper was not bringing his gift in order to qualify for membership amongst God's elect. In the unilateral movement of God, Israel was called and redeemed into a people of God's presence and favour. It is from within the covenant that the worshipper offers his sacrifice, and he does so in accord with the obligations of the covenant relationship.

Israel could trace her unique covenant roots back to Abraham and the covenant made by Yahweh with him and his descendants. Entailed within the Abrahamic covenant was animal sacrifice (Gen. 15:7–21).

With the revelation of God's holiness to Moses, God determined to redeem Israel from the slavery of Egypt through the blood sacrifice of the Passover (Exod. 6:6). By

the sacrifice of lambs and the daubing of blood, God's son—Israel—was provided with a sacrifice which declared that a death had already taken place. The ratifying of God's covenant at Sinai, with sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood, established fellowship between God and his people. Sacrifice consecrated God's people, depicting that they had this relationship through redemptive sacrifice.

The relation between the Passover and the other sacrifices in the Mosaic system is this, that they prolong in Israel that which the Passover once for all achieved.<sup>1</sup>

No foreigner was allowed to offer the sacrifices of Israel (Lev. 22:25). Through the covenant, Israel had access to the sacrifices, which presupposed fellowship with God. The sacrifices were designed for the maintenance and enjoyment of that fellowship.

### MAINTAINING FELLOWSHIP

We are told that the burnt offering is 'for acceptance in your behalf before the LORD' (Lev. 1:3). In order to be devoted to Yahweh, sacrifice has to be made for the worshipper to be acceptable. To maintain fellowship, sin has to be attended to.

The worshipper does not merely touch the animal about to be slaughtered, but *samak* means to press upon, to lean on the beast (Lev. 24:14; Isa. 59:16). From Leviticus 16:21 we could interpret that the worshipper would confess his sins as he identified with the animal.

Providing that the worshipper is not dissembling before the Lord, we take it that in bringing the sacrifice there is an acknowledgment of disorder, with the numbing effect of guilt. The law of God has been broken and justice demands punishment. This would be correct from a forensic point of view. But there is more to it than this, for the worshipper is a member of the people who dwell in communion with God. When a person fails to do what he should do in obedience to God, we are told that he is 'subject to punishment', which means he shall 'bear his iniquity' (Lev. 5:1). He begins to suffer because he has 'incurred guilt' (Lev. 5:17). Guilt is punishment. We experience angst primarily because of a fracture in personal relationship. The law will reinforce this as an external and legal command.

God's holy people carry the alienating and numbing effects of guilt, which stem from disordered relationships. Skewed lives can lead to an immobility which seems beyond resolve (Ps. 6:4–7; 32:1–5; 39:2–3, 7–10).

The prime cause of the worshipper's pain is because his sin has set off alarm bells in heaven. God notices and responds. The burnt offering makes *atonement* on behalf of the worshipper. The need for atonement to be made means that wrath has to be turned away. P. T. Forsyth's maxim is that nothing will satisfy the conscience of Man that does not first satisfy the conscience of God. The God of covenant love is aghast at the distorted and abusive ways his people live before him. To continue in communion with God, the offence must be removed. Reconciliation rests upon atonement. Only this will rob guilt of its power.

The purpose of the burnt offering was to prevent God's displeasure, to deal with the dysfunctionality of Man's sin as a covenant partner with God, and to prevent Man's sin from being turned into lasting punishment.

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Motyer, 'Priestly Sacrifices in the OT', an essay in *Eucharistic Sacrifice*, ed. J. I. Packer, Church Book Room Press, London, 1962, p. 29.

## ‘SACRIFICE FROM THE OTHER SIDE’

This phrase comes from Walter Brueggemann (*Finally Comes The Poet*, Fortress Press, Indianapolis, 1989, p. 30).

Atonement in the Old Testament was not the placating of God’s anger, but the sacrament of God’s grace. It was the expression of God’s anger on the one hand and the expressing and putting in action of God’s grace on the other hand. The effect of atonement was to cover sin from God’s eyes, so it should no longer make a visible breach between God and His people . . . Sacrifices were not desperate efforts and surrenders made by terrified people in the hope of propitiating an angry deity. The sacrifices were in themselves prime acts of obedience to God’s means of grace and His expressed will.<sup>2</sup>

In Leviticus 1 the action of the priest with the animal comes from the other side, and what is done is done at a distance from the worshipper—for God is not directly available. The participants in the drama know that God overrides the distance, and deals directly with the guilt.

The sacrifice comes from God as his provision. Leviticus 17:11 says the blood for atonement is a *gift*. The sacrifice is donated for God’s own purposes; based on, and coming in conformity with, God’s own nature. The ‘life’—*nephesh*—is in the blood (Nephesh I). The blood makes atonement for your ‘lives’—*naphshoth* (Nephesh II). The blood makes atonement—*bannephesh* (Nephesh III). Nephesh III refers back to Nephesh II. The blood displays a life forfeited, and given up in death. This is given in the place of the guilty.<sup>3</sup>

‘Atonement’, *kipper*, is a denominative verb which comes from the noun *kopher*, which means ‘a ransom price’.<sup>4</sup> The giving of the ransom is God’s. God alone has the being, the life, and the passion to give of himself the life which will ultimately be poured out in the shedding of his blood in the place of sinners.

With the ascent of the offering in the smoke, the worshipper comes to the extremely massive statement that it was soothing to God. Knowing that the Lord is well pleased means that the disorder of sin has been removed and healing comes through union with God.

## THE BURNT OFFERING AND CHRIST’S SACRIFICE

Not as a moral example—to teach us the religious steps we must climb to spiritually ascend to God—does Christ set us an example. Jesus is the incarnate Son of God come to us in our flesh and blood. As one of us, Jesus takes humanity into communion with the Father. In coming to us, God has provided the sacrifice for the disorder of sin, from the other side. ‘Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.’ ‘In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.’

Like the burnt offering, an exchange takes place in the coming of Christ. Christ becomes what we are, so that in him we become what he is. He takes our sin and bestows on us his true humanity.

Christ is both the favour and the gift of God to us (Rom. 5:15ff.). Jesus lives in full solidarity with corrupt, mortal, humanity. He is the one man who has responded to

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<sup>2</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1994), p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> Motyer, *ibid*, pp. 40f.

<sup>4</sup> cf. Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Tyndale, 1955), pp. 17ff.

God's call. He alone is the only human being whose faith and obedience is perfectly acceptable to God.

In his willing obedience, Jesus had something to offer God (Heb. 8:3; 10:5–10). This was his body wherein, through obedience to the Father, Jesus gave himself up as a ransom in the place of many (Mark 10:45). Jesus, the incarnate Son, was the sacrifice who bore all the sin of all humanity, for all time. Christ obeys the Father unto the shedding of his blood in death. In Christ's death sin was atoned for ever.

In the man Jesus, who is risen from the dead, sinners have their guilt rectified, and in him they are reconciled to God (Rom. 4:25; II Cor. 5:19).

Thomas Torrance recounts an episode of a student who had written an essay on the atonement, in which the student saw Christ's death as simply a demonstration of the love of God. The student had expounded the 'moral influence theory' of the atonement. Torrance showed the student a reproduction of Grunewald's famous painting of the crucifixion, at Colmar, which is extremely vivid. It focuses on the fearfully lacerated flesh of Jesus which he suffered from flagellation and the wounds inflicted upon him by the soldiers. These were now blackened by the sun. The student shrank back in horror at what he saw. Torrance said to him:

Harold, you have written about that as a picture of the love of God. It is certainly a picture of the fearful sin and hatred of mankind, but if you can tell me WHY Jesus was crucified, WHY he endured such unbelievable pain and anguish, then you will be able to say something of the real meaning of the atonement, and about why the crucifixion of Jesus is indeed a revelation of the love of God—Christ was crucified like that FOR our sakes, to save us from sin and judgement.<sup>5</sup>

The burnt offering shows us what we need to know about the meaning of Christ's death. His is the sacrifice in which all sin was immolated on the cross in the fire of God's wrath. The glorious sacrifice of Christ is received by God as well pleasing. Like the ancient worshipper with his beast, we need to lean upon the head of our sacrifice, identifying with our crucified Lord, confessing our sins.

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<sup>5</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1999, pp. 54f.

## study three

# Sacrifice and Thanksgiving

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It doesn't take long in reading the Bible to encounter the action of sacrifice—the offerings of Abel and Cain—and then in continuing to see that the matter of sacrifice is common throughout the whole of the Scriptures. It is not simply an Old Testament phenomenon, dispensed with in the coming of Christ. Rather, the number of references commanding offering or sacrifice<sup>1</sup> in the New Testament (e.g. Rom. 12:1; 6:13; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 13:15), shows that this matter is essential to the life of the people of God. In fact, the church could be typified as the 'sacrificial community'; another way of speaking of it is as the 'community of love'.

### THE ORIGINS OF SACRIFICE

The first actions of sacrifice we note in the Scriptures are those of Cain and Abel, who both brought offerings of their produce (Gen. 4:3–4). Continuing on from there, we next encounter sacrifice in Genesis 8:20, burnt offerings as a thanksgiving sacrifice following Noah's deliverance from the Flood. Then, in Genesis 12:7–8, when the Lord appeared to Abraham and established His covenant promise to him, Abraham responded in sacrificial worship. When this promise was reiterated in 13:14–17, we again see Abraham responding in sacrifice, in 13:18. And so we could go on through the unfolding of salvation history in this way, noting the occasions of sacrifice: Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Manoah, Samuel, David, etc. Alongside this, of course, is the contrasting offering of false sacrifices in idolatry—again a line traceable from Cain onwards.

What is clear is that whenever people encountered God in His grace and kindness, they offered sacrifice to Him. This response of sacrifice was not commanded, but flowed out of the encounter. There must have been something about the encounter with the Lord which drew out sacrifice from those who received His grace. If, when people met him and came to know Him, they sacrificed, then the truth of sacrifice must be very

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<sup>1</sup> The word 'offering' comes from a Latin term, *offerre* referring to the presentation of a gift; 'sacrifice' has the meaning of making holy, *sacer*, 'holy' + *facere*, 'to make'. The Hebrew expression 'present an offering' is a hiphil form, *hiqrib*, and has the idea of causing to be brought near—the offering was the *qorban*. It was a broad word and included most kinds of sacrifice. The verb *zabach* (to slaughter for sacrifice) is used in Leviticus and virtually the rest of the Old Testament only in reference to the peace offerings. Strictly speaking, then, the word 'sacrifice' in the Old Testament refers only to animal offerings slaughtered and eaten as part of a communal meal, and 'offering' refers more comprehensively to animal or vegetable offerings. The Greek terms corresponding to these phrases—*thuo* and *prosphero*—do not have quite the same precision.

deep in the heart of God Himself. Sacrifice appears to be a gift given in the establishing of relationship between God and Man.

Sacrifice seems to be 'compatible' with God; that this response came whenever men and women met God indicates that sacrifice must be very deep in the heart of God Himself. Further, the fact of false sacrifice from Cain onwards tells us that sacrifice is very deep in the psyche of Man also. Certainly at a human level, the response of people to (seeming) acts of sacrifice by others is very deep.

Hosea 6:6 says, 'For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings'. This was not an absolute criticism of the sacrificial system by Hosea, but rather a pointing to the heart of the matter of the sacrifices given to Israel. Right at this heart were the issues of steadfast love (*chesed*) and the knowledge of the God (*da'ath elohim*). To sacrifice aright was not simply the performance of a set ritual, but a coming to the knowledge of God. The origins of sacrifice then are within God Himself, the expression of His own character and being. Trying to define sacrifice is quite difficult, but it certainly involves so loving another that we give up to them and for them what was precious to us, but which cost is of no consideration to us now in view of that love. To be sacrificial is to be concerned not for yourself but for others. For this reason sacrifice is right at the heart of the being of the Triune God.

Moltmann says of the divine relationships:

Each divine Person exists in the light of the other and in the other. By virtue of the love they have for one another they ex-ist totally in the other: the Father ex-ists by virtue of his love, as himself entirely in the Son; the Son, by virtue of his self-surrender, ex-ists as himself totally in the Father, and so on.<sup>2</sup>

The divine relationships are relationships of utter self-giving. Jesus spoke of the Father giving all things to him, and of withholding nothing from him (see John 3:34–35; 5:19–30; 6:37; 10:29; 13:3; and especially the great high priestly prayer of 17:1–26). Note too in John 5:30 the reciprocal relationship of utter devotion to the Father, 'I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me'. The character of the Son's self-giving to the Father is that of submission and obedience—glad, free and total. Love looks not to one's own things, but to the things of others (Phil. 2:4), and so in this it is always sacrificial. So, to be in communion with God, to know God, means that a person and community will by nature of the case be sacrificial.

## COMMUNION, THE GOAL AND THE GIFT OF SACRIFICE

The Old Testament sacrifices were part of the gift of God to Israel that were included in the gifts that Paul lists in Romans 9: 4–5: 'Theirs is . . . the worship . . .' It is important to have clear that the sacrifices were not devised by Israel, but given to them. Leviticus 17:11 makes clear the giftedness of the sacrifices, 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life'. This gift was temporary and also prophetic—as the writer to the Hebrews makes clear (Heb. 10:1–18). Yet they were enormously powerful and dynamic proclamations to the people of God of the grace of God and the purposes of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Moltmann, quoted by D. Meatheringham in 'The Dynamics of Divine and Human Perichoresis', *Trinitarian Theology: Human Unity and Relationships*, 1991 NCTM Pastors' School, NCPI, Blackwood, 1991.

Leviticus 17:11 points to the goal of sacrifice, especially the blood-shedding sacrifices, that they were given ‘... to make atonement for your souls’. Atonement is more than forgiveness, although forgiveness is an enormous and essential part of atonement. Atonement is being brought into rich, personal, communal fellowship with the Lord.

There was a logic in the Old Testament sacrifices. Basically there were three kinds of sacrifice: propitiatory offerings, to deal with sin and guilt; dedicatory offerings, an expression of thanksgiving to the Lord (these are called ‘pleasant to the Lord’); and peace or fellowship sacrifices, expressing intimacy with the Lord and with His people. The basic offerings were the propitiatory offerings, even though the sacrifices we encounter first in the Scriptures were either dedicatory or communal offerings. In those cases, the encounter with the Lord had shown to those worshippers that the Lord was the Lord of mercy and grace who had dealt with their sins. It was with the giving of the Law that the propitiatory sacrifices were established. In Israel’s worship, the propitiatory sacrifices were given to the means of proclamation of this fact of God’s grace. The other sacrifices, dedicatory and fellowship, were offered following this offering. The propitiatory sacrifices were efficacious, because the Lord had given the blood to be the means by which atonement was to be made. The life of the animal sacrificed stood for the forfeited life of the sinner—worshipper. The animal’s blood was shed in the stead of the worshipper’s.

Equally essential to atonement were the dedicatory offerings—the whole burnt offerings, the cereal offerings, and the drink offering. The offering of the gift symbolised the complete dedication of the worshipper to the Lord. Again, the gift stood in the stead of the worshipper, not this time to bear the sins but to proclaim the responding love. In the offering of the dedicatory gifts, Israel symbolised the heart of the Law, ‘you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might’ (Deut. 6:5). This self-dedication to the Lord was grounded on the knowledge that God had made them His people through His action of grace, through His dealing with their sins. That is, their dedicatory sacrifices were *by the mercies of God*.

Note well that both sacrifices, dedicatory and propitiatory, were the gift of God to His people. It is not entirely accurate to describe the propitiatory sacrifices as God’s gift, and the dedicatory sacrifices as human response. The grace of God includes the way of response within itself.

The outflow of these two offerings, propitiatory and dedicatory, were then the fellowship or peace offerings, which symbolised the gratitude of the people to God and their desire to participate in His gift of fellowship. In many cases these offerings were entirely voluntary—so, for example, the regulations surrounding the thanksgiving offerings in Leviticus 7:12ff. and 22:29–30 do not command the sacrifice, but assume the fact of it and then regulate the way it is to be offered.

## **CHRIST’S ONCE-FOR-ALL SACRIFICE**

Athanasius spoke of Jesus Christ exercising a two-fold ministry: ‘He ministered the things of God to man, and the things of man to God’. We could add, ‘... and so he became the place of communion, God with man and man with God’. These three aspects of Christ’s ministry correspond to the three-fold action of the sacrifice. In Christ’s ministry the whole of the sacrificial system is fulfilled. Hebrews 9:11–14 says:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

The ‘good things that have come’ could be summed up in ‘communion with God’. This goal was obtained by the taking of his own blood into the Holy Place for atonement. He, in his death on the Cross, so completely identified with us that he took our sins upon himself, and bore the judgment of that sin within himself. Whilst he bore the judgment of the world, he was not simply punished instead of us. This is the heart of the suffering servant’s intercession—that he comes in under the burden and bears that burden to its utter extremity. So thorough was his action there that it has secured an eternal redemption—he has borne the sins and evil of the whole world and of all eternity in that enormous, depthless action of sacrificial love. In this, Christ fulfilled the propitiatory sacrifices of the old worship.

Hebrews 7:23–25 says:

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Christ holds his priesthood forever, and continues in this ministry permanently. That is, there is a ‘sacrificial’ act—the ministry of the priest—which Christ continues forever to perform. This is quite clearly not the propitiatory action of his death, which was once and for all (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 26; I Pet. 3:18). This sacrificial action of Christ is the worshipful, obedient, dedicatory offering of himself to the Father (‘Lo, I have come to do your will’). In this action Christ has established the human response to God—he responds to the Father *for* us, but in such a way that as the Spirit of Christ is given to us, this response of Christ’s becomes ours, coming freely and spontaneously from ourselves. In Hebrews 2:11–13 Christ is shown to be unashamed in calling us his brethren, for we all have one origin, Christ himself, and so in his self-dedication to the Father (‘Here I am!’) we are caught up with him (‘. . . and the children [you] have given me!’).

In this, then—the receiving of the Father’s rich and free grace for us in His Son through faith in his blood, and the offering of ourselves fully and richly to God through His Son in the empowering of the Holy Spirit—true communion is known.

## THE SACRIFICIAL COMMUNITY

The gift to God, then, is that we participate in His own sacrificiality through Christ’s priestly ministry. I Peter 2:4–5 exhorts the church to come to Christ:

. . . to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The sacrifice the church offers is no sacrifice other than Christ’s. Hebrews 13:13–15 indicates that this offering of spiritual sacrifices is linked to a participation in Christ’s suffering:

Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp *and bear the abuse he endured*. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come. Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

This suffering participation comes through the acknowledging of Christ's name.

All true sacrifice flows, at heart, from thankfulness (cf. Ps. 50). The heart of thanksgiving in both the Old and New Testament phraseology (*yadah* in Hebrew and *aineo, eucharisteo* and *exomologeomai* in Greek) is praise and acknowledgement of the truth of the being and action of God (cf. Ps. 136). The root idea of *yadah* and of *exomologeomai* is of confession or acknowledgment. All sacrifices of thanksgiving, then, are declaratory of the action and being of God, and doxological in this declaration. The community of grace stands in contrast—by that grace—with the whole world, who denied the truth of God (an anti-declaration) and ‘although they knew God *they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him*, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened’ (Rom. 1:21). ‘Doxaphasia’ and thanklessness stand at the heart of the loss of man’s glory and are essentially an anti-proclamation of the truth of God.

In Acts the community born of the Gospel and the Spirit is typified by a sacrificiality. In Acts 2:41–47 and 4:32–35 we see that, without being commanded, there was a desire to sell property and give to those who were in need. ‘There was not a needy person among them.’ The source of this is clear in Acts 4:33b, ‘and great grace was upon them all’. There is no indication that there was any sense of imposition upon them. (In fact, when Ananias and Sapphira sought to deceive the community through an ingenuine act of sacrifice, Peter was clear to them that the land was theirs to keep or to dispose of as they willed; cf. Acts 5:3–4.) What is clear through this is that by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the great depths of the love of God for the world, who spared not His Son but gave him up freely for us all, was shed abroad in the hearts of the people of God. The church, then, was not looking to its own things, but to the things of others. There is no sense of this in either the Acts or the epistles of the church being ‘put on’ to be sacrificial. (In fact we see almost the opposite in II Cor. 8:1–5. The church in Macedonia could not have conceived of their giving in terms of ‘cost’ or ‘commitment’—their giving was beyond their means to give, but they did not ‘give ’til they hurt’. Rather, it hurt them to be unable to give.)

This is the dynamic reality of true sacrifice—it is the overflow of the heart filled with the love and the grace of God, caught up into the action of God Himself. This is essential to know in pastoral ministry, where often we are reacting against a lack of ‘sacrificiality’ within a congregation or person. To hit this ‘law-way’ goes right against the true dynamic of sacrifice, and so whilst it may produce some kind of result, in fact what is produced is not sacrifice—the sacrifice of love—but a counterfeit, the sacrifice of obligation, and is probably closer to the sacrifice of Cain than of Abel.

The heart of the life of God’s people together is that each looks not on his own things but on the things of others. So, mature Christians are called upon in the New Testament to give up their ‘rights’ for the benefit and upbuilding of others. For example, in Romans 15:1–3a, in response to a disagreement about the rightness of eating meat,<sup>3</sup> the fact that Christ did not please himself is crucial in understanding how we are to behave. So too those who are mature are not to seek to please themselves, but ‘let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to edify him’. This way of living in

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<sup>3</sup> Probably because it has been sacrificed to idols, although Paul identifies the key issue here only as cleanness/uncleanness (14:14ff.).

Gospel harmony is then linked to the praise and worship of God by the church in the following verses: e.g. 15:7, ‘Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, *for the glory of God*’. The principle of sacrifice is at work here.

The heart of this dedicatory life is love; the person who, being gripped by the grace of Christ and who wants to respond sacrificially, will love (Eph. 5:2). In fact, acts of so-called sacrifice that lack love are gutted of their true meaning and dynamic (I Cor. 13:3). The New Testament names a number of elements of that sacrificial love that is pleasing and acceptable to God, desired by Him. They are listed simply here without comment:

And as he sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ But when he heard it, he said, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.” For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners’ (Matt. 9:10–13).

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (Heb. 13:15–16).

Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity . . . (I Thess. 4:1–3).

Therefore do not associate with them, for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them (Eph. 5:7–11).

If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God (I Tim. 5:4).

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord (Col. 3:20).

## study four

# The Gift of Propitiation and Its Fruits

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### INTRODUCTION

The term ‘propitiation’ carries the general meaning ‘to appease’. Linguistically it portrays the basic idea ‘to make an angry deity joyous’.<sup>1</sup> In the pagan world propitiation is by the self-offering of a gift (often a sacrifice) to calm a capriciously angry deity. Biblically we find the basic meaning ‘to appease’ in usage, but in the context of the one and only true God who is good and merciful and who chooses to act accordingly. The holy God whom we know fully expends wrath, but in his grace redeems by bearing it within himself with immense personal suffering.<sup>2</sup>

### GOD’S GIVING IN FORGIVING BY SACRIFICE AND PROPITIATION

To understand propitiation we must view it in the context of God’s salvation history where a deepening revelation of his grace in patience and kindness unfolds and the deeper revelation of his being as love—his everlasting covenant giving for the good of the other—is made known. Grace is firstly known in forgiveness:

‘O LORD, if I have found favour in your eyes,’ he said, ‘then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive [*salach*] our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance’ (Exod. 34:9, *NIV*).

Although freely given, this forgiveness is not automatic nor is it gratuitous. Sin needs to be dealt with before a Holy God (Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7; cf. Ps. 7:11). The Hebrew for ‘forgive’, *salach*, occurs mostly in the context of the sacrificial laws of Leviticus and Numbers (e.g. Num. 15:25, 28; Lev. 4:26; cf. vv. 20, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18).

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<sup>1</sup> In the New Testament we find the verb *hilaskomai* ‘to propitiate’ (Heb. 2:17; Luke 18:13), the nouns *hilasmos* (I John 2:2; 4:10) and *hilasterion* (Rom. 3:25) ‘propitiation’ (=‘that which makes propitiation’). The word *hilasterion* also means ‘mercy seat’ in Hebrews 9:5. There is the adjective *hileos* ‘propitious’ (Heb. 8:12 from Jer. 31:34), while *hileos* derives from *hilaros* ‘joyous’, and hence the verb *hilaskomai* ‘to make joyous or gracious’ and therefore ‘to appease’.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Redemption contemplates our bondage and is the provision of grace to release us from that bondage. Propitiation contemplates our liability to the wrath of God and is the provision of grace whereby we may be freed from that wrath’ (John Murray, *Romans*, NICNT, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1968, p. 116).

Forgiveness only occurs in the context of God himself giving sacrifices for his people to make atonement:<sup>3</sup>

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and *I have given* it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life (Lev. 17:11).

The sacrifice is offered up as a substitute and ransoms<sup>4</sup> the life of the offerer. 'He is to lay his hand' on the sacrifice, whose death takes the sinner's place and so he is accepted (Lev. 1:4–5).

Another term for forgiveness is the word *nasa*; to lift up, to bear, to have sin and guilt taken away. For salvation it is necessary for sin and guilt to be borne:

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'—and you forgave [*nasa*] the guilt of my sin (Ps. 32:5).

Likewise Cain and Abel offered sacrifices: Abel's was by faith (Heb. 11:4) and Cain's was not. The Lord's response to Cain, 'If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?' may be translated, 'if you do what is right, will you not be forgiven [*saeth*]?' (Gen. 4:1–7). The word *saeth* comes from the root *nasa*, clearly indicating that Abel had faith in a God who makes propitiation.<sup>5</sup> God's promise in Genesis 2:17 was, 'when you eat of it you will surely die'. Abel's offering alleviated God's judgment. The God, who reveals himself as holy, redeems his people whilst never overlooking sin; it is always dealt with. Sin causes death and until there is death (sacrifice) sin remains.

Jesus came as the fulfilment of Israel's sacrificial system. John the Baptist said of Jesus, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29). Peter proclaims:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed (I Pet. 2:24).

He bears sin for 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us' (II Cor. 5:21) yet we were co-crucified with him (Gal. 2:20). Jesus died in our sins as our substitute. His once-and-for-all propitiatory death (Heb. 2:17) pays the death-price for our sin, satisfies God's holiness, and effects universal (I John 2:2), complete (Col. 2:13–14) and on-going forgiveness (I John 1:7). By the death of Christ the wrath of God kills and cleanses the sinner.

Man as a sinner could never offer any sacrifice of himself as a payment for his sin before a holy God. Nor could animals be of ultimate good (Heb. 10:8). Only the sacrifice of Jesus, our brother and high priest, whom God appointed (Heb. 2:17; 3:2), the One who is holy, blameless, pure and set apart from sinners (Heb. 7:26), is sufficient for a spotless sacrifice.

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<sup>3</sup> In the LXX the word group 'propitiation' is used extensively to translate, for example, the Hebrew terms for 'forgive' in the context of impending wrath (e.g. Lam. 3:42; Dan. 9:19); also for 'repent' where God repents of his wrath (e.g. Exod. 32:14); its usage is connected with atonement words and is rendered for 'mercy-seat'. See Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, third ed., 1965), pp. 155–74.

<sup>4</sup> Likewise linguistically *kipper* 'atone' is derived from *kopher* 'ransom' (redeem).

<sup>5</sup> See G. Bingham, 'Knowing God through Propitiation' (NCTM Monday Pastors' Study Group, 3/4/95), p. 6 and Gordon J. Wenham *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Word, Waco, 1987), p. 105.

## THE HORROR OF SIN, AND GOD'S GIVING IN WRATH

It is only in the light of Christ's death that the full abhorrence of sin can be known. Israel's sacrificial system points to this one, eternal sacrifice. Historically, God was and is now patient only with the view to his appointed once-and-for-all sacrifice of his Son, implanted firmly in the centre of history (Rom. 3:25). The deep revelation of the Spirit to human spirit in the Cross is the total forgiveness of sins, but in the light of the eternal culpability of sin against God who is offended and angry with it. It is the gospel that reveals the wrath of God (Rom. 1:16–18). Until this wrath and the propitiatory sacrifice of the Christ is understood, forgiveness is not understood as a miracle to be marvelled at and its depth is not contemplated. Moreover, the glory of God is not known and experienced.

Sin is fundamentally a deliberate attack on God as God (Rom. 1:21; Gen. 3:22). Man hates God being God and aggressively desires that he not direct his creation. He is not content to be vice-regent; his ambition swells his ego to be God himself. He wishes to do violence to God's glory (Rom. 1:21; 3:23).

Because of this Man loses his own glory for he chooses foolishly: he ceases to choose as created man should in dependence on the Creator. He is de-humanised, loses what he is and is relegated to the level of the animal world (Rom. 1:26; Gen. 3). He falls from the heights of being God's created ruler to being controlled by animals. He refuses to worship God, for to worship God means to confess him as God. Yet he is made to worship, so in his upside-down and backward state he worships what is of a lower order than even himself, the creation around him. He is ruled by the creation, remains locked into its chaos rather than living above it to subdue it (Gen. 1:2, 28). In total self-centredness (Rom. 2:8) he cannot obey God (Rom. 8:7) and, because his transgression is against the one and only true and everlasting God, he lives everlastingly in his sin (Rom. 3:9–18). His heart is permanently diseased and his conscience seared and scarred (Jer. 13:23; 17:9–10; I Tim. 4:2).

Yet God remains God. De-humanisation does not mean de-deification in any way, for God's being is far greater and higher than that. Man's offensive on God is to remove him which is an axiomatic impossibility. God eternally stands his ground and this for the sake of his own being and therefore for all that he has made. As Moral-Being he is enraged and angered by the rebellion of humanity: for its disregard, the refusal to give thanks for who he is, for what he's done, for his plan to fill the earth with his glory, and to follow his instructions accordingly. God in holiness and purity is aroused to destroy sin in wrath:

*God is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11, KJV).*

*Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue (Ps. 50:22, NIV).*

Without the concentration of sacrifice, God would destroy the whole earth in an instant. The wrath of God is being revealed, is happening today, and is amply attested to in the Scriptures.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Leon Morris says of the Old Testament, "There are more than twenty words used to express "wrath" as it applies to Yahweh . . . These are used so frequently that there are over 580 occurrences to be taken into consideration.' He also goes on to cite the extensive themes of wrath and judgment in the New Testament as taught by Jesus and the apostles (ibid. pp. 149–50, 179–84).

It is important to note that God's anger is not capricious and arbitrary.<sup>7</sup> It is an expression of his holiness for the good of the other—he is wrathful because he loves his world. Not to uphold his holiness would be to walk away from who he is and therefore what is true.

His wrath is experienced in judgment—the intervention and direct retribution against sin. For example, God 'creates [*bara*] disaster' (Isa. 45:7). He 'crushes' sin (e.g. Isa. 14:25; Ps. 68:21). It is also experienced in his 'giving over' to sin (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; Num. 11:18–20). The wrath of God causes sin to metastasise: Man becomes totally ensnared by sin's all-encompassing mesh. Under wrath his guilt is heightened, for he can do nothing about what he has done: sins remain indelibly marked into history. His guilt before the ever-present Presence drives him further into sin: he remains in an endless spiral into the dark pit of his selfish abyss. The horror of it is unbearable, and God is deeply wounded and grieved about the predicament, for the love-bond with his humanity is permanently marred.

From Man's side there is nothing but darkness, but God still loves for he is love: he remains personally present to Man, albeit in wrath. He is still *giving*. He is all the time loving. The wonder is that he does not treat us as our sins deserve: he only allows the full revelation of this wrath to be known at the concentration of it on his own Son in the Cross. God gives samples of wrath in history, terrible yet only painful enough to drive us to Jesus, to the Cross where God rightfully has his day in court and hands out the decisive decree of 'guilty' and a fierce eternal punishment.<sup>8</sup>

## **GOD SENDING HIS SON AND PUTTING HIM FORWARD TO DIE**

Both Paul and John say that the Father is the initiator of Christ as the propitiation for our sins:

... Christ Jesus, whom *God put forward* as a [propitiation] by his blood, effective through faith (Rom. 3:24–25, *NRSV*).

In this is love, not that we loved God but *that he loved us and sent his Son* to be the propitiation for our sins (I John 4:10).

The point of 'sending' is the authority and submission of love. God 'putting him forward' has to do with grace—covenant love which keeps loving undeservedly in the face of interpersonal rejection and sin. In these texts God is the primary giver in the Cross (see also II Cor. 5:21 – 6:1). There can be no thought of the Son merely placating an angry Father and getting him 'off our back' by a payment (forcing him to love by a bribe), nor that the Son saves us from the Father.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The word used for God's wrath in the New Testament is *orge*. Leon Morris notes there are two possible words for anger but only the one is used (apart from one reasonable exception): he says, '[*thumos*] more readily denotes passionate anger, arising and subsiding quickly, whereas [*orge*] is adapted to a more settled emotion' (ibid. p. 180).

<sup>8</sup> The theology of the Cross as an expiation for our sins does not do justice to the fact that God is personally angry with the sinner. Wrath merely as mechanical consequence denies God's holiness, the terrible offence of sin to his being, and renders him as Passive-Deistic-Onlooker. An eternal, holy God cannot be paid off.

<sup>9</sup> John speaks of the Son being our 'advocate' (*parakletos*) who speaks to the Father in our defence (I John 2:1). This is not saying that Jesus needs to save us from God, but that he stands with us *as Man* before the Father, giving to humanity his righteousness by his purifying work of propitiation (v. 2). In this sense the Son acts before the Father on our behalf, but this is *within* the love communion of the Father and the Son.

The deep revelation of God is his mercy, that he chooses to be merciful out of the freedom of his being. This is his glory! (Exod. 33:19; 34:6–7). He plans before time that the Son should die (I Pet. 1:19–20; Rev. 13:8): ‘Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer’ (Isa. 53:10, *NIV*). It is God’s will that he die as the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2; cf. John 3:16). Furthermore, he chooses those who are to participate in Christ’s atonement by grace and through faith (e.g. Rom. 8:29–30; I Cor. 1:27–31; Eph. 1:4–5), those who share in the universal forgiveness of sins.

The Son obeys the Father’s will in all he does, even unto death (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 10:5–10). Only Jesus specially sent as a true and pure human being, who ‘learned obedience’ (Heb. 5:8) having been tempted and tested in every way just like us, could fulfil God’s law. He glorifies the Father, that is, he upholds his will, his moral glory. He lives in complete dependent response to the Father and lives righteously. Furthermore, he receives in the Cross, by the will of the Father, a sinful humanity; bears along with it the guilt; receives the full blast of God’s wrath, and lovingly endures the pollution, loneliness and the barrenness of the whole human race from the entirety of history (Rom. 3:25–26). Wrath is averted onto Christ whilst he carries us with him through the abyss. He is judged in our stead, we are judged with him in his stead and so we are free. Propitiation is the averting of wrath by it not being averted.

The even deeper revelation is the Cross’s impact in the union and communion of love that is known between the Father and the Son. From the Son’s perspective we see his pain as man in his separation from the Father on the Cross. But the final and most crucial unveiling and the goal of propitiation is the love of the Father, so that through Jesus we may come back to him with an eternal confidence and unhindered access. This breaks open to the human heart when the Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20; Rom. 8:14–16), unveils the Father giving up the Son to die, to receive our punishment, and by this showing that it is foremostly the Father bending his wrath, as it were, back into himself. When God gave his one and only Son he tore his own heart out for us. His loneliness at that point is unspeakable. The Father through the Son absorbs and destroys our sin and endures the wrath for us. *This* is love: not that we loved God but that *he loved us* and *sent his Son* as the propitiation for our sins! God is love and all love comes from God. Our cleansing is not merely for our relief: it is so that we may see God the Father as he really is in the deepest reaches of his being. The great gift of propitiation is that it elevates a person to view salvation from God’s side, and that we may know and live in *his* love and in *his* holiness; mortals eternally filled with immortality. The Father put his Son into hell that he may put us into Paradise.

## **THE MIRACLE OF FAITH AND OBEDIENCE**

Paul says in response to Christ’s work on the cross:

*For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised . . . For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (II Cor. 5:14–15, 21, *RSV*).*

The love of Christ, understood in its universal scope, its bearing away of sin and the imputation of *God’s* righteousness, constrains us to live for Christ and for God. The eternal relief from our misery paves the way back to the heart of the Holy Father. This is the love which creates trust and empowers response in the human heart. The glory of

the gift softens the heart to receive it, own it, and reciprocate it in true, distinct and free human love, trust and obedience. We note that faith itself is inseparable from obedience. The phrase ‘the obedience of faith’ is an *inclusio* of Romans (1:5; 16:26). Luke speaks of priests who ‘became obedient to the faith’ (Acts 6:7). This is in accordance with the whole purpose of the gospel that we may ‘be holy and blameless in his sight’ (Eph. 1:4). John evokes:

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are . . . And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure (I John 3:1, 3, RSV).

We have seen the love of the Father is primarily known in sending the Son to be the propitiation for our sins. John is saying that this love is not without effect. In the context of this love a person must respond to God in faith for the ongoing forgiveness of sins (I John 1:7; 2:1–2) and in total obedience—without propagation of sin (I John 3:6, 9; 5:18). So demanding is the holiness of God. John does not allow for pastoral expediency in the name of grace. If sin is sin, which is exposed as sin by the truth, then it is to be confessed and shunned. It is unthinkable that sin, which took the Son to his cross to bear such an awful judgment and rendered such pain in the Father’s heart, be allowed to go on undealt with in the life of the church. The power of propitiation is so great that it sanctifies the church to live in righteousness—the instruction and discipline of the Lord. Absolute grace instils and demands absolute obedience, unto suffering, personal loss and even death. The knowledge of God’s holy love is of far greater importance than our own preservation. Without holiness there is no true love. P. T. Forsyth says, ‘The holiness of God is a deeper revelation in the cross than His love; for it is what gives His love divine value’.<sup>10</sup> Not to participate in his holiness is to deny his love. It is to receive God’s grace in vain.

What must be constantly recalled is that God wills everything on behalf of Man and this is most acutely seen and experienced in the Cross. God acts as God, electing in holiness and loving into submission. In doing this, he affirms and upholds Man as Man. Man as creature is a derived and dependent being. The revelation of wrath in the gospel drives and compresses him to a deeper dependence. He is shut into God’s narrow way for salvation through the crucible of the Cross. Under this constriction Man is pressed into a grander dependency. Believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ is the most dignified response for a person. The Father upholds the wonder and status of his highest creature, a human being made in his image. Christ as our Propitiation is the Father’s gift of increasing glory for humanity, for it his prescribed way, the only way back to him at the deepest point of need.

Our response, therefore, should never be one of presumption. God acts out of the freedom of his own being and not because he is pressured by what we may insist he ought to do. The Father redeems us out of his own freedom by drawing us to himself, upholding our nature and even giving greater human glory in the process. This melts the hardest heart into thankfulness, praise and worship. For God to create a universe out of nothing is one thing, but for him to re-create and renew the human heart from entrenched self-centredness and utter darkness is surely the greatest miracle and gift of all.

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<sup>10</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1984, reprint of 1910 edition), p. 205.

## study five

# The Gifts to Israel

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<sup>1</sup>I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—<sup>2</sup>I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup>They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; <sup>5</sup>to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Rom. 9:1–5).

This lament by the Apostle Paul is understandable. Israel is ‘my own people, my kindred according to the flesh’ (v. 3). His statement that he ‘could wish [he] were accursed and cut off from Christ’ for their sake has occasioned some speculation, especially in the light of his previous statement in chapter 8 that nothing can separate us from the love of God (v. 39). Possibly his meaning is that he was once like his fellow Israelites in that he ‘used to wish<sup>1</sup> to be anathema from Christ’, but now his heart aches that they maintain their resistance and their unbelief. But whatever his meaning, he is expressing a deep concern for the people of Israel. Of course, this paragraph is only an introduction to his treatment of the subject of the hope of Israel, which he continues to the end of chapter 11, and so his concern here must be set against the wider perspective which he develops.

But Paul’s lament for Israel is not only because they are Israelites. Verses 4 and 5 list Paul’s understanding of the immense privileges which Israel had received and which, by their unbelief, they were actively contradicting. A detailed exposition of these privileges has been given by Geoffrey Bingham in the NCTM Monday Pastors’ Studies notes from September to December 1996, and February to May 1997. I would strongly recommend that these be examined. Obviously there is no need to reproduce the full content of them here.

Paul’s lament goes even further than merely seeing that Israel had somehow not taken advantage of all that it had. This list of eight or nine<sup>2</sup> items represents a careful summary of, what we might call, Paul’s ‘Old Testament Theology’. Although we have designated these items as ‘gifts’, Paul himself has not done so. He has, at best, called them ‘advantages’<sup>3</sup> (Rom. 3:1) and the description ‘the giving of the law’ in verse 4, called ‘the receiving of the law’ in the *NIV*, is misleading in this context. Actually this

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<sup>1</sup> The verb translated as ‘I could wish’ is ἠχόμην, the imperfect tense. It could also be translated as ‘pray’. But see C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, ICC, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1979, pp. 454–7 for a summary of the possible approaches to the verse.

<sup>2</sup> (i) Israelites; (ii) bestowal of sonship; (iii) glory; (iv) covenants; (v) bestowal of law; (vi) worship; (vii) promises; (viii) fathers; and (ix) Messiah. The number depends on whether there is special significance in the use of the word ‘Israelites’.

<sup>3</sup> τὸ περισσὸν (*to perisson*). Romans 11:29 does speak of the gifts and the calling of God.

list is quite stylised, with ‘the giving of the law’ being the translation of a word,<sup>4</sup> unique in the New Testament, which rhymes with the word previously translated as ‘adoption’ or ‘sonship’.

The structure of verses 4 and 5 seems to be as follows:

They are Israelites—of whom belong

the bestowal of sonship ἡ υἰοθεσία	and the glory καὶ ἡ δόξα	and the covenants καὶ αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι
and the bestowal of law καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία	and the worship καὶ ἡ λατρεία	and the promises καὶ αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι

of whom the fathers and out of whom the Messiah according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever, Amen.<sup>5</sup>

## ISRAELITES

Paul commences by identifying the object of his concern as ‘Israelites’. Until this point in Romans he has designated them as ‘Jews’<sup>6</sup> (1:16; 2:9, 10, 17, 28, 29; 3:1, 2, 9, 29). The name ‘Jew’ derives from the name ‘Judah’ and appeared only after the return from the Babylonian exile. It refers to a person whose home was in the southern kingdom of Judah and was thus, for example, used of Mordecai in Esther 2:5, even though he was from the tribe of Benjamin. Later, it became more an ethnic distinction; a person is either a ‘Jew’, or one of ‘the nations’ (a Gentile).

On one occasion Paul identified himself as ‘a Jew’ (Acts 21:39), and then it was in response to the assumption that he was ‘the Egyptian’ (Acts 21:38). In that case it was his knowledge of Greek which prompted the topic, and this was followed by him again identifying himself as a Jew when he spoke in ‘Hebrew’ to the Jewish crowd (Acts 22:2–3). The only other occasion where he actually identified himself as a Jew is in Galatians 2:15 and there, again, it is to distinguish himself (and Peter) as different from ‘Gentile sinners’.<sup>7</sup>

Why, then, does Paul turn from describing them as Jews to calling them Israelites? The answer is that ‘Israel’ was the preferred title of the people themselves. It was their own way of recognising themselves as descended from Jacob, as the phrase ‘children of Israel’ shows,<sup>8</sup> whereas ‘Jew’ was the name by which they were known to others. ‘Israel’ expressed a consciousness of being the people of God.<sup>9</sup> Three times Paul announces his pedigree using this phrase:

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin (Rom. 11:1).

<sup>4</sup> νομοθεσία from νόμος, law and τίθημι, to place or set.

<sup>5</sup> This arrangement is taken from John Piper, *The Justification of God*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1993, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> See von Rad, Kuhn, Gutbrod Ἰσραήλ κτλ in Kittel and Friedrich (eds), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3 (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1976), pp. 356ff.

<sup>7</sup> He identifies himself as Jewish *by implication* on a large number of occasions; here it the use of the word ‘Jew’ which is significant.

<sup>8</sup> This title is used almost six hundred times in the Old Testament.

<sup>9</sup> Cranfield, p. 460.

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I (2 Cor. 11:22).

Circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5).

To be an Israelite meant that a person was ‘out of the seed of Abraham’, and so a participant in all that Abraham represented. Douglas Moo’s statement sums up the matter:

It is therefore no accident that Paul in Rom. 9–11 generally abandons the word ‘Jew,’ which has figured so prominently in chaps. 1–8, in favor of the terms ‘Israelites’ and ‘Israel.’ Paul is no longer looking at the Jews from the perspective of the Gentiles and in their relationship to the Gentiles but from the perspective of salvation history and in their relationship to God and his promises to them. The appellation ‘Israelites,’ then, is no mere political or nationalistic designation but a religiously significant and honorific title. And despite the refusal of most of the Israelites to accept God’s gift of salvation in Christ, this title has not been revoked.<sup>10</sup>

Abraham was far more than an individual in history. He has a corporate status, and Israel was the nation which represented that:

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and *in you*<sup>11</sup> all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen. 12:2–3).

N. T. Wright suggests that Paul’s ‘in Adam, in Christ’ theology actually takes this into consideration. He writes:

I suggest that the work done so far has not yet gone to the heart of the matter. Specifically, it has overlooked a central and, for Pauline exegesis, vital feature of the Jewish background. Speculation about Adam, in the intertestamental and rabbinic literature in particular . . . is not about ‘humankind in general.’ It is about Israel, the people of God . . . the use of ‘Adam’ themes in the Jewish literature . . . consistently makes one large and important point: God’s purposes for the human race in general have devolved on to, and will be fulfilled in Israel in particular. Israel is, or will become, God’s true humanity. What God intended for Adam will be given to the seed of Abraham. They will inherit the second Eden, the restored primeval glory. If there is a last Adam in the relevant Jewish literature, he is not an individual, whether messianic or otherwise. He is the whole eschatological people of God . . . Adam-theology, where it occurs in the Old Testament and intertestamental writings, fulfills a specific purpose. It either advances, or develops, a claim about the place of Israel in the purposes of God. It is another way of saying that the world was made for the sake of Israel, or that Israel is, or is to become, God’s intended true humanity.

Abraham’s children are God’s true humanity, and their homeland is the new Eden.<sup>12</sup>

Israel and Abraham are, in *one* sense, interchangeable. The privileges which belong to Israel are theirs because Israel is the seed of Abraham.

The call of Abraham provides the parameters within which to understand the role of Israel and this is the way Paul presents his argument in Romans. Having asserted that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all the nations (‘to the Jew first and also to the Greek’—Rom. 1:16), and that the righteousness of God is revealed through faith alone, Paul has shown that there is a prior revelation which makes this necessary, namely the revelation of God’s wrath, and all stand under this judgment.

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<sup>10</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1996, p. 561.

<sup>11</sup> LXX ἐν σοὶ MT \$B.

<sup>12</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. 20–23.

In Romans chapter 2 Paul directs his attention to the Jew who presumed that his Jewishness entitled him to a special and more lenient treatment from God. On the contrary, boasting of the possession of the law (*torah*) is meaningless if that law condemns you. Or boasting that the rite of physical circumcision provides some sort of status is a failure to see that it is, at best, ‘an outward . . . sign of an inward and spiritual grace’.

So, then, does the Jew have any privileges? Does his circumcision mean nothing? The reply is the Jews were ‘entrusted with the oracles of God’ (Rom. 3:1–2). They are the ones to whom God has committed his special revelation. Blessing for the nations will come as those nations come *to Zion* to learn instruction (that is, *torah*, Isa. 2:2–4). But Israel must be a people of faith for this privilege to be a blessing. What is more, this is the evidence from Abraham’s life. His *faith* was ‘reckoned to him as righteousness’ because what was needed for righteousness was not the weighing of merit but the forgiving of sin (Rom. 4:3–8).

Now when a Gentile comes to faith, he has Abraham as his father, as does a Jew (Rom. 4:11, 16–17a), even though Abraham is not his ‘forefather according to the flesh’ (Rom. 4:1). I suspect that this lies behind the imagery of Romans 11:16ff., where the picture is of believing Gentiles being grafted into the place from which unbelieving Jews were broken off. But it should be noted that they are not described as merely joining Israel; they are ‘grafted in their place to share the rich *root* of the olive tree’. The Gentile becomes a sharer<sup>13</sup> in the richness of the plan of God in Abraham. Unbelieving Jews, on the other hand, are cut off from that very blessing. To be a genuine descendant of Abraham is different from being a Jew (Rom. 9:6–8), so that to be an Israelite is to be a person who stands in the context of faith in the promises God made to Abraham, and rejecting the fulfilment of those promises becomes a horrible contradiction. Hence Paul’s distress.

The six items—adoption; glory; covenants; law; worship; and promises—express the way the privilege of being an Israelite was experienced. But the question ought to be posed: why were these items given to this people? In answer, we should again see that the call of Abraham was with the blessing of the nations in view, and that the blessing of the nations relates directly to the restoration of creation.

### THE PRIVILEGES—ADOPTION<sup>14</sup>

When addressing Pharaoh, Moses was to say:

Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son.<sup>23</sup> I said to you, ‘Let my son go that he may worship me’ (Exod. 4:22–23).

Also, Israel’s distinctiveness was because they were ‘sons<sup>15</sup> of the LORD [their] God’ (Deut. 14:1). If the question is asked why this title was used, it is Luke who provides the answer: ‘Adam [was] the son of God’ (Luke 3:38). It may well be that the Old Testament does not spell out the details, but with the hindsight of salvation history it can be said that Israel was given the adoption because through this people all that was true of Adam, but which he had rejected, was being restored.

<sup>13</sup> συγκαινωνός.

<sup>14</sup> See G. Bingham, NCTM Monday Pastors’ Study 2/9/96.

<sup>15</sup> Not ‘children’, as in the NRSV.

Given that Adam, prior to his sin, was a man of the Spirit, the assertion by Paul that ‘all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God, for you . . . have received the Spirit of adoption’ (Rom. 8:14–15) is obvious. The restoration of the Spirit to humanity is the restoration of sonship, so that the *telos* of present history will be expressed in the declaration, ‘I will be his God and he will be my son’ (Rev. 21:7). The fact that this statement is in the same terms as the covenant formula to Israel, for example Leviticus 26:12, ‘I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people’, ought to be conspicuous. Israel is the paradigm for all the restored nations.

## GLORY<sup>16</sup>

The description of the call of Abraham is given by Stephen in Acts 7:2, ‘The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham’. When we add to this statement Isaiah 42:8, ‘my glory I give to no other’, and Psalm 8:5, Man (v. 4),<sup>17</sup> has been crowned ‘with glory and honour’, we must say that Adam—mankind—has been created to participate in the glory of God, that in his sin he has ‘fallen short of the glory of God’ and that historically Abraham stands at the commencement of the restoration of the glory.

While there are a number of occasions when the glory of God is seen in the Old Testament, two occasions stand out. The first is the dedication of the Tent of Meeting in Exodus 40:

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.<sup>35</sup> Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (vv. 34–35),

and the second is the dedication of the Temple in 1 Kings 8:10–11:

And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD,<sup>11</sup> so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

The glory of God was so palpably present that neither Moses nor the priests could even enter. When Moses, later, was interceding for the forgiveness of Israel, the Lord replied:

. . . I do forgive, just as you have asked;<sup>21</sup> nevertheless—as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD . . . (Num. 14:20–21).

The being of the Lord is one with his purpose that the earth will be filled with his glory. The later promise that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord (Hab. 2:14; cf. Isa. 11:9) stands in contrast with the loss of glory in Israel, as in 1 Samuel 4:21, ‘Ichabod . . . the glory has departed’, and Ezekiel 10:18–19 and 11:22–23, where the glory of the Lord left the Temple and Jerusalem. But the principle was that the nations would see the glory of God in Israel (cf. Isa. 66:18–20).

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<sup>16</sup> See NCTM Monday Pastors’ Study 14/10/96.

<sup>17</sup> Two words are used for ‘man’ in verse 4, w0nA (*enosh*) and m\$A (*adam*), and they are used in parallelism in a number of places in the Old Testament (Isa. 13:12; 51:12; Ps. 73:5; 90:3; etc). w0nA may carry the idea of frailty or mortality (see Maass, w0nA in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, eds G. J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. 345ff.

## THE COVENANTS<sup>18</sup>

The plural ‘covenants’<sup>19</sup> in Romans 9:4 probably refers to the various covenants made by God throughout Israel’s history, such as those with Abraham (Gen. 15:17ff.; 17:2ff.; cf. Exod. 2:24), with Israel itself at Sinai (Exod. 19:5; 24:1–8), at Moab (Deut. 29:1ff.) and the covenant with David (2 Sam. 23:5; etc.). From what has already been said, we may expect to see that these covenants have a particular function in terms of the restoration of the creation.

Peter described God as the ‘faithful Creator’ (I Pet. 4:19), urging that, on that basis, he may be trusted with the readers’ ‘souls’. This is in keeping with such statements as Deuteronomy 7:9:

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty [dCh *chesed*] with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.

God’s faithfulness is his own trustworthiness to fulfil his own commitment to his covenant. He is true (JmA amen: Isa. 65:16) to his own purpose. If, as it has been stressed in the past, God’s covenant with Noah was not something new but a previously existing covenant ratified,<sup>20</sup> then the writer was subtly recognising that from the moment of creation covenant was in operation. Creation, and therefore Man, was formed in covenant with God.

This is brought out in the use of the covenant words ‘blessing’ and ‘cursing’ (e.g. Deut. 30:19–20): Man’s whole vocation is given as blessing (in Gen. 1:28) and the never closed seventh day of creation was also blessed (Gen. 2:3), whereas the serpent (a creature, Gen. 3:1) and the ground (Gen. 3:17) are cursed following the sin of Man. These two aspects of covenant are in operation. Sin may have offended God but it has not rendered his covenant inoperative. However, if Man will not live in the blessing then he must live in the curse.

These two aspects are then seen in the call of Abraham, where the nations, presently under the judgment of God, will be blessed in Abraham. In other words, the many covenants made with Abraham and then with Israel are essentially functions of the one ‘eternal covenant’ (Heb. 13:20). For Israel, then, to regard their covenant relationship with God as an end in itself was a tragedy.

## THE GIVING OF THE LAW<sup>21</sup>

As I mentioned above, this phrase is not an accurate translation of the Greek word νομοθεσία (nomothesia); the words ‘giving’ (NRSV) or ‘receiving’ (NIV) being necessary in English. However, there is another issue which ought to be noted, namely, that the word ‘law’ sometimes carries a quite specific sense in the New Testament as a reference to the Jewish law, the *Torah*, or Instruction.

What was deposited in Israel was not simply the whole law of God but that law in a particular covenantal form. The ‘law of God’, that law by which God himself subsists and so the law by which all created beings function, is fundamental within creation. So, when speaking of the universal judgment in Romans 2, Paul states that:

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<sup>18</sup> See NCTM Monday Pastors’ Study 4/11/96.

<sup>19</sup> Some MSS have the singular, but the majority have the plural and, as set out above, the plural also matches the plural ‘promises’. See also Eph. 2:12, ‘strangers to the covenants of promise’.

<sup>20</sup> See NCTM Monday Pastors’ Study 4/11/96, p. 2 and fn. 1.

<sup>21</sup> See NCTM Monday Pastors’ Study 2/12/96.

All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law (Rom. 2:12).

There are some who are ‘apart from the law’, not meaning that there is no law, but that they are not the recipients of *Torah*. Romans 5:13–14 explains this:

... sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. <sup>14</sup>Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

Sin was in the world before there was *Torah*, but had there been no ‘law of God’ then it would not have been reckoned, but as it was, death exercised dominion because the law of God was (and is) a present reality from Adam onwards. Thus Romans 2:14–15:

When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. <sup>15</sup>They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them.

The law of God ‘is written on the hearts’, a phrase I suspect deliberately reflecting Jeremiah 31:33, meaning that at creation the law was written on the hearts of men and women. ‘So, they are without excuse, for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened’ (Rom. 1:20–21). Hence the purpose of the new covenant is that there will be a new creation with the law again written on the heart.

The means by which that would take place was to be Israel. They would be the people with a revelation from God of his own being and they would live in conformity with the instruction he gave. The particularity of their *Torah* is seen in many of the regulations which cannot simply be divided into ‘moral’ or ‘ceremonial’. The *Torah* is a whole revelation to Israel. See, for example, Exodus 31:15–17, where God expressly says that the observance of the sabbath is ‘a sign forever between me and the people of Israel’:

Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall be put to death. <sup>16</sup>Therefore the Israelites shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. <sup>17</sup>It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

The horrible divisions which have afflicted the nations since Babel<sup>22</sup> will be removed when the nations stream to Israel to be instructed because the *Torah* will flow from them (Isa. 2:2–4).

The bestowal of *Torah* on Israel was an immense privilege since it was to be the means by which the whole creation was to be restored. When instruction goes forth from Zion, it will be ‘the word of the LORD from Jerusalem’.

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<sup>22</sup> Or, since Adam, cf. Acts 17:26, ‘From one [*ancestor*] he made all the nations to inhabit the earth’ (NRSV).

## THE WORSHIP<sup>23</sup>

Once again, the question of ‘the worship’ needs to be asked in the context of salvation history. What does it mean for Israel to have the worship? Without repeating the details given in previous schools, etc., we should be reminded that Adam’s role was to lead the creation in worship, to take this worship to the ends of the earth, to be ‘Edenising’ the world. This goal was not lost, as Isaiah 66:22–23 declares:

For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the LORD; so shall your descendants and your name remain. <sup>23</sup>From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the LORD.

The exclusion from Eden (Gen. 3:23f.) was exclusion from worship, and this was expressed in hostility to those who, like Abel, were people of faith. Cain was a man constructing his own worship and who was not ‘accepted’, one for whom there was no forgiveness in worship.<sup>24</sup> True, there were those at the time of Seth who ‘began to invoke the name of the LORD’, but they are far short of ‘all the families of the earth’.

When Noah and his family came out of the ark, as the new ‘Adam’ he worshipped (Gen. 8:20–21a), but the result was not the Edenising of the world but the rejection of that whole principle in the construction of the tower in Babel (Gen. 11:1–9).

With Abraham there was again worship (Gen. 12:7–8; 13:18), climactically demonstrated in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac. The fulfilment of his worship was seen in the worship offered by his descendants, the people of Israel whose worship was an expression of the heavenly paradigm (Exod. 25:40; Heb. 8:5–6). Therefore, to be a true participant in Israel’s worship was a rich privilege. Here there was forgiveness and a recognition that the worship was according to the mind and will of God.

The tragic turning from worship of God to worship of worship is seen in Isaiah 1:10–17:

When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; <sup>13</sup>bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. <sup>14</sup>Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them (vv. 12–14).

The blessing of the worship became a curse:

And now, O priests, this command is for you. <sup>2</sup>If you will not listen, if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, says the LORD of hosts, then I will send the curse on you and I will curse your blessings; indeed I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. <sup>3</sup>I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and I will put you out of my presence (Mal. 2:1–3).

## THE PROMISES<sup>25</sup>

Given the stern warnings, the fact of judgment upon Israel is not surprising. But along with the judgment was the promise that there is blessing when the judgment purifies Israel. Thus Malachi continues:

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<sup>23</sup> See NCTM Monday Pastors’ Study 3/2/97.

<sup>24</sup> See G. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1. Word, Waco, 1987), p. 104: ‘If you do well, is there not forgiveness?’

<sup>25</sup> See NCTM Monday Pastors’ Study 3/3/97.

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>2</sup>But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; <sup>3</sup>he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. <sup>4</sup>Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years (Mal. 3:1–4).

There is actually no Hebrew word for 'promise' in the Old Testament, but the thought is prominent. The purpose of God has been made known and even if it involves judgment it is with a view to the ultimate blessing of Israel:

For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup>For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope (Jer. 29:10–11).

God has spoken and the prophets have received that word:

Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. <sup>8</sup>The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:7–8).

History is moving towards the goal of God, not because of the ability of Israel but because 'the mouth of the LORD has spoken' (Isa. 40:5) and 'the word of our God will stand forever' (Isa. 40:8).

Zechariah's prophecy recognises this:

'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for *he looked favorably* on his people and *redeemed* them.  
<sup>69</sup>He *raised up* a mighty savior for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
<sup>70</sup>as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
<sup>71</sup>that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.  
<sup>72</sup>Thus he *showed* the mercy promised to our ancestors,  
and *remembered* his holy covenant,  
<sup>73</sup>the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham . . .' (Luke 1:68–73).

The verbs indicate all that God did in the past, even though English perfect tenses are used in most translations.<sup>26</sup> But all that God did in the past was in accordance with what 'he [had] spoke[n] through the mouth of his holy prophets'. He showed the mercy which was 'promised'. But after his resurrection Jesus accused the two on the road to Emmaus of being 'foolish . . . and slow of hearing to believe all that the prophets have declared' (Luke 24:25), and earlier he said that Jerusalem was 'the city that kills the prophets' (Luke 13:34). The precious and very great promises which God had given to Israel and which, had they believed them, would have kept them in constant touch with the vast plan of God for creation, had been generally rejected or interpreted in far more restricted terms.

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<sup>26</sup> The words in italics are all aorist tenses.

## THE FATHERS AND THE MESSIAH<sup>27</sup>

The fathers (the patriarchs) are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and it is possible that this reference provides some sort of conclusion to the list of privileges or advantages which Israel had by saying again, in a different way, that they are Israelites. 'The oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham' was equally 'his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' (Exod. 2:24).

All these advantages are theirs. But there is far more. Out of<sup>28</sup> Israel has come the Messiah, the one who has fulfilled in himself all that Israel was called to be in itself and for the nations. By rejecting him, Israel had demeaned itself, for it had failed to see itself as the matrix for the salvation of the world in him.

## THE BLESSINGS BECOME A CURSE

The role of Israel was always with the nations in view. Israel, however, almost always rejected that role, as in the story of Jonah. Isaiah had foretold that, far from the nations being somehow absorbed into Israel, Israel was intended to stand as one of the nations in the restoration of the blessing of the world:

On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, <sup>25</sup>whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage' (Isa. 19:24–25).

To that extent, Israel's unique role within salvation history was to come to an end when the blessing came to the nations. One of the reasons why there was so much pressure put on Gentile believers by Jewish believers was exactly in this area: many of the Jewish believers still felt that the Gentiles (nations) ought to be absorbed into Israel and adopt those elements which had marked out Israel as the carrier of the blessing, namely circumcision,<sup>29</sup> sabbath observance<sup>30</sup> and the dietary laws.<sup>31</sup>

The climax of Israel's role was seen in Jesus. Although we have usually taken the language in a very general way, could we not perhaps see the language of the Gospels pointing in this direction? For instance, what does it mean to fulfil all righteousness (Matt. 3:15)? Could it be that at last there is someone who will give complete expression to the covenant relationship with Israel's Messiah, in the person of Jesus, submitting fully to the law on Israel's behalf?<sup>32</sup> If that is so then Israel will at last fulfil its function.

More pointed is Matthew 5:17–18:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.  
<sup>18</sup>For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

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<sup>27</sup> See NCTM Monday Pastors' Studies for 7/4/97 and 5/5/97. See also my paper for the 1998 NCTM Pastors' School, 'Jesus the Messiah: Messianic Truth'.

<sup>28</sup> ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ.

<sup>29</sup> See Rom. 2:25–29; 3:1; 4:9–12; 15:8; 1 Cor. 7:18–19; Gal. 2:3, 12; 5:2–3, 6, 11; 6:12–15; Col. 2:11; 3:11, as well as the regular designation of Jews as 'the circumcision', surely a reference to their undue emphasis on the rite.

<sup>30</sup> Rom. 14:5–6.

<sup>31</sup> Rom. 14:2–6, 13–21; 1 Cor. 8; Gal. 2:11–14; Col. 2:21; 1 Tim. 4:3–5.

<sup>32</sup> See, similarly, William J. Dumbrell, *The New Covenant: The Synoptics in Context: Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Bible Society of Singapore, Singapore, 1999), p. 26.

Verse 18 speaks of the full weight of the law being in force ‘until all is accomplished’. When is that to be? And which law is in mind? Given verse 17, the law is surely the *Torah*. There is no question of the eternal law of God *ever* passing away, but when all righteousness is fulfilled and when the kingdom is established then the law and the prophets will have served their salvation–historical purpose. This would be Jesus, then, announcing that in himself the climax of Israel’s purpose is about to be reached (cf. Rom. 10:4, ‘Messiah is the goal, the *telos*, of the *Torah*’?).

Luke 4:18–30 indicates the response of the Jews to this sort of announcement. When Jesus said that the promise of the anointing of the Spirit was being fulfilled in their hearing, and when he described the blessing going to the Gentiles, the crowd in Nazareth attempted to kill him. Once again they were rejecting the prophetic word (v. 24).

What we call Jesus’ earthly ministry was one of teaching and healing, all within the context of Israel and all prior to the Cross and the Resurrection. He was declaring the kingdom of God in word and deed. He ordered the disciples, at that stage, to ‘go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but [to] go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matt. 10:5–6). This compassion for Israel was because they were ‘harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd’ (Matt. 9:36). The language, superficially pastoral, was in fact drawn from Numbers 27:17 and referred to Israel as a people without a leader. Now, like Israel wanting a king ‘like the nations round about’, they had rejected God from being king over them and were lost in the presence of ‘the king of the Jews’. Their leaders, especially those who claimed to uphold the law and the prophets (the Pharisees), were focussed on their own self-aggrandisement (Matt. 23:5–12). They would cross sea and land to make a single convert but, in doing so, laid on the convert heavy burdens which were hard to bear and at the same time were locking people out of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 23:4, 13–15). On the other hand, Jesus’ burden was light and the yoke which he placed on people was easy to bear (Matt. 11:30). The contrast between Jesus and the leaders of Israel was becoming stronger and the division deeper.

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was as King, fulfilling the promise of Zechariah 9:9 (Matt. 21:5). Luke describes the Pharisees attempting to silence the exultant disciples, and Jesus’ response that ‘if these were silent, the stones would shout out’ (Luke 19:39–40).

The worship in the Temple had become polluted as the court of the Gentiles had been used as the place where the sacrificial animals were sold and the foreign money exchanged. The result was effectively the exclusion of Gentiles from worship. It is Mark’s account which gives the full quote, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’ (Mark 11:17; cf. Isa. 56:7). Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple (see Mal. 3:1–4) was associated with the story of the cursing of the fig tree. This was no act of pique but rather an enacted parable, based on Jeremiah 8:13:

When I wanted to gather them, says the LORD, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them.

The cursing of the tree was announcing that fruitless Israel, with its polluted worship, was finished; ‘may no fruit come from you again’ (Matt. 21:19; cf. John 15:1–8). This imagery was repeated in some of the parables which followed.

First was the story of the two sons in Matthew 21:28–32 in which Jesus likened the chief priests and elders to the son who claimed to do the father’s bidding but in reality did not. Tax collectors and prostitutes were entering the kingdom before those leaders. The leaders were like the tenants in the story of the vineyard (Matt. 21:33–46),

based obviously on Isaiah 5. Here were people given great privileges. They were not slaves and were living securely behind a protective fence with the only requirement that they provide produce at the time of harvest. The murdering of the Son would result in the execution of the tenants and the leasing of 'the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time' (Matt. 21:41), a reference to the fact that then the kingdom of God would be taken away from Israel 'and given to a nation [singular] that produces the fruits of the kingdom' (Matt. 21:43).

The parable of the guests invited to the wedding (Matt. 22:1–14) pointed to the eschatological hope of the wedding banquet, and the general unwillingness of the leaders of Israel to attend on terms other than their own, or to attend at all. Matthew 24:1–36 dealt with the 'destruction of Jerusalem and the end of Israel'.<sup>33</sup> Dumbrell describes Matthew 24:37 – 25:46 as 'Five Parables against Israel':

- a. The unprepared generation of Noah surprised by the massive judgment of the flood (24:37–41).
- b. The unprepared householder surprised by a thief (24:42–44).
- c. The faithful versus the wicked servant surprised by the return of the master (24:45–50).
- d. The prepared versus the unprepared maidens (25:1–13).
- e. The servants who were unproductive with their Lord's resources (25:14–30).<sup>34</sup>

In these parables, being prepared for the time of judgment is a matter for Israel, in the light of the privilege and responsibilities it has been given. Luke 12:48 summarises the issue:

But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

Dumbrell's comment is helpful:

Discipleship is to be associated with vigilance, continued readiness for the kingdom. But what is meant by the return of the Son of Man will be clarified in Luke 21, when his return will be seen as associated with the fall of Jerusalem. Verses 47–48 indicate that if punishment is necessary, it will be meted out commensurate with responsibility given.<sup>35</sup>

Salvation by grace through faith is not being considered here. The issue is the way in which Israel has responded to its calling as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Thus Matthew 25:30–46, the division between the sheep and the goats, the conclusion of Jesus' public ministry, has nothing to do with personal salvation. It concerns the separation of the nations, including Israel. When the Son of Man comes in his glory, he will sit on the throne of his glory as King (vv. 31, 34). Whatever else, the parameters of the judgment are similar to those in Isaiah 58, which explained why Israel did not receive the blessing of God. For example:

... day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God.

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<sup>33</sup> Dumbrell, *The New Covenant*, p. 76.

<sup>34</sup> Dumbrell, *The New Covenant*, p. 77.

<sup>35</sup> Dumbrell, *The New Covenant*, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup>‘Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?’ Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. <sup>4</sup>Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. <sup>5</sup>Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

<sup>6</sup>Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? <sup>7</sup>Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

<sup>8</sup>Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup>Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, <sup>10</sup>if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday (Isa. 58:2–10).<sup>36</sup>

The blessings which had come to Israel in gifts and calling are irrevocable. There remain ‘the children of the promise’ (Rom. 9:8). God has not ‘rejected his people’ (Rom. 11:1f.). But for Israel to know the goal of those blessings they must cease their unbelief (Rom. 11:23). Israel must now find itself as one *of* and one *with* the nations who all ‘share the rich root of the olive tree’ (Rom. 11:17). Only as they belong to the Messiah are they ‘Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise’ (Gal. 3:29). As in Matthew 25:31–34, it is not possession of the gifts, but faith in the one to whom the gifts led, which is decisive.

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<sup>36</sup> It is this passage which explains the ministry of the anointed one in Isa. 61:1ff.

## study six

# God's Giving and Gifts in Creation

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### THE NATURE OF THE CREATION

All creation beats out the love of the Creator and is intended to engender human pleasure and sonly trust, because it reveals his fatherhood and covenant faithfulness (Gen. 2:9; Matt. 5:45; 6:30; Acts 14:15–17; 17:24–31; I Tim. 6:17). Solomon said:

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

Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, proclaimed a life of giving ‘to him who asks of you’ (Matt. 5:42; also 6:19–21), as ‘sons of your Father who is in heaven’, who ‘makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good’ (Matt. 5:45, 48). This was the perfection he had come to establish as true Son of his Father; a world in which receiving the bounty of the Father (Matt. 6:25–34), and giving freely to others, was the norm.

We should think of God’s giving, not just in the sustenance of life but in our being given familyhood (Eph. 3:15) and life itself. God breathed into Man and he became a living soul. Only God can sustain and restore that soul (Ps. 23:3). God gives us everything necessary to life and godliness (II Pet. 1:3).

Because we have used God’s gifts as ‘consumables’, they are not seen or felt as gifts, but they remain gifts, given out of the freedom of the Father’s heart.

### PARTICIPATING IN THE GIVING—FRUITFULNESS

Linked with God’s creating was his blessing the animals and birds for procreation (Gen. 1:22), and blessing humanity, not only for procreation but also for subduing the earth (v. 28). After this blessing, we are told of the gifts of God to Man and beast for their food. Then, everything God had made was called ‘very good’ (v. 31).

The creation is constituted by God’s giving, but anticipates the dominion and subduing for which humanity was blessed. This dominion must be with a view to the purpose of God, which is the sanctifying of the whole creation:

*Blessing is God doing Man and the creation good in the light of its relation to Him, or its opposition to Him, as also in the light of His destiny for His creation.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Bingham, notes to Pastors’ School 2000 speakers.

The second creation account notes that no plants had yet appeared because there was no-one to 'serve' the ground (Gen. 2:5, 8–9). Again, Man was to till the ground, and was given every fruit of the tree to eat (vv. 15–16). By God's blessing and the fruitfulness it enabled, creation would have its true function and goal.

The same link of Man's works, as part of the works of God, is seen in Psalm 104:19–24. Again, there is a link between enjoyment of the creation and being rich in good deeds in I Timothy 6:17.

None of this says that God's giving is conditional on Man's fruitfulness. The Father makes his sun shine regardless of our good or evil (Matt. 5:45). However, we could never understand the creation or ourselves if we regarded ourselves as consumers. We participate in the fruitfulness and the gifts of the creation by being fruitful and by being, ourselves, a gift, and givers, in the creation.

The Father has now sent his Son as the second Adam. It is in this giving that the creation and its Creator are truly seen, and many sons are raised up to participate in the creation as it truly is.

## **GOD'S GIFTS AND GIVING FALSIFIED**

Knowing the Creator and truly receiving his gifts is central to our moral nature. In Eden, the Serpent questioned the liberality of God's gifts. Eve began to see the world through this questioning perspective. Instead of 'every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food' from which they could eat 'freely', and the tree of life in the middle of the garden, she saw the trees from which they 'may' (permission) eat, and the forbidden tree in the middle of the garden. In this way, sin entered the world.

The 'fruit' (or unfruitfulness) of this choice was disastrous. Mutual accusation was immediate. Murder followed. Violence became a matter for boasting (Gen. 4:23–24) and encompassed the earth (Gen. 6:11–12).

Elsewhere in Scripture, we note that 'unfruitfulness' is caused by 'the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things' (Mark 4:19), and the 'works of darkness' (Eph. 5:11). On the other hand, 'fruitfulness' is linked with 'good works in order to meet urgent needs' (Tit. 3:14) and goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, mutual affection and love (II Pet. 1:5–8).

## **GOD'S GIFTS AND GIVING RE-AFFIRMED TO THE PATRIARCHS**

The lives of Abraham, to whom the promise of blessing for the earth was renewed, and his grandson Jacob, together with his son Joseph, make instructive reading for our theme.

Abraham grew in faith as he heard the word of God (Rom. 4:20). He believed in the promise of blessing for the world through a son yet to be born to him. God effectively called him back into (or, on to) Eden where doubt of God would not constrict his spirit. He received from God and learned to give to his family (the first choice of grazing lands), and to his neighbours (the return of their plundered goods) and to God (he did not withhold his only beloved son). Here was fruitfulness and the assurance of blessing for the world.

Jacob inherited the blessing promised to Abraham but sought to grasp from others what God had promised him. He bought his brother's birthright and wangled riches from a fellow wangler. Then he wrestled and prevailed with God. Even so, he seemed reticent to return to Bethel where he had promised that the Lord would be his God.

However, his life was punctuated with God's re-affirmations of his promise and these led him on into a true confession of God as the God who would bless him. He came to a true assessment of his sons as mostly selfish people, while still knowing that the purpose of God for the world would be fulfilled through them.

The story of Joseph, in the midst of rivalry, shows the purpose of God to reveal himself as the true Giver, through making Joseph fruitful, 'to preserve many people alive'.

### **GOD'S GIFTS AND GIVING REDISCOVERED**

Though the vision of God as Giver had been challenged, James says we should not be deceived (James 1:13–18). Temptation is still present in our own lusts. This gives birth to sin and leads to death. We are still involved in the same battle.

But now, God has brought us to birth as 'first fruits' of his creatures by the 'word of truth'. His meaning seems to be that, through the gospel, Christians have been brought into being as the beginnings and promise of the whole creation renewed.<sup>2</sup>

Like Israel, the church is the foretaste of the completed creation bringing to God the thanks and worship and service befitting creatures (Jer. 2:3).

Here, as a new creative work of God, we have been brought back to the unsullied view of God which was present in Eden, but now with all the advantage gained from being sons of God in Christ.

God does not entrap his creatures with temptations or deny them good gifts. Rather, he is the Father of lights—the God who gave us the created lights, but who, unlike them, does not vary. He may be trusted to supply all things.

### **CHRIST, THE TRUE CREATURE, RESTORING TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD**

It would be foolish to think that we could rediscover the true nature of God and his creation by an explanation. Christ lived in the creation as a true creature, receiving and delighting in the gifts of his Father. His Sermon on the Mount should be seen as a call to see the Father truly, and so to live in his giving—a word of promise and hope.

The view of creation and of God's gifts which we now have has arisen from our being redeemed. In this view, God has brought us to see all of the free gifts he has bestowed on us through the lens of the Cross. Christ has gone to the heart of our ungratefulness (unwillingness to acknowledge him) and materialism (making an idol of the creation) and revealed his love by bearing the barrenness of what we have become. It is there we rediscover the fact and the dimensions of his gifts and of himself as the Giver.

We may use the image of Eden to say that Christ has restored to us a vision and receiving of God's gifts in which the tree of life is again in the centre of the garden.

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<sup>2</sup> cf. Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Commentary, Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1982.

### **NOTE CONCERNING PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL AND READING OF SCRIPTURE**

When God is seen as mean-spirited, making (unreasonable) demands of his creatures, the Scriptures and the gospel itself are perverted and presented as a means to grace. Many have come to expect that the word of God to them is a word of law and are barely able to look up to God without shame, despair or anger. Such is the heritage of our seeking the knowledge of good and evil, as competitors of God rather than as his creation.

In fact, God has renewed his word to us—his fallen creatures—now, as a word of promise. If false teachers have turned the gospel of grace into a heavy burden to bear and wrongly bound up the consciences of their hearers rather than taken them to Christ, their word needs to be exposed for what it is (cf. Gal. 3:17–19).

### **STANDING AS SONS AND DAUGHTERS IN THE CREATION**

As purified sons of God, we stand in the creation, receiving the plethora of the Father's gifts, knowing they are ours to have as a possession, to enjoy, to labour in, to sanctify (for example, food is sanctified by thanksgiving), to guard, to fill, so that all creatures may know the depth and breadth of the Father's giving.

### **GOD STILL GIVES IN TIME OF TRIAL**

When we make an idol of the creation or part of it, God may send judgments, making it appear that there is no benevolent Creator. However, he desires that the creation perform its true witness as an ordered and habitable garden (Isa. 45:18f.). He subjects the world to vanity, but in hope which is revealed by his prophets (Rom. 8:19–25). In times when the unbelieving world tells us there is no providence, we should entrust ourselves to a faithful Creator (I Pet. 4:19).

## study seven

# New Testament Principles of Giving: II Corinthians 8 – 9

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From about AD 52 – 57 Paul devoted a considerable amount of his time and energy to the organising of a collection among the Gentile churches for the poor among the believers in Jerusalem. He had spoken to the Corinthian Christians on a previous trip about contributing to this need and they had made certain promises back then but had not fulfilled them. So this part of Paul's second letter to them was by way of reminder that they ought to keep their word.

### **THE MACEDONIAN EXAMPLE: II CORINTHIANS 8:1-5**

Paul begins tactfully by giving the example of the generosity of the Macedonian Christians. This would have shown up the Corinthians by comparison! There are several key principles in this introduction.

#### **True Giving Flows from the Grace of God**

Paul shows that the giving of the Macedonians was a result of the grace of God coming upon them. The Gospel had come to this area through Paul's preaching and many had been converted as the church was founded. That was nothing less than the grace of God in action. Out of that grace these young believers had seen their indebtedness to God and therefore wanted to share their new-found blessing with others. When men and women discover what God has done for them in Christ, so they will want to share—not just the Gospel—but also their material possessions and money. Grace moves the believer to act in the same way towards others as God has acted towards them.

#### **True Giving Is Generous No Matter What the Circumstances**

The Christians in Macedonia had suffered for their faith. They were persecuted and maligned—just as Paul had been when he first went there with the message of Christ. Nevertheless, in spite of their suffering and personal needs, these Macedonians joyously responded to the need in Jerusalem. In their giving, inability did not govern them, distress did not deter them, poverty did not hinder them. There was an

‘abundant joy’ which led to a ‘wealth of generosity’. In their giving, joy permeated it, spontaneity characterised it and grace motivated it.

### **True Giving Flows out of Joy in God**

As the Macedonians experienced the grace of God in their lives, so they were filled with joy. It was out of that very same joy that they gave. It was in ‘extreme poverty’ that they experienced an overwhelming joy in God and in being able to share their meagre wealth with other believers. John Piper says: ‘*Love is the overflow of joy in God which gladly meets the needs of others . . . They [the Macedonians] found their pleasure in channelling the grace of God through their poverty to the poverty in Jerusalem.*’<sup>1</sup>

### **True Giving Goes beyond One’s Means**

The extraordinary characteristic of the Macedonian giving was not that it was according to their means. It was more than that. They gave in faith *beyond their means*. Somehow these Christians were able to give more than they could logically and practically give. It seems that they gave over and above what they could afford. This shows that grace enables even poor people to give extraordinary amounts of money. It defies arithmetic. Faith sees that the God of grace can supply not just one’s needs, but beyond. It sees that God can provide in a way that goes beyond human thinking or rationale.

### **True Giving Is Seen as a Privilege**

The Macedonians pleaded with Paul to allow them to give, ‘begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints’. They saw giving as a colossal privilege. Why? No doubt because they were thus able to show gratitude to the God of all grace who had so lavishly blessed them with salvation and forgiveness. This sense of privilege is lost the moment giving is legislated.

### **True Giving Is Always Accompanied by Dedication to the Lord**

The Macedonians gave liberally. But they gave themselves ‘first to the Lord’ and then to the apostles. Giving is often divorced from both God and the recipients of the gifts. Giving is often impersonal. It is money in the plate each Sunday and that’s that. It’s a duty. But true giving cannot be apart from a devotion to the Lord, to whom we are indebted for our very life—let alone our salvation.

## **GIVING IS A GRACE: II CORINTHIANS 8:6–7**

Titus had already been dispatched to Corinth to help collect the money the church had promised. Paul now reminds them yet again of the fundamental truth that it is a grace to give. The Corinthian church had been blessed with an abundance of gifts. They were a church which was loaded with the gifts of God’s grace. Everything they’d experienced of his gifts of the Spirit were given by God. Now, says Paul, seeing that you excel in

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<sup>1</sup> *Desiring God*, by John Piper (Multnomah Publishing Inc., Sisters, Oregon, 1986), p. 103.

all these wonderful grace-gifts, excel in this one also! *Excel in the grace of giving!* Like the Corinthians, few believers today seem to understand that to give is a grace. It is generally viewed as a normal human act of kindness or generosity or love. It may be those things, but Christian giving is far more. It is a *grace* to give. It is literally something that can only be done as the grace of God acts in our lives. Grace-giving is Spirit motivated. It is God oriented. It is a giving out of a heart of love that has no strings attached. There is no agenda with grace-giving. It is a giving that does not seek some reward or pay-back. Grace-giving is initiated by the love of God within us that compels or thrusts us forward with an open-hearted willingness. Grace-giving is giving to others in the same way in which God has given to us.

**CHRIST IS THE ILLUSTRATION OF TRUE GIVING:  
II CORINTHIANS 8:8–9**

Paul nowhere makes the mistake of commanding the Corinthians to give. He does not lay a ‘heavy hand’ on them or seek to pressurise them into having to give. He does not bring some law to bear and insist that they ought to give *because . . . !* Instead, he requests, makes suggestions, gives examples and encourages obedience. What Paul does is allow them to test the sincerity of their love. He has given them the example of the Macedonians—they can compare themselves with *their* sterling effort! But such comparisons are always inadequate and fraught with danger, so Paul simply places the example of Christ before them. He says, in effect, ‘If you want to compare yourselves with anyone, then make the comparison with Christ’.

**CHRISTIAN GIVING IS SO THAT THERE MIGHT BE EQUALITY:  
II CORINTHIANS 8:10–15**

The Corinthians had begun to give the year before, so Paul now urges them to complete what they had originally intended to do. He then gives another important principle in Christian giving. Where there is a genuine willingness (wrought by grace), then our giving is according to what we have, not according to what we don’t have. It is pointless giving to the needs of others if that very act places us in a worse position than they are in. That would be senseless. It would not be honouring to God. It would indeed be a bad witness. No, the real issue is equality. Even though the Macedonians had been led to give ‘beyond their means’, Paul urges the Corinthians to give ‘according to your means’. To illustrate this principle, Paul quotes from Exodus (cf. 16:13–36) in relation to the gathering of the manna. Each gathered what was needed and none had more or less than was needed for the day. It was not to be hoarded.

**WE SHOULD MANAGE MONEY WITH DISCIPLINE AND INTEGRITY:  
II CORINTHIANS 8:16–24**

Paul took extraordinary steps to manage the money given by the Corinthians. The contribution by the Corinthians was probably a considerable sum which had to be transported from Europe to Palestine. In order to safeguard the funds—as well as his own reputation as someone who could be trusted—Paul sent Titus ahead to organise the collection. But the task was of such importance that it would have been unwise for

Paul to have left it in the hands of one person. Thus he also sent with Titus, ‘the brother who is famous among all the churches for his proclaiming the good news’. This second brother was not just Paul’s choice, but ‘he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us while we are administering this generous undertaking’. As if this was not enough, there was a third member of the delegation, ‘our brother whom we have often tested and found eager in many matters, but who is now more eager than ever because of his great confidence in you’. Notice Paul’s clearly stated reasons for taking these steps and for making these detailed provisions:

In order to honour the Lord himself.

To show his eagerness and goodwill in wanting to help.

To avoid any criticism or blame as he administered this liberal gift.

He took pains to do what was right—in men’s eyes as well as in the Lord’s.

The couriers were representing the churches in order to honour Christ.

Paul makes just one final comment to the Corinthians: On the basis of all that he has undertaken to ensure the safe transit of the money from Corinth to Jerusalem, ‘Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you’. He wants the Corinthians to rise to the occasion; do what they had promised to do; honour the Lord by their trust and confidence in Paul and the couriers, and thus let the churches around see what was happening!

### **WE SHOULD BE READY TO GIVE WHENEVER THE NEED ARISES: II CORINTHIANS 9:1–5**

Paul had boasted about the liberal offering which the Corinthians had promised a year before. He had told the churches in Europe of the willingness of the Achaian believers and was therefore anxious that they fulfil their obligations in this matter. Some think Paul was being manipulative here—that this was a ‘con’. But he was only reminding the Corinthians of what they themselves had offered and promised to do a year before. The point here is that we ought to make adequate preparations when it comes to giving to the work of the Lord. There is the need to be organised and disciplined. It is a poor witness to the world (as well as to other Christians) when we do not make appropriate preparations for giving. Many Christians only ever give on the spur of the moment. They never budget. They never think ahead. They give what is left over and make no prior preparation to give. On the other hand there are those who make promises to give to the church’s work in the world but never keep their word. They are like the Corinthians—enthusiastic, but needing a prod to get them going to fulfil their promises!

### **GENEROUS GIVING BRINGS REWARDS—TO BOTH GIVER AND RECEIVER: II CORINTHIANS 9:6–15**

There are a number of key points that we can deduce from this passage:

#### **What We Sow We Will Reap**

The farmer sows expecting a crop as a reward. To sow sparingly makes no sense for a farmer. The more he sows the more he is likely to get back by way of a bumper crop.

Our giving to God is said to be like sowing. If we are stingy and sparing in our giving, then it means we have no expectation of seeing anything by way of results. It means we do not understand the grace of God. We do not see that he is the one who gives the reward for our generosity (Luke 6:38; Prov. 11:24–25; 22:9). Spurgeon once said, ‘Many people will always be poor because they never give to the cause of God . . . God has a way of giving by the cartloads to those who give away by shovelfuls.’<sup>2</sup>

Some Christians seem to think it is wrong to give with a reward in mind, but one of the first things we discover when we are disciplined in our giving is that God has a blessing for us *in* giving. When we give freely and willingly to the Lord, we soon discover that we receive back from the Lord blessings in abundance! This is not to say that we give in order to get, for, as R. G. Le Tourneau once remarked, ‘If you give because it pays, then it won’t pay’.<sup>3</sup> If we give in order to gain some favour or blessing from God then we ‘neutralize our gift’.<sup>4</sup> The principle here is that giving is not just a matter of arithmetic but of faith. The farmer sows in faith and then trusts (God) for the increase. We are to ‘sow’ in our giving with the same faith-attitude. God will in his own way and time give us the increase. As we give, we need therefore to be on the lookout for that bumper crop! That indeed is our reward.

### **We Will Be Loved by God for Our Cheerful Giving**

John Piper comments on the II Corinthians 9:6–15 passage, ‘I take this to mean that God is not pleased when people act benevolently but don’t do it gladly. When people don’t find pleasure (Paul’s word is “cheer”!) in their acts of service, God doesn’t find pleasure in them.’<sup>5</sup> If our giving is reluctant or grudging or under compulsion, then it shows that we do not understand the way in which God goes on giving to us. The giving of the Father, Son and Spirit is without measure. It is not conditioned or restrained. It is a giving that is profuse. It is giving that is extravagant. It is over-the-top giving! ‘One thing I know’, said Spurgeon, ‘is that a cheerful giver always wishes he could give ten times as much’.<sup>6</sup> When we give cheerfully and generously it pleases our Father because it is a giving that is like his giving. The word Paul uses here in the Greek for ‘cheerful’ is that from which we get our English word ‘hilarious’. In other words he is saying, ‘God loves an hilarious giver’.

### **As We Give, God Will Graciously Support Us**

God’s grace abounds to us all the time. He is able to support us and provide for us under all circumstances. As a result, we will never be without the things we need in life. Our Father clothes the lilies of the field, and he will not only clothe us but will enable us to ‘abound in every good work’. His righteousness endures for ever, and he will never let up in scattering abroad his gifts to the poor. He will lavish his grace on us—even in this matter of giving—so that we will never be in need.

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<sup>2</sup> *Spurgeon At His Best*, by Charles Spurgeon (Baker Book House Company, Grand Rapids, 1988) p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by J. Oswald Sanders, *Problems of Christian Discipleship* (China Inland Mission, London, 1958), p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> *Desiring God*, by John Piper, p. 104.

<sup>6</sup> *Spurgeon At His Best*, by Charles Spurgeon, p. 336.

### **As We Give, God Will Multiply Our Resources**

Not only does God supply our needs in life but he does something more. He multiplies our resources. It is God who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, and it is also he who will 'supply and increase' our store of seed. In Elijah's day there was a severe famine for three years. By God's command he went and stayed with the widow of Zarephath. God used Elijah to meet her needs. Her meagre supply of food did not run out. Humanly speaking it was impossible for her oil and meal to have lasted so long. God 'multiplied her resources'. The miracle happened. Day after day she drew from her resources to feed three hungry mouths—and the food kept multiplying!

Another example: Imagine the disciples' amazement when Jesus instructed them to feed the five thousand who had gathered to hear him speak! All they had in the basket was five loaves of bread and two fishes. Not only was everyone satisfied, but twelve baskets of fragments were gathered after the meal—exceedingly more than the original supply! The same miracle happened as had occurred in Elijah's day.

These are wonderful illustrations of God's method of multiplication! He delights in confounding our arithmetic, and his way of multiplying our resources transcends human wisdom or reasoning. There is therefore a logic of the heart which is higher than the logic of the mind when it comes to giving money to the Lord. He gives to us and we give back to him. But what he gives can multiply in our hands in the same way as those loaves and fishes multiplied in the hands of the disciples. But when human reason puts limits on God we fail to see the miracle of God's multiplication. The fact is, he is well able to, 'supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness' (v. 10). In faith we need to launch out into the deep. As we do, we will be, 'enriched in every way for your [our] great generosity'.

### **As We Give, Others Will Be Blessed and God Praised**

Our generosity will not only bring blessing to us, but it will benefit others. More than anything else, it will resonate to God's glory. It will result in 'thanksgiving to God'. It is when we look outward and consider those in far greater need than ourselves that we will begin to give in a way that is truly honouring to God. Such good giving will be as light to the dark world around us—resulting in praise to God. Not only does our generosity supply the needs of God's people but it will overflow 'with many thanksgivings to God'. Men and women will praise God for our obedience. God will be honoured. Christ will be exalted.

### **As We Give, God's Gracious Gift Will Be Seen By All**

Behind the generous giving of God's people there will be seen something of the grace of God. Since giving is in itself a 'grace', it is no wonder the grace of God is communicated to others when we give with a willing and transparent motive. As we give, those who are on the receiving end will pray all the more for us! And as they do, their hearts will go out to us because of 'the surpassing grace of God that he has given you'. Paul knew what it was like to be on the receiving end. The Philippians had sent gifts to him via Epaphroditus. Their generosity and love drew out from him a deep bond with the believers in that bustling Macedonian city (Phil. 4:18). When Paul first arrived in Corinth he met up with Priscilla and Aquila. Since both he and they were tentmakers by trade, they had a common interest and so began working together. Paul set out to avoid any criticism that he was being paid by those to whom he preached

(Acts 20:34–35; I Thess. 2:9; II Thess. 3:7–8). However, the arrival of Timothy and Titus from Thessalonica brought gifts of money for Paul to the extent that he was able to give himself full-time to the proclamation of the Word. He experienced the grace of God many times in these gifts from those who supported him financially. He therefore reminded the Corinthians that their giving to the saints in Jerusalem would convey the grace of God to them also.

### **ALL WE HAVE IS PURE GIFT**

When Jesus met the woman at the well that dusty day in Samaria she was astounded at his words. She had come to collect water from the well, but Jesus spoke of another water—the water of life. He spoke of this as *the gift of God*. He said to her:

If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink’, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water (John 4:10).

Believers are those who have drunk at this well of life. The great gift of God—eternal life—has become ours through faith in Jesus Christ. Everything we have and everything we are is therefore pure gift from the Father. This means that our giving—whatever form it may take—flows out of his giving. If we seek to help others it is because he has first helped us. If we give money or material gifts it is because we recognise that they are all gifts to us from him anyway. Whatever we have by way of gifts, talents, abilities, spiritual gifts, material gifts—these all come from the Father’s hand. Paul asks, ‘What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?’ (I Cor. 4:7).

Christ himself is God’s greatest gift to us. It is out of his death that life has come to us. Gratitude of heart cannot but rise within us when we contemplate what we would have been had he not graced us with this incredible blessing. We echo Paul’s words: ‘Thanks be to God for *his* indescribable gift!’ (II Cor. 9:15).

## study eight

# Dorea, Domata and Charismata

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At first sight the three Greek words meaning 'gift' or 'gifts' seem not to signify something of immense importance. When we ask, 'what is at the heart of giving?', and, 'can words convey its great principle in its different forms?', then the answer must be that we need to know *dorea*, *domata* and *charismata*. Whilst not often considered, these three Greek words, although somewhat overlapping in their uses, have fairly well defined special uses.<sup>1</sup>

This paper seeks to define the use of these three terms from the text of the New Testament. It will then explore the purpose of God's giving, our receiving, and our giving. The emphasis will be on the relational; and hence our participation in the union with Christ:

A gift (*doron* and related words) is qualified by the reason for which it is given and the end which it is intended to serve. Its characteristic feature is not the act of giving [*didomi*], but the intention behind it.<sup>2</sup>

This statement will be made clear in this paper. The three words used for 'gift' in the New Testament have special connotations. The word *dorea* often refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit who effects the union and fellowship with Christ. The word *domata* is not used so often and is usually linked to the gifts of ministry. The last word *charismata* refers to the gifts of life and its use in the New Testament connotes the equipping of the person for service arising from the union and fellowship with Christ.

### *DOREA*

The term *dorea* in extra-Biblical usage denotes a complimentary gift.<sup>3</sup> However, in the New Testament it is used in reference to a divine gift, and more specifically often used in reference to the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, he said, 'If you knew the gift [*dorea*] of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water'

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction to the subject by G. Bingham, in personal communication.

<sup>2</sup> O. Becker, 'Gift, Pledge, Corban', *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Colin Brown (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1967), p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> H. Vorlander, 'Gift, Pledge, Corban', *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Colin Brown (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1967), p. 40.

(John 4:10, *NIV*). Here Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> It is not likely that Jesus was referring to Himself as the *dorea* in this context.

Peter used the term in the same way on the Day of Pentecost, when he said, ‘Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift [*dorea*] of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38, *NIV*). The use of the term *dorea* is consistent throughout the Book of Acts in reference to the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:20; 10:45; 11:17). This gift (*dorea*) of the Holy Spirit is from God the Father as indicated in the following verses: John 4:10; Acts 8:20; 11:17; 2 Corinthians 9:15; and Ephesians 3:7. The reference to the Holy Spirit is not explicit in Ephesians 3:7 and 4:7, but this can be inferred from the context.<sup>5</sup> However, in Ephesians 4:7 Paul refers to the Holy Spirit as Christ’s gift (*dorea*). John 4:11 infers that the Spirit is both the gift of the Father and the Son, though the reference is made in a veiled manner. This gift (*dorea*) of the Holy Spirit is for all believers, and is given under the New Covenant.

Other references to the use of the term *dorea* are found in Romans 5:15, 17, and Hebrews 6:4. The usage in Romans is not in direct reference to the Holy Spirit, but to the gift of righteousness, given out of the bountiful grace of God. While this may be so, the term *dorea* is used for the bestowal of the divine gift of the Holy Spirit. Righteousness is a relational term, and the restoration of this relationship is the work of the Holy Spirit. This link between righteousness and the Holy Spirit is borne out in Romans 8:4, 10.<sup>6</sup> A comparison to our human giving is made in Luke 11:13, which speaks of the boundless love of God for His people.

What is the significance of the gift of the Holy Spirit? In reference to the giving of God, Geoffrey Bingham has pointed out, in his first study of this School, that ‘this giving has to do with what [God] is about in creating, that is, what is the end of His creating. That end is the redeeming, sanctifying, glorifying and perfecting of His creation.’<sup>7</sup> The Holy Spirit is the effector of all the above. We know that the Holy Spirit is the one who effects our reconciliation through Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:15–16, 23).

The gift of the Holy Spirit, as well as the giving of ‘His only begotten’ (John 3:16), is God’s giving of Himself to us. If the Father had given to us something of His *creation* to effect the reconciliation, then that thing would become the intermediary. It would only be a substitute, and there would therefore be no real intermediary between God and Man. In an exemplary demonstration of the principle of the clear identification of the giver and the gift, the writer to the Hebrews puts it clearly that what the Great High Priest gives as the sacrifice is none other than Himself, as the sacrificial Lamb (Heb. 9:11–14, 25–26).

Writing on the paschal mystery, T. F. Torrance sums up the importance of the absolute identification of the gift and the Giver, as well as the importance of the giving of the Holy Spirit in this way:

If we insist over against both Catholics and Protestants that the Giver is identical with the Gift and the Gift is identical with the Giver, then such an immediate self-giving of God to us in his own divine Being and life through Jesus Christ must be understood as one that takes place *in the Holy Spirit* who is not just an emanation from God but the immediate presence and activity of God in his own divine Being, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, himself the Lord the Giver of

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<sup>4</sup> cf. John 7:38–39.

<sup>5</sup> James Dunn, ‘A Note on *Dorea*’, *The Expository Times* (August, 1970), 81:349–51.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> G. Bingham, ‘The Giving and the Receiving’, *Pastors’ School 2000*, study 1, p. 4.

life. Moreover, this is a real presence of Christ to us, creating a union between himself and us, and us and himself in the Spirit, such as he has with the Father eternally in the same Spirit, the Spirit who comes to us from the Father through the Son and who gives us access through the Son to the Father.<sup>8</sup>

In the *dorea* of the Holy Spirit we have been given ‘the immediate presence and activity of God in his own divine Being, the Spirit of the Father and the Son . . . creating a union between himself and us, and us and himself in the Spirit’. It is the purpose of this paper to present the understanding of the giving of God and our giving in the context of our union with Christ. This will be brought out in the subsequent discussion.

### ***DOMATA***

There are only a few references to the use of *doma* in the New Testament. The usage is usually linked with the gifts of ministry, for example in Ephesians 4:8–11. Its distinction from *dorea* is clear in this passage. While *dorea* is used mainly in reference to the gift of the Holy Spirit in verse 7, *doma* is used for the gifts of ministry in verse 8, ‘When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts [*domata*] to his people’ (NRSV). The gifts are given by Christ and they are for ‘building up the body of Christ’. The nature of these gifts is spelled out in verse 11. Other references to this usage are found in Matthew 7:11 and Philippians 4:17.

### ***CHARISMATA***

The term *charismata* is well known to all of us. It refers to the result of the grace (*charis*) of God acting upon our lives.<sup>9</sup> It is translated as ‘gift’ and used only of the gifts from God to Man. Its use refers to the gifts of life; for example in Romans 6:23, and the pneumatic gifts of 1 Corinthians 12. We have come to refer to *charisma* as ‘spiritual gifts’, after 1 Corinthians 12:1: ‘Now concerning spiritual gifts [*pneumatikos*], brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed’ (NRSV); though the term *charisma* is not used here.

The term ‘spiritual gifts’ is in common usage today. The connotation behind the term is that it describes a two-tiered experience of the Christian life—it is an ‘optional extra’. However, ‘there is no expression in the Greek New Testament which can be literally rendered “gifts of the Spirit”’, argues D. Robinson.<sup>10</sup> Neil Chambers in his article on ‘Spiritual Gifts’ argues that the term is a misnomer.<sup>11</sup> The word used in 1 Corinthians 12:1 and 14:1 (both translated as ‘spiritual gifts’), is *pneumatikos* and not *charismata*. The term *pneumatikos* is used quite widely in the New Testament and it is not an easy word to translate. It refers to matters pertaining to the Spirit, as in 1 Corinthians 2:13.

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<sup>8</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, 1996), p. 132.

<sup>9</sup> On p. 219 of J. W. Wenham’s *The Elements of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1965) he points out that the use of the suffix *-ma* indicates the result ending. For example, *krisis* (the act of judging) and *krima* (the judicial result). Thus *charis* (grace) and *charisma* (the result of grace).

<sup>10</sup> D. W. B. Robinson, ‘Charismata versus Pneumatika: Paul’s Method of Discussion’, *The Reformed Theological Review* (May–August 1972), vol. 31, pp. 49–55.

<sup>11</sup> Neil Chambers, ‘Spiritual Gifts’ in *Spirit of the Living God*, part 1, ed. B. G. Webb (Lancer Books, Homebush West, 1991), p. 117.

It would therefore be better to translate 1 Corinthians 12:1 thus, ‘Now concerning spiritual matters . . .’, though the reference to the *charismata* is obvious in the context. We should not confuse what Paul refers to as *pneumatikos* and *charismata*. The only place where Paul used the two words together is in Romans 1:11, when Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, ‘For I am longing to see you so that I may share [*metadidomi*] with you some spiritual [*pneumatikos*] gift [*charisma*] to strengthen you’ (NRSV). Here he is not referring to the *charisma* in the specific sense, but more to the general blessing from God through His presence.<sup>12</sup>

The term *charisma* is used for what results from the grace of God. It connotes the equipping of the person for service arising from the union and fellowship with Christ. The understanding of what God gives must not be detached from union with Him. Paul wrote in Romans 6:23, ‘the free gift [*charisma*] of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (NRSV). Peter added, in 1 Peter 4:10, ‘Each one should use whatever gift [*charisma*] he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms’ (NIV). We may sum this up by saying that the *charismata* are God’s gracious investment in us through the Holy Spirit, and in true Triune relationship, such investment resulting from union and used in service for the other. It is important to note the intention of the *charismata* which is stated also in Ephesians 4:11–13. Here again the union in Christ and the service to others are emphasised—‘building up the body of Christ’.

At this juncture, it is appropriate to distinguish between the gift (*dorea*)—of the Holy Spirit—and the gift (*charisma*). The former is the giving of the Holy Spirit as the other *parakletos* by the Father and Christ to all under the New Covenant, to effect our union with Christ. The latter is the manifestation or expression of the Holy Spirit in us for service as a result of our union in Christ. The *charisma* is given by God (Rom. 6:23; 11:29; 1 Cor. 7:7; Eph. 4:11–13). They are diverse and take different forms and expression. They are also the manifestations of the Holy Spirit for service in the building up of the body of Christ. The diversity of the *charismata* is the result of the singularity of the *dorea*.

It may appear from Romans 5:15–17 that there is an interchangeability in the use of *charisma* and *dorea*.<sup>13</sup> I would think not. The term *dorea* is used consistently in reference to the gift of the Holy Spirit, while the term *charisma* is used in reference to the result of grace.

What is the intention of the *charismata*? First Peter 4:10 makes it clear. It is used ‘to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms’. The intention of the giving of God, as we have noted, ‘is the redeeming, sanctifying, glorifying and perfecting of His creation’.<sup>14</sup> ‘Administering God’s grace in its various forms’ is our participation in the Holy Spirit as He effects our response to His grace in fulfilling this end.

As the focus of this paper is on giving, the various other aspects of the *charismata* will not be discussed, except to note that Paul, in his discussion on the subject, did not intend to be prescriptive, but merely described what was already manifested in the various churches. The *charismata* is not exhausted by the list given in the New Testament.

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<sup>12</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, ‘A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans’, *Int’l Critical Commentary Series* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1975), p. 79.

<sup>13</sup> N. Chambers, ‘Spiritual Gifts’, p. 121.

<sup>14</sup> G. Bingham, ‘The Giving and the Receiving’, Pastors’ School 2000, study 1.

## THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S GIVING, OUR RECEIVING AND OUR GIVING

Having discussed the various terms used, we come now to see the purpose of God's giving, our receiving and our giving. We have touched on the matter of God's giving in the discussion above. The text that we need to consider is 1 Corinthians 12:4–11.

In Gordon Fee's commentary on First Corinthians, he gave a structural display of 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 (the emphasis on 'diversity' is CAPITALISED; the emphasis on 'the same Spirit' *italicised*).<sup>15</sup> I have taken the liberty to reproduce that as it makes clear the discussion that follows:

DIVERSITIES of gifts            there are, but *the same Spirit*;  
DIVERSITIES of service        there are, but *the same Lord*;  
DIVERSITIES of workings      there are, but *the same God*,  
who works ALL THINGS IN ALL PEOPLE.

TO EACH is given the manifestation *of the Spirit*  
*for the common good.*

for  
TO ONE is given                a message of wisdom,        *through the Spirit*;  
TO ANOTHER                    a message of knowledge,    *by the same Spirit*;  
TO ANOTHER                    faith,                            *by the same Spirit*;  
TO ANOTHER                    gifts of healings,        *by the one Spirit*;  
TO ANOTHER                    workings of miracles;  
TO ANOTHER                    prophecy;  
TO ANOTHER                    discernments of spirits;  
TO ANOTHER                    kinds of tongues;  
TO ANOTHER                    interpretation of tongues;

ALL THESE THINGS works *the one and the same Spirit*,  
DISTRIBUTING to EACH ONE,  
even as he wills.

In his commentary, Fee was keen to highlight the point of 'unity in diversity': thus the tabulation of 1 Corinthians 12:4–11. Our concern in this passage is the way we understand the *charismata*. The gifts are not to be understood as something we receive, though this is a common form of expression. Nor can we understand this in the framework of the 'receptacle model'. The gifts are to be understood in a relational context.<sup>16</sup> There have been many ways of defining the word *charisma*, but I suggest we simply take the text of 1 Corinthians 12:7 and understand *charisma* not so much as something we receive, but rather as '*the manifestation of the Spirit*' through us. The structural display of 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 given above makes this clear. While the manifestations may differ, it is the same Spirit who is behind that manifestation.

In the context of the *pneumatikos* (1 Cor. 12:1), Paul refers to the diversities of the *charismata* (gifts); *diakonia* (service); and *energema* (activities or workings), while contrasting them with the unity of the Triune Godhead (1 Cor. 12:4–7). These are aspects of 'administering God's grace in its various forms' (1 Pet. 4:10). We should not make too much of the differentiation in the *charismata*, *diakonia* and *energema* in the passage above, as all three issue from the same Triune God, with the

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<sup>15</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1987), pp. 584–5.

<sup>16</sup> This is explored in my study, 'The Principle of Blessing', in the 1996 NCTM Pastors' School, 'The Fullness of the Blessing of Christ'.

same intention.<sup>17</sup> However, it needs to be noted that the ‘workings’ result from ‘service’, which in turn is driven by the result of ‘grace’—*charismata*. They are all manifestations of the same Spirit and, by inference, the same God. Here the Trinitarian implication is noted. Paul is not expounding the formal doctrine of the Trinity here, rather, the experience of the Father, Son and Spirit is so paramount in his life, and in the life of the early church, that it is only natural to make such references. As L. Hodgson rightly comments, ‘Christianity was a trinitarian religion before it had a trinitarian theology’.

Much of the problem in our understanding has been the way we think of the ‘gifts’. We have not approached the understanding in the context of union, but in a dualistic mode of thought—God on one side, and humanity on the other. They are the manifestations of the Spirit, and as such are directed by Him. Reference has been made above to the problem in our understanding of giving which arises firstly from a detachment of the gift from the Giver, and secondly from an approach that is not rooted in the union between God and humanity. This is a dualistic form of thought resulting from the Enlightenment. We have detached the gift from its origin in the Triune Godhead and treated it as a utility to achieve some ideals in our construction of reality. Geoffrey Bingham made this remark in one of his conclusions to the subject of gifts:

The gifts are not *objects*—so to speak—which are received and then possessed by members of the body. Members receive the *charisma* of Christ, which gives eternal life to them, but they are also given that participation in the gifts which the Spirit dictates.<sup>18</sup>

So when we see the gifts expressed as we exercise them in various manners of service, we see beyond the expression, to the Spirit who has caused the manifestation. This can only be understood in the context of the union brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit, who effects our participation in the Son’s communion with the Father.

Just as the giving of God is identified with His Being, so also our giving must be identified with our being. That is why Paul gives the injunction in Romans 12:1.

We cannot do any less, when God withholds nothing and gives of Himself to us. In our giving, our whole being, as it is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and sanctified by Him, is then presented back to the Father, with all its investments of *charismata*—unrefined though they may be—by the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ. C. S. Lewis makes this comment in his book *Mere Christianity*:

Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given to you by God. If you devoted every moment of your whole life exclusively to His service you could not give Him anything that was not in a sense His own already. So that when we talk of a man doing anything for God or giving anything to God, I will tell you what it is really like. It is like a small child going to his father and saying, ‘Daddy, give me sixpence to buy you a birthday present.’ Of course, the father does, and he is pleased with the child’s present. It is all very nice and proper, but only an idiot would think that the father is sixpence to the good on the transaction. When a man has made these two discoveries, God can really get to work. It is after this that real life begins. The man is awake now.<sup>19</sup>

We have now arrived at the point where we can begin.

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<sup>17</sup> G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 586–7. He also cites F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (NCB, London, 1971, p. 118), ‘Gifts, service and working are not distinct categories’.

<sup>18</sup> G. Bingham, *The Day of the Spirit* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1985), p. 266.

<sup>19</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Fount Paperbacks, Glasgow, 1979), p. 124.

## study nine

# Israel and Sacrifice—II

## *Sacrifice Offered and Received*

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### THE CEREAL OFFERING

Leviticus 2:1–16 prescribes the way of making the offering. The worshipper first prepared his offering from choice materials. The flour could be cooked or uncooked. If it was fine flour, or new roast grain, it was mixed with oil, with an added pinch of incense. If the offering was cooked, the flour was baked without yeast. The worshipper would then break up the wafers and sprinkle them with oil.

The offering was brought to the priest, who took a portion of the offering and burned it on the altar as a memorial portion to Yahweh. The remainder of the offering was given to the priests to be eaten within the sanctuary as ‘a most holy portion of the Lord’s food offerings’.

### GIVING A PRESENT TO GOD

Numbers 28 shows that the cereal offering normally followed the daily burnt offering, although Deuteronomy 26:1ff. indicates that it could be offered on its own. Linked with the burnt offering, the cereal offering could well be interpreted as thanksgiving for the provision of the forgiveness of sins, and for the continuance of Yahweh’s covenant faithfulness. In Deuteronomy 26 the worshipper is acknowledging God’s salvation in bringing his people into the promised land, and returns some of his agricultural produce to God in thanksgiving.

The Hebrew word for cereal offering is *minhah*. Both Cain’s and Abel’s offerings are called *minhah*. According to Martin Noth, *minhah* has the quite general root-meaning of ‘gift’, or ‘present’ (cf. I Sam. 10:27). In the cult of Israel, it first denoted any sacrificial gift, and later became the technical term for non-animal, or vegetable, gifts.<sup>1</sup>

The worshipper is simply giving a present to God. Sacrifice is making a gift from ourselves and our substance. Sacrifice does not always need to be associated with sin or atonement blood. Within the Triune Godhead, there is the living community of love, where each person gives of himself to the other. There is no giving apart from the

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (revised translation, SCM Press, London, 1977), pp. 26ff.

donation by the giver of himself to the other. In this light, all giving is sacrificial. It is the joyful giving and receiving within the communion, in the divine fugue or the dance of life.

What is staggering for us is that, as participants within the communion of God, we can give presents and gifts to God for the sheer joy and love of doing so. This may come as a surprise to some people (especially young people) within our churches. Giving has become associated with raising money for causes which the church supports for its own needs, or the needs of others. These may be quite legitimate and needful charities or mission goals, but (and especially if they are linked with a psychological sales pitch) they may block out the wonder of giving a present to God.

Luther says that to receive God's donation of himself in Christ is to make the Christian greater than the entire world. He says that though this gift which the Christian holds by faith is seemingly small, yet it is greater than heaven and earth, because Christ, who is the gift, is greater than the whole world. The greatness is realised in us, as, by faith, we give a present. Such an action must be the most glorious action that can take place in human life.

### **GOD ACCEPTS THE GIFT**

It is one thing to give a gift to God, but does he want it and does he receive it? We are told that God does not need the gifts of Man. Our giving, no matter how well wrapped up in excessive ritualism, cannot be commensurate with God's glory (Isa. 40:16; Micah 6:6–7; Ps. 50:7–15). Facing the religion of Man, Paul says that God is not 'served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and everything' (Acts 17:25).

A popular religious view is that God receives any gift which people offer him. This does not accord with the Scriptures, because it contradicts the nature of God as the Holy One. In some places, the Lord says he hates the sacrifices which people bring, for they are so polluted by human corruption that for him to receive them would be to be corrupted by them (Isa. 1:10–17). All of our gifts, prayers, service and worship are contaminated with our uncleanness, and polluted with our moral corruption.

The meal offering in Leviticus 2 follows the burnt offering, where atonement for sin has been made for the sin of the worshipper. This offering, as we saw in my previous study, has come from the other side. The portion of the cereal offering burnt before the Lord is 'the food of their God' (Lev. 21:6). That it was prescribed by God indicated that he had graciously given his people the way of responding to him. The ascent of the perfumed smoke indicated that God was pleased to receive this sanctified gift.

Through the atoning and sanctifying gracious sacrifice of Christ, God has washed us from our evil consciences, cleansed our hearts, and washed our bodies. Those whom Christ has sanctified have been perfected for all time. Thus we can approach God boldly, and with our bodies and gifts serve God (Heb. 9:14; 10:10, 14, 19–22). Our prayers and service are offered in Christ's name, making them acceptable to the Father (Rom. 12:1). Our gifts in service to others, and provision given for others, are pleasing sacrifices to God (Heb. 13:15–16).

### **A REMEMBRANCE GIFT**

The 'token portion' of the meal offering, in Leviticus 2:2, 9 and 16, can also be translated as the 'memorial portion'. This was the portion which was burnt on the altar and

ascended as perfumed smoke to the Lord. Some commentators interpret this to mean the relation between the two portions of the cereal offering, that is, that the burnt portion represents the whole, unburnt portion. This would simply mean that the cereal offering teaches that the sacrifice was made by a representative portion of the whole.

It also could be taken to mean that the worshipper, in making his gift, would be remembering all of God's covenant blessings, and in particular would be reminded of the grace of the atonement, which God has provided for his sins. His troubles may have initially come because he had forgotten the Lord, and not remembered his covenant.

Then again, in various places in Scripture, God's people called upon him to remember them. There may come a terrible fear to people at times: that God had forgotten them; that he no longer regarded them; and that they were not amongst God's favoured elect (Ps. 25:7; 74:2; 106:4; Jer. 15:15; Luke 23:42). The portion of the gift which ascends to God is God's provision, to bring his grace to remembrance, and an assurance that God has not forgotten them.

The regulations about not using yeast or honey, and the use of salt, seem to be because the first two ingredients produce purification, and the last ingredient prevents it. The salt of the *covenant with your God* signifies that (in antiquity) salt could not be destroyed by fire. Therefore the meal offering which was acceptable to God is a pledge of an indestructible covenant between God and his people (Num. 18:19; II Chron. 13:5).

In the Lord's Supper, we eat and drink in remembrance of Christ. Remembrance makes the past present to our lives. In communion with Christ, the Holy Spirit brings to our memory our participation in all that Christ has done for us, through his suffering death on our behalf. Yet it is not primarily we who do the remembering, but in the meal, Christ, in his own person, brings to remembrance what he has done for us. Moreover, as our High Priest, Christ continues to be our memorial before the Father, as he lifts us up into the presence of the Father.

### **THE MOST HOLY PORTION**

The priestly family of Aaron and his sons were chosen by God as the family to mediate the sacrifices. They had no land of their own, making them entirely dependent upon the gifts of the people of God (Lev. 2:3, 10). These offerings are called the *most holy* because the food was offered to God—eaten within the holy sanctuary—by ministers who were set apart for the holy service of the Lord (Lev. 6:14–18).

The NT follows this principle, in that those who minister in the Gospel should receive their living from those who are served in with the Gospel (I Cor. 9:13–14; Gal. 6:6). The Pastor, if he is supported by a congregation, does not so much receive wages for hours worked and results produced, but receives a living to serve the Word of God to God's people. The Pastor is involved in holy orders and cannot corrupt the gifts given to God with the yeast of being a pedlar of the Gospel, or preaching for the praise of men. Rather, through the love of Christ, he will have a passion to tell of the sacrifice which God gives from the other side, and to joyfully do this without pay.

## study ten

# The Fullness of the Blessing of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—I

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### INTRODUCTION: THE PURPOSE OF THE TWO STUDIES

What we mean by our heading is the fullness of the blessing which God gives to His world, the blessing which is itself a fullness the world needs, without which it cannot operate. This blessing flows from the Godhead, and so it is proper for us to see what is the nature of the Triune Godhead in its own internal relationships, that is, the subsisting ontological or immanent Trinity. In one sense we can talk of the blessing or giving that the Three Persons have in their mutually coinhering relationships. Since we have been given some teaching on the pre-creational relationships of the Three, we can draw from that. Generally speaking we gather our knowledge of God in giving and blessing from what is revealed of their activity in the economic Trinity, that is, their outward work in creation, providence, redemption and the predestined *telos* of the new heaven and the new earth.

Briefly we can speak of the Divine Intention of God in creating the universe. The first chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians deals much with the intention or goal of God for creation and that part of it called 'Man' or 'mankind'. Genesis 2:1–3 shows us that God, having created all things, rested from that kind of work. He both blessed and hallowed the day of resting *from* creation. Jesus said, 'My Father is working still, and I am working', and he said this in respect to the accusation that he was breaking the sabbath by healing. Healing is a work fit for the sabbath, and we assume that what God did, having rested from His creating work, was to so care for it that He would bring it to what He had planned for it—the *telos*.

In order to bring about fulfilment, God would have to bless creation, that is, give it that by which it could operate as a creation and, in particular, work in His will, with Him. We have said that blessing is that which ensures Man can be and do all that is required of him. That which enables all creation to fulfil its destiny we call blessing, and that blessing of enablement comes out of the fullness (*pleroma*) of God.

### THE FULLNESS OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

One thing we must not do is to think of God's fullness as a vast reservoir which is there for us to draw upon at will, refresh ourselves and so enable us to proceed with

our own ambitions and goal, or, simply, just go on living. God's fullness in the Old Testament has three aspects to it, and with these we now deal.

### **God's Fullness is Present in the Whole Earth**

By this we mean that the fullness by which the earth lives and is sustained belongs to God. Many of the following verses need to be interpreted in the light of this principle. Psalm 24:1 (cf. I Cor. 10:26) says, 'The earth is the LORD's and the *fullness* thereof, the world and those who dwell therein'. First Chronicles 16:32, 'Let the sea roar, and all that *fills* it, let the field exult, and everything in it!' Psalm 96:11, 'Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that *fills* it'. Jeremiah 8:16, 'The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan; at the sound of the neighing of their stallions the whole land quakes. They come and devour the land and all that *fills* it, the city and those who dwell in it.' Ezekiel 12:19, 'and say of the people of the land, Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with fearfulness, and drink water in dismay, because their land will be stripped of *all it contains*, on account of the violence of all those who dwell in it'. Psalm 50:12, 'If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world and all that is in it is mine'. Psalm 89:11, 'The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine; the world and all that is in it, thou hast founded them'.

### **God's Fullness Occupies the Whole of the Earth for Certain Reasons**

In Jeremiah 23:24 God asks the question, 'Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the LORD. Do I not *fill* heaven and earth? says the LORD.' Psalm 72:19 says, 'Blessed be his glorious name for ever; may his glory *fill* the whole earth! Amen and Amen!' Whilst the prayer, 'may his glory *fill* the whole earth!' seems to infer it does not, yet the psalmist knows God's glory does fill the whole earth. He is praying in the subjunctive for *the effect* of the glory filling the earth. The statement in Isaiah 6:3 shows the glory does indeed fill all: 'And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is *full* of his glory"'.<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 43:5 (cf. 44:4) is intended to show that God was in His temple with a certain purpose in mind which He would accomplish: 'the Spirit lifted me up, and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple'. His filling it was His Lordship over it. Ezekiel speaks of the glory exiting from the temple, and then later of the glory returning. The tabernacle first and then the temple were to be the sanctuary of God as He was present with His people, hence the temple was always filled with the glory, albeit the glory was not visible.

### **God's Fullness is Present in Order to Fulfil His Will**

A simple statement such as Psalm 65:9, 'Thou visitest the earth and waterest it, thou greatly enrichest it; the river of God is full of water; thou providest their grain, for so thou hast prepared it', shows God is caring for Israel and its land. Yet 'the river of God is *full* of water' might even sound humorous but it means 'Where God is there is His fullness'. Nothing is insufficient. Of course, 'river of God' may be literal or

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<sup>1</sup> This verse can be translated 'the whole earth is the fullness of His glory', which could mean a number of things, one being that all glory is God's, and that He is present in this glory.

theological, but the message is the same, ‘He fills all things full’. There are other statements like Psalm 16:11, ‘fullness of joy’, and Ezekiel 14:9, ‘fullness of bread’, and these mean ‘not less than required fullness’. We will have cause to see this idea of ‘fullness’ (*pleroma*) in the New Testament and understand it better from its Old Testament meanings.

Numbers 14:21 appears to be eschatological, ‘but truly, as I live, and as all the earth *shall be filled* with the glory of the LORD’, but Isaiah 6:3 says the earth *is* filled with the glory of the Lord. Habakkuk 2:14 also seems to be eschatological, ‘For the earth *will be filled* with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea’. Isaiah 11:9 states, ‘They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth *shall be full* of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea’, and whilst ‘glory’ is not mentioned—‘the knowledge of the LORD’ is—the idea is the same.

When we ask, ‘What is His glory?’ we can answer, ‘God in His fullness’ and we would be correct. However, His glory, amongst other things, represents God in His government. Where His glory is, there is His authority and government. Man as the image of God is vice-regent to God as King, ‘the King of glory’ as Psalm 24 represents Him.

God’s fullness as Creator and King must fill all the earth. ‘All things of creation’ are such because He has created them, and upholds them, and draws them into His will—His plan for all creation. We see from Exodus chapters 33 and 34 that His glory is moral and that it is this which Man, as the image of God, is to reflect. He does this by two things which are really one: (i) knowing the will of God and doing it; and (ii) knowing the law of God and obeying it, that is, obeying God. Alex Motyer speaks of the law as ‘the written, preceptual image of God’. *A human being is at his or her fullness of being when living fully in these two elements.*

## **THE BATTLE FOR THE FULLNESS OF ALL THINGS**

It may be difficult to think of the whole of creation filled with the glory of God whilst yet there are other things—even evil things—which appear to fill creation, at least to some degree. In the commission given to Man in Genesis 1:28–29, one of the commands is to ‘fill up the earth’. This is not detailed, as such. The verb ‘to fill’ (Heb. *male*) has also the idea ‘to complete’, or ‘to fulfil’. In Genesis 9:1 the creational commission is repeated—‘fill the earth’. In Genesis 1:22 God blessed the fish and told them to ‘fill the waters in the seas’. The birds, likewise, were to ‘multiply on the earth’. Out of God’s creative fullness mankind, fish and birds were to fill up their respective areas of habitation.

In Genesis 6:11 we see ‘the earth was filled with violence’ and later Israel’s land was filled with idols. Also instead of light upon them darkness filled the land. How then do we reconcile such statements? It is by seeing that only what is true, what is God’s glory, is what truly fills the earth. In Isaiah 5:20f. there are those who call darkness light and light darkness. Only that which is ontological has true existence. If God’s glory is filling all the earth, then sin, idolatry and darkness are seeking to denude the earth of fullness. They denude, but do not fill. In Genesis 15:12–16 God tells Abraham that he—in his children—will inherit the land of Canaan. The land will be taken by Abraham’s descendants when the Amorites are ready for judgment, ‘And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites *is not yet complete*’ (Gen. 15:16).

This last statement ‘not yet complete’, or ‘not yet full’, brings us to the statement ‘the fullness of’, that is, ‘the fullness of time’, as in Galatians 4:4, and indicates that God’s plan has its epochs of ‘fullnesses’. So Galatians 4:4 puts it, ‘when the time had fully come’. Nothing is done before or after its correct time. There is a *chronos*, a process of time, but there is also a *kairos*, an appointed point of time for the resolution of things which were scheduled to happen. Revelation chapter 10 is a good example of this. Romans 11:12, 25 speaks of the full numbers of Jew and Gentiles. Paul can talk about ‘the fullness of blessing’.

We see then that true fullness is God’s own fullness and that other contrary or opposing fullnesses, far from being genuine, are an attempt to diminish or destroy God’s fullness—whether it be a creational or a redemptional one. God’s glory and God’s fullness are synonymous, and they signify God’s government over His creation, and over His people. All creation moves to the *telos* which is the climax of God’s plan and so the completion of His will. It is this which enrages the powers of darkness who have their plans—under their head, Satan—to fulfil. Satan has, as his goal—and so his plan—that the earth should be filled with the glory of him as the waters cover the sea. He seeks to prove that he has a fullness which is virtually ontological, when, being a creature, he has only derived power and glory.

Even so, all personal evil—Satan and his hosts—work on the basis of an end time, and were they not so self-deceitful they would see the impossibility of success from their imagined ‘fullness’. So, beset by Christ, they revert to an ontological understanding. Thus the demons could plead ‘the time’—‘Don’t send us into the abyss before *the time*’—as though that were their right, and as though God, sovereignly, must work by His set schedule. Revelation 12:12 seems to confirm this principle. ‘Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because *he knows that his time is short!*’

## THE FULLNESS OF THE GODHEAD

The term ‘the fullness of the Godhead’ or ‘the whole fullness of deity’ in Colossians 2:9 has a specific meaning in its context and is not specifically Trinitarian, although to us it could amount to that because of the emergence in history of a theology which is based only upon the Scriptures. The term ‘the fullness of the deity’ (*to pleroma tes theotetos*) would be understood to mean that (i) there is only one fullness; and (ii) it is God’s fullness. It would also be seen in this verse as dwelling in the Son, Christ, and this especially and uniquely in one person, that is, the Son.

For our part we know that it is a Trinitarian fullness (*pleroma*). Our knowledge of the Trinity, especially in what we have seen of the *perichoresis*, is a knowledge of fullness; the fullness of each of the Three Persons, and the unity of fullness that their communion ensures. We do not have time here to develop largely the matter of their interpenetration of one another, their coinhering one another, and their relationships and actions, which Scripture reveals to us and in so doing reveals all we need to know of the ‘fullness of God’. This ‘fullness’ is God Himself in His triune Being and His Intention of *telos*. Such ‘fullness’ is not an hypostasis.

We do need to know of the order of the Triune Godhead, that whilst there is no inequality, yet the mode of their being One contains within it a *prius* for the Father. The Son lives by reason of the eternal generation of the Father and so receives from the Father. That is, the Father gives to the Son. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father

through the Son, and so receives from both the Father and the Son. Both Son and Spirit give to the Father in worship and service. All Persons are ‘other-Persons regarding’ so that out of their differentiations they effect a whole complementarity of giving and receiving. Each receives from the Others. In the order of creation, each Person gives to creation and the Three as One give out of their fullness. This is the case with their economic work, that is, in the redemption, sanctification, glorification and perfection required for Man’s ultimate completion or fullness.

It is probably not appropriate for us to speak of the Three Persons blessing one another, but it is about the best we can do, for we know the purpose and impact of God upon us in blessing and other forms of giving.<sup>2</sup> As Paul exhorted us to ‘count others better than yourself’, and ‘think not on your own things but also on the things of others’, then this must be how it is prescribed for us, because this is how it undoubtedly is within the Triune God.

When Colossians 1:19 and 2:9 speak of ‘the fullness of God’, and Ephesians 1:23 speaks of ‘the fullness of him [Christ]’, then we are faced with the fullness of the Triune God. We have already said that the Old Testament speaks of that fullness in respect to God creating. It is here we are baffled when we try to understand creation, for no one can say that he understands creation. We can face creation and attempt to analyse or codify it, but—perhaps because we are part of that creation—we should not claim we can understand it. This is because we are creatures of time. God is eternal and He creates that which has to do with time. Psalm 90:1–2 helps us here:

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations,  
Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.

Moses is telling God and his own people that God’s intention to create comes out of a situation which is eternal.

Before the hills in order stood,  
or earth received her frame,  
from everlasting thou art God,  
to endless years the same.<sup>3</sup>

It is this eternity of God that is the fullness, and how then can we understand— when God the Eternal creates creation the temporal? Creation cannot have the *quality* (‘substance’, ‘being’?) of God, for creation issues from it. To understand creation we would have to be as competent to view it as is God.

What we are saying, in effect, is that all creation cannot create itself, or sustain itself from itself. It is dependent upon God’s fullness which has created it to be, and contingent upon it to live and work so that it is brought to the fulfilment God has planned for it.

If, then, we are trying to understand God, to ‘find Him out’, we will be unable to do so. He is ineffable and is not to be compared with anything created by Him. Analogy cannot reveal Him. He must be understood by what He is pleased to

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<sup>2</sup> We made the point in previous Studies that God’s blessing is the empowering of us by Him so that the blessed can accomplish what He has commanded us to do, e.g. Genesis 1:22 for fish and birds, and 1:28–29; 9:1f. for mankind.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Watts, ‘Our God, Our Help in Ages Past’, *The Australian Hymn Book*, no. 46, v. 3.

communicate of Himself. We know He works through many media to reveal Himself, and the true revelation of God is His Son, as also the true revelator of the Son is the Holy Spirit. We have seen that the fullness of God is His glory, and that to see that glory as Moses did in the 34th chapter of Exodus is to have communicated in our depths, the true nature of His fullness.

Then the statement of John 1:14–18 brings us face to face with God:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John bore witness to him, and cried, “This was he of whom I said, “He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.” ’) And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

Through the Son we have great understanding of the Father. It is in seeing the glory of God in the Word (the Son) that we know glory is ‘full of grace and truth’.<sup>4</sup> We receive ‘grace upon grace’ from Christ’s *fullness*. Also we know ‘truth upon truth’ from him in his incarnation.

Having come to this point we are now more in a position to know what is our connection with, and our part in, the fullness (*pleroma*) of God.

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<sup>4</sup> A number of commentators point to Exodus 34:6–7 as being virtually ‘grace and truth’. Christ is God’s glory—and glory as ‘moral’—so that the revelation of the fullness comes from the one ‘full of grace and truth’.

## study eleven

# The Blessing of Eternal Life

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### THE NATURE OF ETERNAL LIFE

#### The Enjoyment of Trinitarian Communion and Action

Eternal life is not merely an everlasting existence. It is the eternal enjoyment of both the communion and action of the Trinity. The primary expression of this eternal life is the joy which each of the Persons has in themselves and each other.

The Father, as the Fountain of the Godhead, is the Initiator in all things. As such, He has unbounded joy and pleasure in Himself. He ceaselessly delights in His own glory—in all that He is and does as Father. His delight is also in the glory of the Son—in all that the Son is and does in response to His initiative. In the same way, His joy is in the Spirit.

Likewise, the Son has fullness of delight and pleasure in the Father. As Son, He is the radiance of His Father's glory (Heb. 1:3)—the Mediator of all that the Father initiates (Heb. 1:2). And, so, His delight and pleasure is also in all that He, Himself, is and does as Son. His joy, too, is in the Spirit.

In the same way, the Spirit's delight is in the Father and the Son. He is the Facilitator of all that the Son mediates at the Father's initiative. As such, He also delights in all that He, Himself, is and does as the Spirit.

The life of the Godhead is primarily, then, one of endless, boundless delight and joy! Central to this enjoyment, of course, is the eternal flow of love between the three Persons—each affectionally honouring, giving to, receiving from and serving the others.

When the scribe in Luke 10 enquired about inheriting eternal life, Jesus' response was most instructive. He asked, 'What is written in the Law? . . . How do you read it?' The answer was given: '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'. To which the Lord replied, 'You have answered correctly . . . Do this and you will live' (vv. 25–28). This statement of the law is the essence of eternal Trinitarian life. It is a life in which Deity is worshipped and Neighbour is loved. The law, then, is the written expression of the nature of the life of God. And it is into this life that humanity is called.

## THE LIFE ADAM KNEW AT CREATION

### The Receiver of a Holy Calling as the Likeness of God

Adam was, by nature, like God. His human nature corresponded at every point to God's divine nature. In this, he had a natural relational oneness with Him.

1) *He was by nature a creature of the Creator*

As creature, Adam was structured to live in complete dependence upon his Creator, and from this to derive the fullness of his humanity (Acts 17:25b).

2) *He was by nature a child of the Father*

As child (Luke 3:38), he had a direct affinity with the Father. The intimacy of this relationship was the wellspring of the whole of his relational life (Eph. 3:15).

3) *He was by nature a servant of the King*

As servant/subject, he was one with God in His rule over the creation. He was the vice-regent of God, exercising divine authority in fulfilment of the mandate of Genesis 1:28.

Having such a likeness to God by nature, Adam was given a *holy calling* (2 Tim. 1:9). In this he was to be holy, just as his Creator is holy (1 Pet. 1:15–16).

God's holiness consists in all that He is as God, which separates Him from anything that is less than that. In His holiness—the distinctiveness of His divine perfections—He is completely *other than* anything that is not divine. There is nothing in the whole universe to which He can be compared! (Isa. 40:25; 6:1–3).

Adam's holiness was to consist in his being all that he was created to be as the image of God, which would separate him from anything that was less than that. In his holiness—the distinctiveness of his true and full humanity—he was to be completely *other than* anything that is not truly and fully human. In all of the earth there would be nothing to which Adam could be compared! (Ps. 8:4–6).

### Called to Know God and Find All Joy and Delight in Him

The primary expression of true human vocation is a joy-filled, free-spirited communion with God. For Adam—with a clear, undisturbed conscience—this was as natural as breathing.

Eden was the place of delight. But it was not a kind of Muslim paradise, merely full of plenty and pleasure. It was a sanctuary. In it, Adam knew the presence of God and delighted in Him on account of all of His gifts.

The God of joy placed Adam in the garden of delight so that there He might reveal to him His glory, constantly making known to his creature, child, servant, all that He is and does as God. The Creator's great passion is to glorify His name in the midst of the creation (Isa. 48:9–11). His purpose? To bring humanity into His own boundless pleasure and delight in Himself! (Ps. 67:3–4). This joy was Adam's heritage in Eden (Isa. 61:10) and would have found its expression in the following ways:

1) *Reverent fear*

At every turn in the garden Adam knew that God was God! He knew what it meant to 'rejoice with trembling' (Ps. 2:11; Prov. 14:27).

2) *Simple trust*

Having the fear of God, Adam was assured of His utter trustworthiness. The Creator's word and way was this first man's immediate point of reference at all times. He knew the constant happiness of lifting up his soul to God (Ps. 25:1–2).

3) *Grateful affection*

Adam lived always in the face of his Maker's abounding steadfast love and faithfulness. His affections were continually enlarged towards Him in love and thanksgiving (Ps. 100:4–5).

4) *Full-hearted obedience*

Eden bristled with the atmosphere of divine vocation. As lord of the creation, king Adam knew the deep pleasure of ongoing, immediate response to the purposes of his Creator, Father, King—one with Him in His grand work! (Ps. 40:8).

### **Called to Glorify God through Reflection of His Glory**

Adam was the image and likeness of God in that he had a *relational oneness* with Him by nature. But—in the enjoyment of that relationship—he also had a *capacity* to actually reflect God's glory through his humanity, and so glorify Him. To see Adam, would be to see what God is like. In the man of Eden, the following elements of the divine glory found brilliant human expression:

1) *Purity of being*

Out of Adam's fullness of delight in God, there was within him a fountain of moral purity. Like his Creator, he had a fiery passion for the glory of God (Ps. 115:1).

2) *Wisdom*

Adam's thinking was shaped by his purity of desire. And so his every thought reflected the mind and wisdom of God (Ps. 111:10).

3) *Love*

Everything that he enjoyed of God overflowed in divine, affectional desire towards all that surrounded him. In this, the focus of his thinking and action was continually being centred on the good of his beloved, Eve, and the creation (1 John 4:19).

4) *Vocational fruitfulness*

Engagement in the action of divine love had this inevitable consequence: participation in the vocational fruitfulness of God Himself (Ps. 1:3).

What a creature! What enjoyment of the eternal life of God! And all of this, of course, he would have known together with his bride, in rich and full communion (as also his Successor ultimately would in the Telos to come!).

## **THE TERRIBLE LOSS OF LIFE AT THE FALL**

### **Hard-Hearted Rejection of God and His Calling**

The Fall of humanity into sin—in Adam—was an untellable tragedy. All that the first man once knew was now lost. In its place was what can only be described as a living death (Gen. 3:3; Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:1; 1 Tim. 5:6)—primarily, death towards God.

The conscience, now tormented by guilt and shame, causes the heart to defensively harden against its Maker. There is an unending resistance to any revelation of the divine glory and the call to true humanity. Such confrontation brings no joy, only the prospect of terrifying judgment (Col. 1:21). The creature no longer finds its delight in the Creator. This is the beginning of all relational death.

Human beings are now, by nature, rebel creatures, children and servants. Their guilt-charged hostility towards God is manifested in the following ways:

1) *Disregard*

The fear of God gives way to a settled attitude of disdain: ‘He is nothing to me!’ (Rom. 3:18; Ps. 10:4; Isa. 29:16).

2) *Unbelief*

Simple trust is replaced by active suppression of the truth: ‘His word means nothing to me!’ (Rom. 1:18; Heb. 3:12; Isa. 30:15).

3) *Ingratitude*

Grateful affection dissolves into cold refusal to acknowledge God’s goodness: ‘He’s done nothing for me!’ (Rom. 1:21a; Num. 14:27; Hos. 6:4).

4) *Defiance*

Full-hearted obedience becomes stubborn rejection of the good purposes of God: ‘His will holds nothing for me!’ (Isa. 65:2–3; Jer. 35:14).

### **Blasphemous Mis-Representation of God**

Having lost its delight in God, fallen humanity has also lost its capacity to reflect His glory (Rom. 3:23). To see a human being now is to see what God is *not* like! The image no longer tells the truth, only lies. The Creator is blasphemed and misrepresented and the creature demeaned (Rom. 3:12). There has been an awful, wilful descent into the following abominations:

1) *Impure desire*

Rejecting the true worship, there is a grasping after the false—a desperate, incessant endeavour to gain from the creation what has been refused from the Creator (Eccl. 7:29; Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:21–22; 1 John 2:16).

2) *Darkened understanding*

Human thinking is shaped by what its passions demand. And so, God, humanity and the creation are deliberately seen from a merely self-interested point of view (Rom. 1:21b, 22; Eph. 4:18; 2 Tim. 4:3–4; 1 John 4:5).

3) *Self-serving relationships*

God, humanity and the creation now become a means of self-fulfilment. Great sacrifices may be made and enormous energy and resources expended to gain the desired result. But relationships are godless and contractual (Prov. 20:6; 30:15a; Matt. 5:46; Phil. 2:20–21).

4) *Futility and barrenness*

The godless pursuit of self-interest results in frustration and bitter fruit—a wasted life,

without true glory and devoid of any eternal significance (Eccl. 2:11; Hab. 2:13; Matt. 16:26).

How tragic! But human tragedy is not the only issue here. There is also the burning matter of divine offence.

That the creature should all of its life despise the glory of its Creator is indescribable evil. And so for the sake of God's name, we must say that the eternal suffering and torment of the wicked is right and just. It is in direct proportion to the magnitude and enormity of human depravity and its offence against divine holiness. The shocking nature of human evil must be established and its judgment affirmed.

This, of course, is not to minimise the element of tragedy. The awful fact is that unregenerate human beings will bear their sins forever. Forsaking the eternal life of God, they embrace not only great temporal loss, but also dreadful eternal ruin (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:46; John 3:36; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 14:11).

### **THE BLESSING OF ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST— THE LIFE OF THE NEW ADAM**

#### **Gained for Us by Grace through His Work of Redemption**

##### *1) His Enfleshment*

With great delight the eternal Son becomes one with us in our humanity, forever! His life was, and is, the fulfilment of our holy calling as the likeness of God (John 1:14; Col. 2:9; 1 John 1:2).

##### *2) His Baptism*

Here, Jesus, with Israel, affirms His glad submission to the law, as Son (Matt. 2:14–15; Ps. 40:8; Mal. 4:4–5; Matt. 3:15); identifies with Israel and humanity in its need, as Lamb (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:19; Luke 12:50); and is anointed as King (Ps. 2; Isa. 42:1; 61:1–2). At this point, the Father declares His total pleasure in Him, the new Head and Representative of the Race! (Matt. 3:17; John 6:27). From then on He walked among us to fulfil His vocation as Son, Lamb, King.

##### *3) His Temptation*

Driven by the Spirit into the desert—like Israel of old (Deut. 8:2)—He is tested (Mark 1:12–13). The question is, 'Does He have the moral authority to overthrow the kingdom of evil?' The answer is a resounding 'Yes!' (Luke 4:1–13).

##### *4) His Ministry*

In the power of the Spirit, He reveals His Father's glory (Acts 10:38). We hear the words of eternal life (John 6:63, 68; 12:49–50). We see the authority of that life in action, reigning over sin, sickness, evil, death and the creation.

##### *5) His Death*

The Son, Lamb, King bears His humanity's sins and effects its liberation! Here we see the true nature of the mutual indwelling and flow of love within the life of the Trinity. It is no self-indulgent intimacy between three impeccable Persons. No love which merely loves in the presence of love. The glory of the eternal life of God is seen as it embraces the death of its enemies, so they may share in its joy! (John 3:14–16; 17:1; Heb. 2:14–15; 1 John 4:9).

6) *His Resurrection*

The victory of the Cross is declared as He rises from the grave which cannot hold Him (John 11:25; Acts 2:24–28; 3:15). In His eternal humanity He has become our living hope! (1 Pet. 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:20–22).

7) *His Ascension and Enthronement*

From the Father's right hand He reigns over all things on our behalf (Eph. 1:20–22). He is King Adam, Ruler of the nations—Lord of history! (Ps. 2; Rev. 1:5; 1 Cor. 15:25).

8) *His outpouring of the Spirit*

By the Holy Spirit's indwelling and power, Christ imparts His life to His people (1 Cor. 15:45). But more of that later.

In this new Adam, the promise of life is now held out to all who languish in death! (John 5:24–26; 2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1–3; 1 John 5:11–13).

### **Secured for Us by Divine Mercy and Faithfulness**

1) *Regeneration*

By His great mercy, God has come to us in our misery and death and made us alive with Christ. He has raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the unseen spiritual realm, as heirs of eternal life! (Eph. 2:1–7; Col. 3:1–4; Titus 3:3–7; 1 Pet. 1:3–4). Nothing less than the power that raised Jesus from the grave was required to bring us out from our death in sin. This is God's effectual calling of His elect (Rom. 8:28–30; 9:10–24; Eph. 1:18–20; 2 Thess. 2:13–14; 1 Cor. 1:26–31; 1 Tim. 1:15–16; Acts 13:48).

2) *Preservation*

Having called us by His mercy, He faithfully keeps and preserves us for the inheritance to come (John 10:27–29; 1 Pet. 1:5–7; 5:10–11; 1 Thess. 5:23–24).

3) *Exhortation*

Through His servants—by the Spirit—He also exhorts us to faithfulness and perseverance with a view to what will be (Heb. 3:7–14; 2 Pet. 1:10–11; 1 John 2:24–25; Jude 20–21).

### **Presently Known—as a Foretaste of the Telos**

Seated with Christ in the heavenly realms, we have been blessed with 'the whole spiritual blessing' that is in Him (Eph. 1:3). This is just as much a reality now as it will be in eternity (Col. 3:1–4; Rom. 8:30). But even though the reality is the same, our ability to know its fullness in this age is greatly limited. We long for the new Day, when our bodies are glorified (Phil. 3:20–21), faith gives way to sight, and we no longer battle with the world, the flesh and devil!

However, although the blessing of eternal life will be fully known only at our Lord's Appearing, we are, nevertheless, a people with a rich present heritage: 'the firstfruits of the Spirit' (Rom. 8:23). These first fruits are just the 'down payment' of what is to come (Eph. 1:14), but the fullness of *them* is more than enough for us to handle this side of heaven! (Eph. 3:20–21). By the gift of the Spirit we may 'reign in life' with the new Adam (Rom. 5:17; 6:4–13).

Having such grace, it is unthinkable that we should receive it ‘in vain’ (2 Cor. 6:1). And so, the exhortations: ‘Be filled with the Spirit’ (Eph. 5:18), and, ‘Let the word of Christ live in you richly’ (Col. 3:16). Only in this way can we live dynamically in the foretaste of the coming Telos—the great *End* and *Goal* to which we are headed.

The Spirit delights to continually assure us of the grand things of the faith: the grace of election, the mercy of calling and regeneration, the Lordship of Christ, the purpose of God in history, the gifts of forgiveness and justification, adoption, sanctification, eternal hope, etc. In the good of these, we are able to know the following elements of the present foretaste:

1) *Participation in the freedom and joy of Christ*

We share in His freedom of conscience (Luke 3:22; 2 Cor. 5:21) and in His freedom to delight in the will of His Father (Luke 10:21; John 6:38; Heb. 2:12; 10:5–7). His own joy in the Father—and in Himself—is our heritage! (Gal. 4:6; Phil. 4:4; 1 Thess. 5:16–18; 1 Pet. 1:8; John 4:13–14; 17:3, 13). We know where our life is found, and where it is not (John 10:10; Luke 12:15; 1 John 2:15–17).

2) *Participation in the moral purity of Christ*

Out of His fullness of delight in the Father, there is in Him a fountain of moral purity. His passion is for His Father’s glory (John 2:13–17; 12:27–28) and, so, for His own (John 5:22–23). Like His Father, He burns with jealous indignation against anything dark, unlovely or godless which intrudes into the creation (Deut. 4:24). One with Him in His joy, we are also one with Him in this divine passion, and the grief and pain it brings in the presence of evil. Those in Christ—in this world—will always know the co-existence of joy and anguish. We particularly have hatred for our own sin, longing for full human maturity (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 3:12–14; 7:1; 1 Tim. 6:7–12; 1 John 3:1–3).

3) *Participation in the wisdom of Christ*

In Him ‘are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Col. 2:3). He has the mind of His Father (John 1:1). The anointing we have received enables us to be partakers of His wisdom (John 16:12–15; 1 John 2:20; 5:20; 1 Cor. 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:16). We may see God, humanity and the creation as He does. A divine world view!

4) *Participation in the love of Christ*

His delight in His Father—and in glorifying Him—is boundless. So is His longing for humanity to enjoy the same (John 17:1–3). This is the love in which we share! One that is full of affection (Mark 10:21; Phil. 1:8), compassion (Matt. 9:36; Luke 7:12–13; Rom. 12:15; Heb. 13:3) and desire (Acts 20:31; Col. 1:28; 2:2, 5; Rev. 22:17). A love that embraces suffering (Isa. 53:3; 2 Tim. 2:10; Col. 1:24), deprivation (1 Cor. 8:13; 2 Cor. 12:15; 1 Thess. 2:8–9) and death, in order to bring life (Mark 10:45; 15:13; 2 Cor. 4:10–12; Phil. 2:17; 1 John 3:16; Rev. 1:5). A love that heartily supplies material resources (2 Cor. 8:1–4, 8–9); one that is as full towards its enemies as its friends (Matt. 5:43–48; Luke 6:27–28, 32–36); that *lives* when its longing is fulfilled (1 Thess. 2:19–20; 3:8–9; 1 John 1:2–4; 3 John 4); but suffers deeply when it is not (Luke 13:34; 19:41–42; Jer. 9:1; Rom. 9:1–3; 2 Cor. 2:4; 11:2–3, 29; Gal. 4:19–20); and a love that habitually knows the burden of intercession (Luke 22:31–32; John 17; Rom. 10:1; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 1:9–11; Col. 2:1–2; 4:12–13). This love is the sweet, indispensable fruit of eternal life (John 15:10–12; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 John 3:14–15).

5) *Participation in the vocational fruitfulness of Christ*

The Son has always been one with His Father in His eternal purposes of love. The result of His earth-walk as the Servant of the Lord was that the will of God prospered in His hand. He knows—and will know—the joy and satisfaction of that! (Isa. 53:10–12; John 17:24). In the same way, we may be one with Him in the ongoing accomplishment of the Father's great love-plan (Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15, 20; Luke 24:47; John 20:21; 4:36; 15:4–5, 8, 15–16; Acts 5:20; 13:47; Gal. 6:8–9; Eph. 2:10). Through His people, the Lord Jesus continues to reveal the glory of His Father in word and deed (Col. 3:17). In this way, the will of God is worked out in all the earth, until the final Day. Of course, such participation inevitably involves many struggles. But as we continually anticipate what awaits us in the Telos, we are able to press on with joy (Luke 6:23–24; Rom. 8:18; 1 Cor. 15:58; 2 Cor. 4:16–18; 1 Thess. 1:3; Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 1:6, 13; Rev. 14:13). We are by nature a people of hope (Rom. 8:24a; 2 Cor. 5:5).

What an incredible thing it is to be those who share in the glory of this new Adam—one with Him in all that He is, has done, is doing and will do!

### CONCLUSION

Such is the blessing of eternal life. To know it, is to enjoy both the communion and action of the Godhead—the worship of Deity and the love of neighbour. We come to this life out of dreadful death. Our ultimate future, in Christ, will bring us into the fullness of its endless pleasures. Until then, we gladly *take hold* of the eternal life to which we were called (1 Tim. 6:12). 'Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!' (2 Cor. 9:15).

## study twelve

# The Abundancy of Grace

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### SECULAR PRINCIPLES OF RECEIVING AND GIVING

It is painful to see the poverty of some Christian churches in the light of their abundant inheritance in the word of God. In envisioning the content of this Pastors' School Geoffrey Bingham lamented:

*The Church has turned to secular principles of receiving and giving. Often they are 'getting for having's sake' and 'giving with a view to getting'. Human endeavour has soured the sweetness of God.<sup>1</sup>*

The present 'marketing' mind, and mandatory parish giving, are often sustained by a 'challenge' and 'commitment' theology, which has no roots in biblical thought, and which is wearisome to both the challenger and the challenged. But what is most grievous about these secular principles in the holy place is that they have 'soured the sweetness of God'. That is, they have obscured the abundancy of God's grace, and avoided the fountain of generosity which God seeks to install in the heart of every believer.

### The Depraved Mind and the Renewed Mind

We need constantly to remind ourselves that the human mind has been given over to a depraved and futile way of thinking (Rom. 1:21, 28). Essentially, this means that we lose sight, on the one hand, of the horror and abundancy of sin and, on the other hand, of the glorious super-abundancy of God's grace toward us as sinners (Rom. 5:8, 20). It is in this 'darkened' state, even as Christians, that we conceive of our human commitment and effort as the central dynamic in the coming of God's kingdom. Consequently we become wearied in the work and even disgruntled by what our discipleship is costing us. At the same time, the mission of God becomes, for us, limited to what we ourselves can, or cannot, achieve. We are in need of a revelation of the abundancy of grace, a revelation that will transform us and renew our whole way of thinking, and our pattern of operating:

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom. 12:2, NIV).*

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Bingham, notes to Pastors' School 2000 speakers.

## THE ABUNDANCY OF GOD

Sin clouds our view of the abundant generosity of God in creation and redemption. While Israel was bemoaning that God (in their perception) was mean and inadequate, Moses was being shown God's glory on the mountain:

*'The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness' (Exod. 34:6).*

The superlatives used by the Psalmists in their praise of God are so familiar to us that we lose sight of what they are saying. For example, in Psalm 145: 'mighty acts'; 'the glorious splendour of your majesty'; 'abundant goodness'; 'gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich [abounding] in love'. These become 'silent superlatives', in the sense that they do not make their intended impact upon our understanding. Taken at face value, however, they speak of the living God who is abundant in goodness, dynamic in power, and astounding in mercy. If the superlatives are accurate, and not just 'divine propaganda', then they ought to stimulate us to know this God in the fullness of His predetermined, and persistent, grace and generosity.

### An Honest Proclamation of God's Abundant Grace

It is the immediate temptation of any proclaimer of God's abundance to weight the testimony towards the abundance of God's blessings, while neglecting any unsavoury elements of grace. It has been said, however, that God's 'problem' is to give so that we won't be destroyed, and to not give so that we will be blessed. An honest and accurate proclamation of God's grace, therefore, must declare that God is abundant in judgment as well as in mercy, in curses as well as in blessings. A comprehensive account of God's covenant grace towards his people is found in Jeremiah 33. God invites his covenant people to call upon him, that he might show them the awesome dimensions of his covenant love and faithfulness:

*'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know' (Jer. 33:3).*

God then reveals the abundance of His judgments and mercies towards Israel. In abundant judgment, He will fill the houses of Jerusalem and the royal palaces of Judah 'with the dead bodies of the men I will slay in my anger and wrath' (Jer. 33:4–5). These purifying judgments will be horrible beyond Israel's imagining, but they are not the end of the matter:

*'Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before. I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me. Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honour before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it' (Jer. 33:6–9).*

In addition to these more immediate expressions of the abundancy of God's grace, are the promise of Messiah in verses 14–16, and the assurance of God's unending covenant faithfulness in verses 19–26. In this way God will 'restore their fortunes and have compassion on them' (v. 26). We can see that where sin has abounded, God has

determined that His grace will more abound. Jeremiah 33 is indeed worthy of our careful reading as it reveals much about God.

### The Abundancy of Grace in Jesus Christ

The abundancy of God's grace to Israel had always been the theme of the Old Testament writers, but in the gift of His Son God brought the full extent of His grace into full view (John 1:14–18). In the New Testament the Greek word translated 'abundant' is *perissos*, and it has the sense of 'more than sufficient, over and above, abundant'.<sup>2</sup> In Romans 5:12–21 Paul contrasts God's super abounding grace with the utter depravity of Man's 'sin', 'trespass', and 'disobedience'. Repeatedly Paul exclaims 'how much more' did God's grace abound over the depth and proliferation of human corruption (vv. 15, 17, 20–21). In commenting on verse 20, Barth, Calvin and Murray are at pains to give further written expression to the crucial point that Paul is making:

For grace became exceedingly abundant at the very place where the transgression of man, through its encounter with the holy will of God, became visible and manifest in its form as enmity towards God, which deserves death (Barth).<sup>3</sup>

Paul teaches us that the extent of grace is more strikingly revealed because it is poured out in so copious a flood while sin abounds as not only to overcome the flood of sin, but even to swallow it up (Calvin).<sup>4</sup>

The apostle construes the multiplying of trespass which the giving of the law promoted as magnifying and demonstrating the superabounding riches of divine grace. The more transgression is multiplied and aggravated the greater is the grace that abounds unto justification and the more the lustre of that grace is made manifest. The surpassing efficacy and the glory of God's grace are stressed by the superlative, 'super-abounded' (Murray).<sup>5</sup>

This revelation of the heart of God has power to work such a new birth in the heart of Man that the recipient is transformed from sin's fearful and selfish grasping to an overwhelming assurance of divine generosity and provision (Rom. 8:31–39). All our self-sustaining systems and securities are swept away, and all of God's abundant and comprehensive giving is mercifully poured out upon us. In addition the astounding abounding grace of God works a response of sacrifice for sacrifice. John Bunyan wrote a little book called *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, which he subtitled, *A Brief and Faithful Relation of the Exceeding Mercy of God in Christ to His Poor Servant John Bunyan*. In it he testifies:

God did bear me out, and keep my heart upon this word; from which I had also, for several days together, very much sweetness, and comfortable hopes of pardon; for thus it was made out to me:

'I loved thee whilst thou was committing this sin,

I loved thee before, I love thee still and I will love thee forever'.

Yet I saw my sin most barbarous, and a filthy crime and could not but conclude, with great shame and astonishment, that I had horribly abused the holy Son of God; wherefore I felt my soul greatly to love and pity him . . . for I saw he was still my friend, and did reward me good for evil; yea, the love and affection that then burned within me to my Lord and Saviour Jesus

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<sup>2</sup> G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1960), p. 357.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth, *A Shorter Commentary on Romans* (SCM Press, London, 1963), p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and the Thessalonians* (Calvin's Commentaries, trs. Ross Mackenzie, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1973), p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids), p. 208.

Christ did work at this time such a strong and hot desire of revengement upon myself for the abuse I had done unto him, that, speak as I then thought, had I a thousand gallons of blood within my veins, I could freely then have spilt it all, at the command and feet of this my Lord and Saviour.<sup>6</sup>

Now we can see more clearly what is meant by saying that to use secular principles of giving and receiving in the life of the Church is to ‘sour the sweetness of God’:

Romans 5:12–21 is a vast ocean of abundant grace-blessing to dispel Man’s dismal view of ‘the giving God’, and invite him to the freedom which will loosen him up and help him to become like the Giving One in the experience of ‘grace upon grace, upon grace, etc.’<sup>7</sup>

## **THE ABUNDANCE OF RECEIVING, GIVING AND THANKSGIVING**

In the last quarter of a century we have seen the abundance of God proclaimed in what has been called ‘prosperity teaching’. While it seeks to awaken believers to the fact that ‘my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus’ (Phil. 4:19), it fails to touch the height and depth of divine grace, and the height and depth of human response to grace. The full picture of the abundancy of grace is set forth in 2 Corinthians 9:6–15, particularly verses 8 and 11:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work . . . You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

The outcome of all this abundant receiving and giving is thanksgiving to God, and the entire perichoresis of receiving, giving and thanksgiving serves to make known in ever widening circles the abundance of God’s grace (vv. 11–15).

### **Examples of Abundant Giving, Receiving and Thanksgiving**

#### ***The Macedonians***

Paul had already expressed his joy at the way in which God’s abounding grace had been at work in and through the believers in Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1–5).

#### ***George Mueller***

A few years ago John Dunn provided us with an inspiring account of the working of God’s grace through George Mueller. In his lifetime it has been estimated that Mueller received and used the equivalent (in today’s Australian currency) of \$400 million in his work with orphans and his evangelistic ministry. His financial principles were: (i) never to go into debt for the work, and (ii) never to ask any human being for money, but only to ask God. He was made rich in every way so that he could be generous on every occasion, and we may be sure that his generosity resulted in many giving thanks to God (2 Cor. 9:11).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding and the Life and Death of Mr Badman* (J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, London, 1969), pp. 60f. (paras 191–2).

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Bingham, notes to Pastors’ School 2000 speakers.

<sup>8</sup> John Dunn, *George Mueller: A Biography* (NCPI, Blackwood, n.d.), pp. 7, 8, 23.

## Receiving, Giving, Thanksgiving and Mission

Reflecting on Paul's testimony in 2 Corinthians 4:1 and Galatians 1:15, 16, Geoffrey Bingham makes the following observation:

Paul saw clearly that salvation was not an end in itself, but was with a view to the ministry, that is, proclaiming the gospel. We might say, then, that the greatest gift we receive is ministry. If we keep seeing it as the gift of mercy, then we keep in mercy and so remain merciful.<sup>9</sup>

When we miss the abundancy of God's grace and turn to secular principles to maintain our church's life, ministry and structure then we reduce the grand global and cosmic mission of the Almighty to the scale of a cake stall for the cash-strapped congregation, or a fundraiser to pay the parson. Those who have attended church finance meetings will have encountered this sad reduction. Again the voice of one crying in the ecclesial wilderness:

. . . what the Church is about is not establishing religious or social units, and keeping them in action and usefulness merely by the giving of members as though they are obligated to keep the work going. Nor is it required to maintain denominations, cultures and the like by promotional means, of which there are many both ancient and modern, religious and secular . . . Ignorance of the actions of the Kingdom in history and our present age will mean we are working on a tiny canvas.<sup>10</sup>

The example of the Macedonians and of George Mueller, and of many others who were, and are, working on a vast canvas, points us to the great river of Edenic grace flowing out from the throne of God, and supporting the tree of life which is for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:1–5). Far from having the dimensions of a cake stall, this is a vast river 'that no-one could cross' (Ezek. 47:1–12). Again we hear Geoffrey's passionate appeal for apostolicity:

I repeat we must have a mission mind, an apostolic mind, an apostolic proclamation and an apostolic way of life. Then we will be surprised by God's marvellous deeds in redeeming, blessing and enriching us, opening us from selfishness and pathetic meanness. We cannot afford to be proud, self-sufficient, against receiving. Giving is the flowing out of the life of God. It is the flowing out of our lives without restraint and an eye to the benefit. It is pure living, pure selfgiving, pure receiving in order to give.<sup>11</sup>

## Who's Counting?

As a Christian pastor I have always had a strong inclination towards counting: count the attendances, count the offerings, count the conversions (if any). As Christians we regard it as good stewardship to budget our money so that every dollar is accounted for and wisely spent. Hilarious giving (*hilarion*, n.b.: 2 Cor. 9:7) is out of the question because every dollar is spoken for. Even our giving to God is carefully pre-planned. Having begun an itinerant 'faith ministry' (after 25 years of having all financial bases covered as a parish minister) I confess that I am inclined to want to count any income with great eagerness! By contrast God says to me, 'Rod, you do the ministry, and leave the counting to me'. God's surprising generosity is leading me to become *more* generous, now that I have no financial security, than I was when income was assured and expenditure more tightly budgeted.

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<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Bingham, *The Magnificence of Mercy* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2000), pp. 183f.

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Bingham, notes to Pastors' School 2000 speakers.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Bingham, notes to Pastors' School 2000 speakers.

## The Abundancy of Grace

The flow of God's kingly reign is expressed in Jesus' commissioning words to his disciples: 'Freely have you received, freely give' (Matt. 10:8). God's part is to 'make all grace abound' to us. He does this that we might 'abound in every good work'.

## study thirteen

# The Fullness of the Blessing of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—II

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### INTRODUCTION: THE RESOURCES OF THE FULLNESS

We have already dealt with the fact that the eternal nature of God, so powerfully seen in the Old Testament in His act of creation and the resultant nature of creation, is His fullness. By fullness Man and creation is blessed, and thus is kept 'full', and so moves progressively to its *telos* of glory. We have also seen that when God deliberately withholds that fullness because He is enacting judgment, the creation feels the diminution of its own 'normal' powers, which of course derive from God's giving, especially in the form of blessing. The diminution of creation's power is God's form of cursing, something we also saw in former Studies. We need to keep in mind that Man who is God's image is dependent upon the rest of creation, even as it is dependent upon him. Living in the fullness of God is indispensable to Man and creation. Because of the Fall and the resultant failure to live in fullness by nature, Man has to live by the grace of God. That is to say blessing comes through grace whereas at creation it was given in the natural order of that creation.

We saw, also, that the fullness of God is that of the unity of the Godhead, the power of the Three Persons subsisting in communion as the immanent Trinity. Within the perichoretic life of the Trinity all members honour one another, serve one another, give to one another and receive from one another. This is what we call the life of communion which is at the same time the life of love. So then, God is love, the Father being the fountain of that love, the Son being 'the Son of His love' and the Spirit being the Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of the Son, and the Spirit of love. The behaviour of this Community of love is to be seen as the law of love, and as Man is made in the image of God—that is, in the image of the Community of love—so the law of love is natural to him when his will is one with God's will. The word 'natural' used here does not mean 'natural law', though natural law may have its beginnings from the law of love, from which it has receded.

The working of the economic Trinity is that of the Godhead using all its inner being and resources which we call 'fullness', and initially moving out to create a community of love in the environment of love—Eden—which is to Edenise the whole creation. Man, of course, refused the Covenant of God in Eden, yet the blessing given

was not withdrawn since ‘the gifts and call of God are irrevocable’ (Rom. 11:29). All creation receives its life-giving and life-acting supplies from the Divine fullness.

Having reviewed all that, we can now proceed to look at redeemed Man, the Church, and the fullness of God working through His Fatherhood, the Lordship of Christ the Son, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the people of God.

## THE FULLNESS OF BLESSING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### The Whole Blessing of the Father through Christ

We are struck by Paul’s statement in Romans 15:29, ‘and I know that when I come to you I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ’. This statement has a plethora of interpretations, most of which, one supposes, contribute to a full understanding of it.<sup>1</sup> Reading these comments after the passing of some years I was struck by the fact that none of the commentators thought to quote Ephesians 1:3, ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places’. Earlier on we saw that ‘every spiritual blessing’ is best rendered ‘the whole, that is, the *full* spiritual blessing’. Surely it is this *full spiritual blessing* which God the Father has given us in Christ, to which Paul was referring generally, if not particularly. John Murray’s comment seems to me to most fit the idea. He says:

But the *certitude* pertains to the blessing with which he would come if God so willed . . . This is the blessing which Christ imparts and Paul is convinced that his presence in Rome would be accompanied by the *fulness* of this blessing. No term could more appropriately express the full measure of the blessing anticipated. We are liable to think of the rich blessing that would *accompany* his ministry. This is without doubt in view. But we may not restrict the thought thus. The terms indicate that he will come thither in the possession of the fullness of Christ’s blessing. This evinces the confidence of Christ’s abiding presence in the plenitude of his grace and power. And it is also the key to the boldness with which Paul had planned his journey to the seat of empire and to the limits of the west. Although we may not press the terms of the sentence to convey this meaning, nevertheless, we cannot exclude from Paul’s total thought (*cf.* 1:12; 15:24) the assurance that the fullness of Christ’s blessing would also be imparted to the believers at Rome.<sup>2</sup>

Paul knows what is the fullness of the blessing as he speaks of it throughout Ephesians. All believers undoubtedly receive this blessing, but not all believers are conscious of its wide meaning. In Acts 20:27 Paul told the Ephesians elders that he had never refrained from declaring the whole counsel of God to them, and it is this very counsel Paul opens up in the first chapter of Ephesians, namely the plan of God. It requires ‘the whole blessing of God’ to know, adhere to, and live in the plan—that is, the purpose—of God. Doubtless Paul meant his coming to Rome would be a special time, with blessing, but it would be because Paul would come to share the whole counsel of God by the blessing of Christ, which would be at the same time the fullness of the Holy Spirit. This is the pattern for all uses of God’s blessing.

### The Fullness of God in the Letter to Ephesus

Here we have chosen to bring forward Markus Barth’s comment on the *pasa eulogia*, that is, ‘every’ or, ‘all kinds’, of spiritual blessing in Ephesians 1:3:

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<sup>1</sup> These interpretations were given in the NCTM Monday Pastors’ Study 6/5/96, pp. 2–3.

<sup>2</sup> J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1966), p. 220.

*the full spiritual blessing.* The Greek can be translated by ‘all,’ ‘every,’ ‘every kind,’ ‘the whole’ spiritual blessing. When the Hebrew equivalent for ‘all’ is used in phrases similar to Eph 1:3 it gives the noun to which it belongs an intensive meaning. The same may be true of the use of ‘all’ in Ephesians: the interpretation has to avoid any shade of doubt that the blessing may be a composite of many parts. There is no hint that God’s one full blessing should be split up into several distinct parts. The blessing given ‘in Christ’ and described in the following eleven verses is an indivisible and perfect whole. If any of its many aspects or dimensions were missing, it would not only be incomplete but distinct from the ‘blessing [given] in Christ.’ Instead of expressing joy in but one, two, or three feats of God, the author praises the one Christ (4:5) whose oneness is matched by the singleness of the total blessing. The totality of God’s gracious manifestation is extolled in the blessing of 1:3–14. This part of Ephesians is a summary of the whole message the apostle wants to give.<sup>3</sup>

Verses 3–14 in chapter 1 of Ephesians<sup>4</sup> are really a description of the blessing which the Father has brought upon us through the Son—that is, all elements of it constitute the blessing. If we look at these elements of sanctification, sonship, redemption with the forgiveness of sins, the revelation of ‘the mystery of His will’ is in accordance with His purpose to bring all things together in and under Christ, and to make both Jews and Gentiles to be to the praise of the glory of His grace, and to the praise of His glory now and in the *telos*. Along with all this is the dealing of the Holy Spirit with the elect so that all will be inheritors. So, then, this is a great blessing. Blessing ensures that the promise will be fulfilled. All elements are noteworthy, for we share in them, but the purpose of God’s will to make Christ the head of all things is breathtaking.

### ***Christ’s Fullness Given to the Church—Ephesians 1:22–23***

. . . and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.<sup>5</sup>

Ephesians 1:22–23 repeats the blessing of God having put all things under Christ’s feet, and made him to be head over all things ‘for the church’. I Corinthians 12:12–13 helps us to understand the ‘body’ and the ‘fullness’:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

The Church is Christ’s body and he fills it from his fullness, ‘the fullness of him’,<sup>6</sup> so that she can now be called his fullness. Christ does not impart that fullness to her so that she alone has it, anymore than a husband surrenders his fullness to his wife for her possession, but the giving is such that the wife is truly the husband’s glory. And for what does she receive his fullness? We might say that his body might be strong as it shares the fullness of the Head. We might say that, as the original Eve was

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<sup>3</sup> M. Barth, *Ephesians 1 – 3* (The Anchor Bible, vol. 34, Doubleday & Co., New York, 1981), p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> It is true, exegetically, that Ephesians 1:3–14 constitute the ‘full blessing’, yet verses 15–23 are a further opening up of the same blessing, i.e. as a development of it, showing the things of the *telos* and Christ’s exaltation over all things, and the place of the Church which receives Christ’s fullness.

<sup>5</sup> Some commentators interpret ‘the fullness of him who fills all in all’ as meaning, ‘the fullness of Him, who all in all, is being fulfilled’. That really makes the Church the fulfiller of Christ, and other commentators make strong protest against this view. The order of filling is, God fills Christ, Christ fills the Church. This can be shown by Christ’s statement in John 17:22–23, ‘The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them’. He is the Vine, and the branches bear fruit because he supplies the sap—the substance for fruit-bearing.

<sup>6</sup> That is by means of the Spirit as Pentecost and the events following at Samaria and Caesarea show. The constant filling of the Spirit is essential. The fullness must be kept full, so to speak.

Adam's helpmeet, so now Christ is the whole Vine of which the Church is the branches. So John said, 'And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace'. We have seen in the Old Testament how God fills all things,<sup>7</sup> and so the 'filling' of the Church is really the blessing from which it is equipped to fulfil the counsel of God in His Son Jesus Christ, for the first Adam was created to fulfil this very counsel but failed to do so. Eve, also, failed to be the 'helpmeet' she ought to have been. Ephesians 4:10–13 shows that Christ's victory was achieved by both his descent and ascent, the purpose of which was 'that he might fill all things'.<sup>8</sup> Israel was considered to be Yahweh's wife in order to be His 'helpmeet'.

It is essential for us to grasp the truth that the Church does not exist for itself, or even to be—as it were—a diversion for the Husband. She is made indispensable to her Husband's ministry, his fulfilling the whole counsel of God. It is the Church which has spent 2000 years in being Christ's partner to 'sum up all things', 'fill up all things', 'reconcile all things', and 'harmonise all things'.

### ***Christ's Ascent and His Giving the Gifts Which are of His Fullness—Ephesians 4:9–13***

His ascent in 1:20–23 means that he was thus—and is—over all things. Does he, then, set out to fill all things, that is, give them substance, their true being and identity? Is there an eschatological thrust in his filling all things? One would think so. We should look at the text:

... He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, *to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ* (Eph. 4:10–13).

He ascends in order to 'give gifts to mankind'. Are the gifts to be the means of bringing the Church 'to mature manhood, *to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*? In other words, is 'the fullness of Christ' given to the Church, sustained and replenished and kept at functional pitch by the gifts given to men? It is clear from the text that the gifts are 'apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers' and the purpose of them is 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry'—and such ministry to them being thus enabled to 'attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, *to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*'. We can say Christ's gifts are to bring the Church to the fullness which already has been given to it. In this sense gifts are aids to continuing fullness for continuing ministry.

### ***Christ and the Spirit Bring the Church to Contain All the Fullness of God—Ephesians 3:14–19***

Ephesians 3:14–19 is a prayer Paul prays for the Ephesian church. The goal is that the Ephesians may be filled unto all the fullness of God, as the text shows:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;

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<sup>7</sup> See Psalm 119:64; 48:10; Jeremiah 4:12; 23:23–24 for elements of God which fill the whole world.

<sup>8</sup> At the Fall, God did not take away the gifts He had given, but Man was not in the state of willing to do God's will and so lost the fullness, that is, the substance, and the true functional use of these gifts.

that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

We note here that Paul prays that the Father, out of the riches of His glory, will grant each believer to be ‘strengthened with might’ in his inner being by the power of the Holy Spirit, so Christ may dwell in the heart—so that out of this work of the Father, the Spirit and the Son a grounding in love may come to the recipient. This grounding in love will enable the believers to comprehend the dimensionless dimensions of God, to know the reality of Christ’s love, so that all may be filled with all the fullness of God. This passionate passage is throbbing with the mystery of God being comprehended in the hearts of believers.

Although the passage does not directly mention it, the passion of Paul is that his readers will grasp the mystery of the Church, of which he has spoken in Ephesians 2:11–13. All of this ‘was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord’. The Church needs to live in the fullness of God which is Christ, the Holy Spirit continually filling the Church with the fullness of Christ who fills all in all. What a bounty of love and enablement—where the *telos* is always in the sight of faith!

### **The Fullness of God in the Letter to Colossae**

#### ***The Fullness of God in Colossians 1:15–20***

In Colossians 1:15–20 we have the theme of the *pleroma*, his ‘fullness again appearing’. We see its context in the passage:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

The thrust of the passage is Christ’s Lordship, partly a parallel with Ephesians 1:20–23 except that Paul is pointing to the Son’s own Lordship as Creator with the Father and the Spirit. The statement ‘all things were created through him and for him’ is linked with I Corinthians 8:6, ‘for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist’, but the Colossian passage has ‘for him’ (*eis auton*) which can be translated ‘unto him’, that means all things are unto him—he is their *telos*. Verses 19–20 tell us the goal of the fullness of God, that is, ‘to reconcile all things unto himself’. In Ephesians the ‘fullness’ or ‘action of filling’ has its goal. It is the working of the counsel—the planned goal of God. In Ephesians everything works towards the heading up of all things in Christ, and this is ‘filling all things’ in the process of which the Church is filled *by means of* ‘the gifts’ (*domata*: 4:11). It is apparent in Colossians 1:19–23 that it is by the Cross that reconciliation can and does take place. It is further evident in 2:14–15 that the evil principalities and powers which constantly fragment the creational unity are also destroyed by the work of the Cross. We repeat: the work of reconciliation is by ‘the fullness of God’ which God is pleased to have

dwell in Christ. The fullness of God is the blessing which ensures that the goal of reconciliation can and will take place at the *telos*.

It should also be recognised that Paul sees the work of the ministry to bring believers to perfection, in the text of Colossians 1:27–29, and that this perfection will be completed in and for the *telos*.

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me.

### ***The Fullness of God in Colossians 2:8–10***

See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fulness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

This passage shows a contrast between human philosophy which was surely gnostic teaching, given by ‘the elemental spirits of the universe’, and Christ in whom dwelled (dwells) the whole fullness of deity. The elemental spirits were emanations which moved out from God and ultimately reached that which was inferior to God—mankind—but Christ was no emanating spirit or celestial creature but truly a man. The difference between him and all men, and for that matter all elemental spirits, was that ‘the whole fullness of deity dwelled’. Thus the salvation discussed in the text above, and which is about to be discussed in the text below, all comes from the whole fullness of the indwelling deity. The ‘bodily’ is best taken to mean ‘in a human body’, that is, there is nothing mythic or abstract about the place where the deity’s fullness dwells.

The passage continues to talk about the infilling of the believers—the Church—from the ‘whole fullness of deity’, saying ‘You have come to fullness of life in him’, or ‘You have been filled full in him.’ This is very powerful news. It insists that the fullness of Christ given to the Church in Ephesians 1:22–23 and 3:19 is not something attained but received, we would say, as ‘the whole spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus’ which the Father has given. Notice that the text of 2:10 says ‘and you are in him having been filled [*kai este en auto pepleromenoi*]’. So then believers live out of the fullness from which they have been filled. This is again a reminder of blessing which is enablement to do the will of God.

## **CONCLUSION TO ‘THE FULLNESS OF THE BLESSING OF THE FATHER, SON AND SPIRIT’**

The purpose of our Pastors’ School has been to help us to see the nature of God in giving and in blessing. We have had to turn away from human ideas about giving, receiving, blessing and cursing. By ‘human ideas’ we do not mean the ideas issuing from human materialism or idealism—though they, too, can be deceitful—but we are talking about using techniques and methods used in human society whereby church congregations can be maintained, ministry paid for, buildings and their fabrics cared for, and all the equipment we may consider essential for church life. We by no means ignore all this business, but we are looking to the greatness of the creation-filling God, and His never failing generosity towards His entire creation. There is His constant sustaining of creation, His never-ceasing ‘filling’ of it, and then the dealing with His

people so that they are caught up into His fullness, sharing it daily, ultimately being inducted into it, into the ‘mystery of God Himself’. To do this we need to see that God has given us all things, that He goes on replenishing us when replenishment is necessary, and how this is effected by His own dwelling in us.

### **God’s Great Blessing and Giving**

We have generally covered giving and receiving in our first Study, and Study after Study has revealed more and more of the giving of God and Man. Just living and working in order to increase possessions, riches and security are nowhere commended by God. Paul shows us that to be content in whatever state one is in is the way to go. Poverty, also, is nowhere commended. Paul’s question, ‘For who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?’ tells us that we ought to acknowledge that all things come from God. The Sermon on the Mount also teaches us.

In the Old Testament the verbs ‘to give’ which are used number well over one thousand mentions. One verb, to give, in the New Testament is *didomai* and it is used over three hundred times. Giving is a work both of God and man. The key to God’s giving lies in ‘God so loved that He gave’. A key verse showing us God’s love in giving is Romans 8:32, ‘He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, *will he not also give us all things with him?*’ We see that the Son was no different, for John wrote of him (Rev. 1:5–6), ‘To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father’, is as powerful a statement as Galatians 2:20, ‘the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’, and Ephesians 5:2, ‘And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’.

This is not the place to go into the gifts which the Father gives, the gifts which the Son gives, and the gifts given by the Holy Spirit, for they are legion, and of course stimulate us to genuine giving. What we see time and again is the kind of giving or action which fills us. We may be filled because we have hungered and thirsted after righteousness. We may be filled with joy, with compassion. We may be filled with the Holy Spirit and ‘unto all the fullness of God’.

What is certain that we have already received ‘the full spiritual blessing’, because ‘His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature’ (II Peter 1:3–4).

There can be no doubt, then, that we do not have to go after God, urging Him to give us what we do not have, unless of course we have never received the gift of eternal life. What we need to consider is that all gifts and fullness of Christ and the Spirit can seem as nothing if we switch from living by faith and set about living by sight. ‘The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable’, and so we should learn to live by them. At the same time we can move away from ‘the gifts and the call of God’, and seek to walk by other ways. It is then we need not so much a replenishment of gifts which have been exhausted by use—could they be?—but a renewal of our own communion with Him.

Hungering and thirsting after righteousness is a continual matter and action, and God certainly fills. What impresses itself upon us in history, whether it be at creation, whether with the creation and with the covenant people, is that God is the One Who moves.

His sovereign acts of filling, supplying and energising arise from His initiative. He makes room in these actions for our prayer, especially as it aligns with His will. So in history we see remarkable happenings. On the one hand there is Psalm 29 by which God reminds us of creational and governing glory in the universe, and on the other hand the intervention is this world by His Son, come in simple human flesh. As is our true need so He fills, and all His filling refreshes us in the multiplicity of His gifts, and again we are active in His will.

### **God Indwelling Man and Man Indwelling God**

God, in His Creator Being has always dwelled in the whole creation. What an awesome matter is this. No part or particle of it is not indwelt by His glory. As Covenant Father and God of grace, He has always dwelt within His people. His mercy seat has never really been confined to the glorious tabernacle of Israel. Psalm 139 is testimony to His love for His creation. Many are the Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs which have arisen from the hearts of men and women who have been enraptured by movements of His Presence.

Perhaps the deepest and most wonderful thing in all time and eternity, is that God will dwell in a human being. No less wonderful is that a human being can dwell in God. When we have talked so much about ‘the fullness of God’ was pleased to dwell in Christ, and that ‘the whole deity dwelt bodily in him’, then that was wonderful, but after all the Son was God. When we read John chapter 14 and hear Jesus talking to his disciples in the following Scriptures, then we are amazed and perhaps more dazed than amazed:

‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you’ (vv. 15–17).

Jesus answered him, ‘If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him’ (v. 23).

Then we read John chapter 17 and are increasingly amazed:

‘I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me’ (vv. 20–23).

That surely tells us that God’s plan has within it the truth that we shall one day dwell in Him and He in us. In John chapter 14 we see that the Holy Spirit will come and dwell in us, and likewise the Father and the Son. When we read John’s first Letter then we know that this matter of dwelling in God is a settled truth. Two different verbs are used, one is *meno* which can be translated, ‘abide, dwell, remain’, and so on. The other is *katoikeo* which has the sense of ‘to settle down’, ‘dwell as in a house’ and indicates something permanent, not that *meno* does not have this quality. In I John we have these following statements, and all of them speak of the Father’s indwelling:

All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us (I John 3:24).

No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (I John 4:12–16).

In Matthew 10:19–20 Jesus had told his disciples, ‘When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking in you’. In Ephesians 3:17 we saw ‘that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith’. Colossians 1:27 speaks of ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’ and Galatians 2:20, ‘Christ liveth in me’. There are many more indications of the Three Persons indwelling us, and of us dwelling in Them. Enough, anyway, to say that the fullness of blessing and of the full spiritual gift comes to us by their blessed indwelling, and we indwell the Eternal God, as He also indwells us. More of this will open to us at the *telos* when, as the Bride of Christ, we are welcomed into the Holy Family of the Triune God. For the present we just rest on this intimacy and are encouraged to share in the counsel of God. It is a thing most beautiful as it is also most incredible, God dwells in a man, and a man dwells in God.

### **The Perpetual Adoration and Thanksgiving**

The last things we speak of is the life of worship and service whereby we use the gifts, and especially in our adoration and thanksgiving to Him. More and more we will grow into the vast and wonderful life of humility which brings gratitude, and gratitude which occupies us in endless praise. We must close with Romans 11:33–36 which so beautifully expresses what we long to express:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!  
‘For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?’  
‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’  
For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.  
(Rom. 11:33–36).

## study fourteen

# The Gifts in and for Love—Forever

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### LOVE AS THE WAY AND GOAL OF THE GIFTS OF GOD

Paul's well-known treatise on love in 1 Corinthians 13 comes between chapters 12 and 14, in an overall passage about 'spiritual gifts'. Love is not another of the gifts, supreme above them all. Rather, it is the 'way' of all the gifts (12:31), and the goal for which they are given (13:8, 12).

As the way and goal of all the gifts, love is directly and thoroughly relational: 'face to face' (13:12). The Greek word used for 'love' is *agape*, sometimes taken to represent a 'higher' form of love that is an altruistic and self-denying act of the will, rather than a relationship that engages the affections.<sup>1</sup> Paul, however, contrasts the love of which he speaks with such altruistic acts as giving away all your possessions, or even sacrificing your own body (13:3).

### WHOSE LOVE?

We think we know what love is. But we are not particularly good at it. Often our notions of 'love' centre upon ourselves and what suits us. Paul negates such self-centredness in 13:4–6. The positives are that 'love is patient; love is kind', and that love 'rejoices in the truth', as opposed to 'wrongdoing'. When we come to verse 7, we quickly realise that the love being spoken of here is of a different order from our own. While our own 'love' has its preferences and cut-out points, this love 'bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things'. Even so, this love is not presented to us as an ideal to which we must strive, however short we may fall of it. It is presented simply as the way love is. It is also presented as being entirely practicable.

John makes it clear in his First Letter that this love is from God, and not from ourselves:

... love is from God . . . In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us . . . (1 John 4:7, 10).

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Crossway Books, Wheaton, 2000), pp. 26–30.

Indeed, this love is such that John can say, ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8, 16). In other words, this love is not known in any humanly originated act of ‘loving’, but only in God. And it is known only in a face-to-face ‘knowing’ of, or ‘abiding’, in God:

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love (v. 8).

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them (v. 16).

Nevertheless, in this relationship with God, we are fully expected to practice this love ourselves, and nothing other or less than this love, towards one another:

We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:11).

How ‘much’ God loved us, and the form that this love has taken, we shall see.

Look back at what is positively affirmed of this love in 1 Corinthians 13:4 and 6—that ‘love is patient; love is kind’, and that love ‘rejoices in the truth’ as opposed to ‘wrongdoing’, together with ‘love never ends’ in verse 8—and see how this corresponds to God’s revelation of His own glory to Moses in the covenant context of Exodus 34:6–7:

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty . . .

Could we say that the glory of God’s innermost being shining out is His love in action?

## GOD’S LOVE

Since the first human sin—and even for that to happen in the first place—there has been necessarily a concerted effort to oppose, suppress, and misconstrue the true love of God (cf. Gen. 3:1, Rom. 1:18). This continues in our own day:

. . . when informed Christians talk about the love of God, they mean something very different from what is meant in the surrounding culture . . . the love of God in our culture has been purged of anything the culture finds uncomfortable . . . I do not think that what the Bible says about the love of God can long survive at the forefront of our thinking if it is abstracted from the sovereignty of God, the holiness of God, the wrath of God, the providence of God, or the personhood of God—to mention only a few nonnegotiable elements of basic Christianity . . . Nowadays if you tell people that God loves them, they are unlikely to be surprised. Of course God loves me; he’s like that, isn’t he? Besides, why shouldn’t he love me? I’m kind of cute, or at least as nice as the next person. I’m okay, you’re okay, and God loves you and me.<sup>2</sup>

It does not take much to sense the insecurity and awareness of guilt that underlies such a glib attitude. Nevertheless, such expressions are commonly and insistently held in the community and even, or particularly, in the church.

The only way we can know God’s love truly is by God’s own revelation in action, by which we are brought into love-relationship with Him:

God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him (1 John 4:9).

So what is the love of God? We know this most fully in the revelation of the Son.

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* pp. 10–12.

## LOVE WITHIN THE TRINITY

Jesus, in his prayer to the Father the night before he died, spoke of the Father giving him glory and loving him before the foundation of the world:

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

This is the love-relationship that was evident in Jesus' earthly life and ministry. Twice in John's Gospel, in chapters 3 and 5, Jesus says how 'the Father loves the Son'. In both cases, the loving has to do with giving. In John 3:35 it is the giving of 'all things':

The Father loves the Son and has placed [*dedoken*] all things in his hands.

John 5:16–30 is particularly instructive of the relation between the Father and the Son.<sup>3</sup> John 5:26 takes us back even further:

For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted [*edoken*] the Son also to have life in himself.

We would expect the Father, as the uniquely self-existent God, to have 'life in Himself'. The fact that the Son also has 'life in himself' would appear to mean that there is another self-existent one alongside this God—another God-centre in parallel with God—of the order of ditheism. This was the understanding that underlay the Jews' objection to Jesus' statement, 'My Father is still working, and I also am working' (5:17), that Jesus was 'making himself equal to God' (5:18). Jesus, however, counters this with the claim that this 'life in himself' is '*granted*' by the Father. Jesus is not setting himself up over against God as an alternative to God. The 'life in himself' of the Son is by the initiative and giving of the Father in love. But it is a totality of giving, holding nothing back. If it was said merely that the Father, who has 'life in himself', granted the Son to have *life*, this would make the Son an entirely secondary and derivative being. But for the Father to have 'granted the Son also to have life in himself' means that there is nothing the Father has that He does not give to the Son (cf. John 16:15, 'all that the Father has is mine'). This is a basis for the later doctrines of the Trinity and the eternal generation of the Son.

This is why Jesus says to the Jews:

The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing (John 5:20).

There is nothing that the Father is doing that He does not show to the Son. The Son receives only what He is shown by the Father, and participates fully in it:

Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise (John 5:19).

As a counter to the accusation of the Jews that he is setting himself up in competition with the Father, Jesus asserts that 'the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing'. But by the same token, what the Son does is not less than what the Father does, but is coextensive with it: '*whatever* the Father does, the

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* pp. 30–38.

Son does likewise'. He goes on to say that this extends to raising the dead and executing judgment. This is all because 'the Father *loves* the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing'.

Some Christian missionary friends of mine work in Pakistan teaching English as a second language to Afghan refugees. They report:

Recently a couple of students asked to study our religion. The students said, 'We have watched the staff of the school for four years and we want to know where the love comes from'.

Where indeed!

Thus, unlike other monistic understandings of deity, there has always been in God a totally other-centred love. All other manifestations of the love of God emerge from this. Yet, because God is one, this does not conflict with God's jealous regard for His own glory, and His concern for His holy name (cf. Isa. 42:8; Ezek. 36:21). God is different from us, in that He is the centre of the universe, and we are not. For us to make out that we were the centre of everything would be false and blasphemous pride of the worst order. For God to concede that He is anything other than the centre of all, rightly to be worshipped and adored, would be the denial of His very being.<sup>4</sup>

Note also at this point:

. . . the *distinction* between the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father. The Father commands, sends, commissions—and demonstrates his love for the Son by 'showing' him everything, such that the Son does whatever the Father does. The Son obeys, says only what the Father gives him to say, does only what the Father gives him to do, comes into the world as the Sent One—and demonstrates his love for the Father precisely by such obedience. Not once is there any hint that the Son commissions the Father, who obeys. Not once is there a hint that the Father submits to the Son or is dependent upon him for his own words and deeds.<sup>5</sup>

To this we shall return.

Supremely, the thing the Father shows the Son is the work of the Cross. It is supremely in obedience to this that the Son demonstrates his love for the Father (John 14:31). Father and Son are one in the action of the Father's love to save the lost sheep:

The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one (John 10:25–30).

## GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL LOVE

In Matthew 5 Jesus speaks of the Father's love for all He has made:

. . . I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (vv. 44–48).

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* pp. 39–40.

‘Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect’ in this context means that as God’s children, made in His image, we are to love as widely as He does, even to loving our enemies—as He reconciled us to Himself even while we were His enemies (cf. Rom. 5:10).

This does not mean that God’s love is indiscriminate, or unconcerned about evil. In a sinful world, God’s providential love has to do with His *forbearance*. This forbearance, or withholding of wrath that is rightly due (as in Gen. 8:20 – 9:17), is with a view to salvation, giving time for all to come to repentance (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9–15a; Rom. 2:4; 3:21–26; Acts 17:30–31). God’s providential love for us, through His creation, is a constant witness to His goodness by which He *gives* ‘rains from heaven and fruitful seasons . . . filling you with food and your hearts with joy’ (see Acts 14:15–17). While the wicked will misconstrue this as indifference or even approval on God’s part (cf. Eccl. 8:11), the true response to God’s providential love in creation is faith, and giving priority to the Father’s kingdom and His righteousness.

### **GOD’S SAVING LOVE TOWARDS A REBELLIOUS WORLD**

As Father, God is also at heart Redeemer (Isa. 65:16). He ‘desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (1 Tim. 2:4). ‘I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live’ (Ezek. 18:32). The outcome of this is:

. . . God so loved the world that he *gave* his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:16–17),

even though that ‘world’ was so far gone in wilful rebellion and sin that it could be said to lie wholly ‘under the power of the evil one’ (1 John 5:19). Indeed, that is why it needed saving.

For the measure of the ‘so’—that is, how much God loved this morally repugnant world—we need to look back to what we glimpsed of the love within the Trinity of the Father for the Son: with a totality of giving, holding nothing back. That the Son, who is so loved, was not withheld by the Father, but was given up to the suffering and death of the Cross for us all (Rom. 8:32), shows God’s love for this world, however far gone, to be measureless, and His love for us as His children to be nothing less than the love that He has for His own Son. This is what lies at the heart of John’s knowledge and understanding of God as love:

. . . God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:8–10).

This, with its present and future outworking, is the sum total of the love of God that is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom. 5:5):

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly . . . God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Rom. 5:6, 8–11).

## GOD'S ELECTING LOVE

The atonement wrought in the action of the Cross was sufficient for all: 'he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world' (1 John 2:2). In the light of Christ's resurrection, 'all people everywhere' are commanded to repent (Acts 17:30).

In this overall plan and provision of God, there is a love of God that makes His atonement effective for those whom He has chosen. This comes through most particularly in the statement:

... I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau (Mal. 1:2–3).

In the context of Malachi, God's love for Israel is shown by His judgment on the land of Israel's enemy Edom. But it goes back further into God's ongoing 'purpose of election', which emphasises God's merciful appointment of us in the face of our inability to do anything of ourselves to save ourselves:

Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might continue, not by works but by his call) she was told, 'The elder shall serve the younger' . . . So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy (Rom. 9:11–12, 16; quoting Gen. 25:23).

While this may be partly seen as God's choice of some for the sake of others—as His calling of Abraham to be the one through whom 'all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (Gen. 12:1–3), of Israel for the sake of the nations, or of the Gentiles for the sake of Israel (Rom. 11)—yet the whole matter is best left within the mystery of the saving love of God:

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery (Deut. 7:6–8).

It also remains that Edom stands in the Old Testament for all those who remain at enmity with God to the end, 'the people with whom the LORD is angry forever' (Mal. 1:4), those who 'will also drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger' (Rev. 14:10)—unmixed, that is, with mercy. Who is to say that 'the lake of fire' (Rev. 20:14–15) is not in the end that same love of God as experienced by those who have eternally rejected it?<sup>6</sup> For it is 'in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb' (Rev. 14:10) that this torment takes place.

## HOLINESS AND THE LOVE OF GOD

P. T. Forsyth, that great prophet of the holiness of God, has said this:

The holiness of God is a deeper revelation in the cross than His love; for it is what gives His love divine value.

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<sup>6</sup> cf. G. Bingham, *Bright Bird and Shining Sails* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1981), p. 114.

Even a loving God is really God not because He loves, but because He has power to subdue all things to the holiness of His love, and even sin itself to His love as redeeming grace.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever may be our personal dilemmas regarding God's judgments, it is in the Cross that we see sin, wrath, and love together in full measure.

Some of the pastoral implications of this have been spelled out by a recent writer in this way:

Twice in his First Letter, John the apostle makes the astounding statement, 'God is **love**' (1 John 4:8, 16). Before that, however, comes the even more far-reaching statement, 'God is **light**' (1 John 1:5).

'Light' here is contrasted with the darkness of sin and unrighteousness, from which we need forgiveness and cleansing (see 1 John 1:6–9). So 'light' designates God's holiness and strong moral beauty and purity. 'Love' here is God's giving of His all, holding nothing back: the sending of His Son in human flesh to be the one in whom all sin and unrighteousness is fully and finally dealt with and disposed of in the action of the cross (1 John 4:9–10), to bring us into direct and intimate relationship with God and with each other (1 John 1:3, 7; 4:12).

In God, and in all God says and does, light and love—moral holiness and relational intimacy—are never apart. Some would like to have one without the other: either tolerant 'love' without moral responsibility, or moral rectitude that cares little for relational closeness. Both of these tyrannise, demean and enfeeble the human spirit. Only God Himself, by His true and faithful actions of holy love in Christ, can bring us, in freedom, to that strength and beauty of character and living that befits those made to be in His image.<sup>8</sup>

## HOLY LOVE AND OBEDIENCE

Even to those within His people, whom He has chosen in love, God says:

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and requites to their face those who hate him, by destroying them; he will not be slack with him who hates him, he will requite him to his face. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which I command you this day (Deut. 7:9–11, RSV).

In the New Testament we are bidden, 'keep yourselves in the love of God' (Jude 21). This implies that there is a sense in which we can be outside the love of God. We are to keep ourselves in it by maintaining faith and being built up on it, to 'pray in the Holy Spirit', and look in hope towards 'the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life' (Jude 20–21). Thus we will grow in faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness and godliness (2 Pet. 1:5–11). So we are not to drift away from the message of salvation which we have received:

For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? (Heb. 2:2–3).

Jesus himself said:

'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them' (John 14:23).

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<sup>7</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1984 [reprint of 1910 edition]), pp. 205, 60.

<sup>8</sup> M. Bleby, *God's Holy Love: For Newcomers to Christian Faith* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2000), p. ix.

Just as obedience is integral to the Son's love for the Father, so for us obedience is integral to our remaining in the love which he has brought us from the Father:

'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love' (John 15:9–10).

So we have come full circle. Here we see the love that is from within the Trinity being exercised in human lives, with our eternity in the love of God firmly in view.

## THE GIFTS IN AND FOR LOVE—FOREVER

It is in this love of God, and for this love of God, that the gifts of God are to be exercised. These various manifestations of the one love of God—within the Trinity; in providence; in saving action; in specific election; and in covenantal obedience—have various pastoral implications in different settings. For instance, a phrase such as 'God's unconditional love' may be appropriate when speaking to unredeemed sinners who think they have to measure up in some way to attain salvation, but not to a wayward believer who needs to come under discipline.<sup>9</sup>

Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 makes it clear that the gifts along the way will come to an end, and that love will remain. Geoffrey Bingham comments:

If gifts are primary—i.e. are important in, and for, themselves—and *agape*, by which, and for which, the gifts are used, is not primary, then what will be there at the end of the ages will be only gifts! No: it is love which never fails, love which is immortal, and since it is God who is love, gifts will have done their work and be no longer needed. He who—so to speak—puts all his gifts as eggs in a gift-basket will then be empty-handed, especially if he has used them without love in this life. He will be bereft of all that is good and right. It appears that Paul thinks the use of gifts is a primary stage which will be outmoded, and that what matters now is *love itself*, for by it—its practice and its action—we are all being matured, and in fact will one day be perfect and will know even as now we are known.<sup>10</sup>

That love is God Himself in action—within the Trinity, and towards us. None of the gifts can be rightly exercised apart from that love. For He has given them, that we might come to participate freely and fully in the life of that love that is God.

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<sup>9</sup> See Carson, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> G. Bingham, *Ah, Strong, Strong Love!* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1993), p. 173.

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## study fifteen

# One Full, Perfect and Sufficient Sacrifice

*Geoffrey Bingham*

### INTRODUCTION: THE ALL-GIVING TRIUNE GOD

We come to the end of our Pastors' School on 'Giving and Thanksgiving in the Church'. Most of its text has been concerned with the giving of God to Man, Man's receiving and then his giving to God and Man. In order to set this forth we have had to show God's receiving also, especially in Man's worship and service. In this last Study we come to the greatest giving of the Triune God, namely, in the Cross of Christ. We recognise, of course, that the Cross is not the only high act of giving, and that it is not only part of all God's giving, but is of one piece with all His giving. Indeed, it is not separable from His 'other' giving, for all giving constitutes one whole. Even so, because it is the most unexpected act of giving by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—even if the most misunderstood—it is the heart of the understanding of all giving—the true nature of giving. We will look at what Father, Son and Holy Spirit gave so that the supreme sacrifice of history can be certified as no light thing.

### THE NATURE OF SACRIFICE

The first sacrifice we meet in Scripture is that of Cain and Abel. The account was written many years after the event, and the writer, or writers, of the Pentateuch already knew the nature of sacrifice; so many kinds of sacrifices there were! So the writer of this account knows the nature of sacrifice. He does not know the origin, or if he does he does not tell us, but to him sacrifice is essential. He uses the term 'offering' (*mincha*) which can also mean a gift. Both sacrifice and offering give to God, and presumably because He had given so much to them. He has given the whole creation to Man and only partly limited creation's giving to Man. Obviously Cain expected God to accept his offering, but God did not. He accepted the offering of Abel. Cain was angry at non-acceptance. Gordon Wenham, in his commentary, translates God's word in Genesis 4:7, 'Is there not forgiveness, if you do well? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its urge is for you, but you must rule over it.'<sup>1</sup>

This statement of God to Cain tells us that the offerings of the two brothers had something to do about sin. However we may rationalise their offering-action, it is to be

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<sup>1</sup> G. Wenham, *Genesis 1 – 15* (Word Books, Waco, 1987), p. 93.

seen related to sin—‘Is there not forgiveness if you do well?’ We seek in vain to know why they brought offerings. What we do know is that their parents knew God before the Fall, and that from this their two sons knew that it was right—if not indispensable—to make offerings. Much research into the matter of sacrifice does not explain its origin. It can be said that offerings were in the nature of bribes in many pagan sacrifices, but even pagan sacrifices could be meals eaten with their deities, that is, that the sacrifice is the basis of fellowship with the god/God. Fellowship—*koinonia*—is the word for participation in God (II Pet. 1:4, *theias koinonoi phuseos*; I John 1:3).

For the moment we will not seek to rationalise the nature of sacrifices but look at God’s giving to the creation, and His provision for sacrifice, especially sacrifice as it redeems humanity.

### **THE GIVING OF THE THREE PERSONS AS ONE: THE FULL, PERFECT AND SUFFICIENT SACRIFICE**

We have looked somewhat, in our first Study, at God as Giver and Receiver. There is giving and receiving with the communion of the Three Persons of the Immanent Trinity, and in the action of the Economic Trinity there is still mutual giving and receiving as redemptive action proceeds. What we now seek to see is the giving to fallen humanity by the Three Persons.

#### **The Giving of the Father**

In the New Testament the term ‘God’ almost always indicates the one who is ‘Father’. So in John 3:16 we have, ‘God so loved . . . that he gave’, so that we establish the principle that giving (*didomi*) arises from love—loving is giving. In John 3:17 God’s giving results in sending (*apostello*). This same order is found in I John 4:9, 14. The giving up of His Son for us all (Rom. 8:32, *paradidomi*) is the Father’s act in the sacrifice of the Cross, and the same verb is found in Romans 4:25, ‘who was put to death (*paradothe*) for our trespasses and raised for our justification’. Romans 5:8 does not use *didomi*, but indicates the deep love of the Father in the act of Christ’s sacrificial death.

Since the death is called a propitiation (Rom. 3:24; I John 2:2; 4:10); and since Romans 4:25 says the Father ‘*set him forth to be a propitiation*’; and I John 4:10 says that the Father ‘*sent him to be a propitiation for our sins*’, then we discover that Christ as our sacrifice was the victim the Father gave to be such. This means that the Father was the Initiator of the sacrifice. This fits perfectly the teaching of Leviticus 17:11, ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life’.

This principle is vitally important: there could be no effective sacrifice (offering) for propitiation in the Old Testament unless God provided the sacrifice. So in the important matter of Christ’s death God must provide the victim. This He did in Jesus Christ. From beginning to end, from before creation to the consummation of creation, Christ was God’s propitiatory victim given upon the altar to make the true sacrifice. No other victim could have been provided. God had provided His only Son, the only true sacrifice. Confirming all we have seen in this section is the fact of Galatians 3:13, that although Christ became curse for us, yet it was the Father who made him to be curse, as also He made him to be sin (II Cor. 5:21).

The proof of God's sacrificial love is that He had to abominate His Son in terms of Psalms 22 and 69. Hence the terrible cry of 'My God! My God! Why did you forsake me?' To provide the victim meant that He, the Father, could not escape the suffering of the Cross. Truly, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not counting their trespasses against them'. A similar passage is Hebrews 2:10, 'For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering'. That is, He had to make sure that the Son suffered the totality of the judgment of death in his suffering on the Cross.

### **The Giving of the Son**

The simple statement of Galatians 2:20b is, 'the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up [*paradidomi—paradontos*] for me'. We see the love of the Son deeply in this, and had he not spoken, in John 15:13, of love laying down its life for its friends? Galatians 1:4, 'who gave himself [*dontos—didomi*] for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father', likewise shows Christ's giving of himself. Again, I Timothy 2:5–6 shows the giving, 'For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who *gave* himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time'. In Galatians 3:13, Christ becomes the curse for us, 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, *having become a curse* for us—for it is written, "Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree"'. Colossians 2:14 indicates that Christ knew the judgment of the law as he hung upon the Cross, 'having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross'.

Whilst all these references support our thesis that the sacrifice was to be a 'full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, satisfaction and oblation for the sins of the whole world', it is essential that we do not see this as a mere forensic act. It is forensic without doubt, but let us not fail to see the ruthlessness of the sacrifice in shutting Christ up to death, the death suffered for the guilt of universal sin as it represented, too, the wrath of God. For, just as in Romans 1:24, 26 and 28 the sinner was given up (*paradidomi*) to his own sin and guilt, and that was the active nature of God's wrath, so on the Cross the Son had given himself to this also, on behalf of sinners. If we have a dry theology of substitutionary atonement, then we will have a dry view of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, and so a very dry view of the Atonement itself.

### **The Giving of the Spirit**

This section may prove somewhat difficult to develop, for the verbs *didomai* (to give) and *paradidomi* (to give up to) are not explicitly used. Indeed, Hebrews 9:14 indicates that Christ's giving up of himself was through the Holy Spirit, 'how much more shall the blood of Christ, *who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God*, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God'. This is surely the point regarding the love of the Spirit: he enabled Christ to give himself up on the Cross as a true sacrifice (*prosphero*, 'to offer in sacrifice'). Every element of Christ's incarnation, baptism, ministry, resurrection and ascension was carried out by the aid of the Holy Spirit, so why not the ministry of the crucifixion? He is known as (i) the Spirit of the Father; (ii) the Spirit of the Son; and (iii) the Spirit of love.

Thus, if God was in Christ for the ministry of reconciliation, so must he have been, not as the Father–Initiator and the Son–Mediator, but as the Spirit–Ennobler.

As for the anguish of the Spirit, who can be vexed and can grieve, so the Holy Spirit was the one whose love was present in this ministry of Jesus at the Cross.

### **CHRIST, HIGH PRIEST AND OBLATION—OFFERER AND OFFERING**

The uses of the term ‘propitiation’ in Paul and John have reference back to the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices. So probably does Hebrew 2:17, ‘Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people’. The writer speaks about the known priesthood and sacrifice early in his Epistle. However, he switches to the high-priesthood of Melchizedek as a more powerful form, both of ministry and sacrifice. He virtually claims that the only valid high-priesthood is that of the order of Melchizedek, and says, in 7:12, ‘For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well’. By ‘law’, he does not mean the whole Sinaitic law, but he means ‘the law of sacrifice’. He then proceeds to develop the High-Priesthood of Jesus. (This is outside our subject to some degree and so we will not follow his argument meticulously.)

In particular we will fasten upon 8:3, ‘For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer’. ‘Something to offer’ means he must have sacrificial offering—whatever it may be. Developing the claim that the Levitical offerings were virtually powerless, because the oblations were animals and never constituted what we might call ‘an efficacious, universal sacrifice to take away all sins’, he then shows that Christ himself is the True Offerer, the True Offering. Hebrews 9:26 says it clearly, ‘for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.’ Christ had it firmly in sight that he was to be the sacrifice, and to sacrifice himself, since he was also the High Priest. Hebrews 5:5–6 and 7:15–17 show that he was appointed a High Priest by God. The quality of all previous sacrifices was never sufficient to even begin to deal with sin and sins. The writer of Hebrews insists that blood must take away sins. On the universal basis of ‘blood must be shed’ in order to propitiate, he shows that the blood of Christ brings universal forgiveness. Christ’s death is ‘the full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world’, although he does not use this exact wording. What he says in 10:9–18 is most revealing as it is also most important:

Then he added, ‘Lo, I have come to do thy will.’ He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,’ then he adds, ‘I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more.’ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

We cannot here spend more time and space upon Christ’s sacrifice in Hebrews, but we claim that it is valid and it is the true sacrifice. What lies in the suffering, and how this is acceptable in the eyes of the Father, we cannot here set forth. We know that this is the heart of the matter. The God who was Yahweh and claimed He was merciful and

gracious, slow to anger, of great kindness, and the one who abounds in steadfast love and who forgives the transgressions, sins and iniquities of Man, is the one who sets forth His Son as the true sacrifice for sins. So we rest on this fact, that in time—even at the very centre of history—the true, universal sacrifice has been made and Yaweh’s claim to be the God of love has been vindicated.

Down through history Christians have seen, not only in Hebrews but also in the other Apostolic writings, that Christ was the Father’s sacrifice. In I Corinthians 5:7 Paul has written, ‘Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed.’ That has always been the mind of Christ’s people. In Ephesians 5:2 Paul had also said, speaking of the gracious nature of Christ’s sacrifice, ‘And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’.

### **THE GIVING OF GOD IS THE BASIS FOR ALL HUMAN GIVING, FORGIVING AND THANKSGIVING**

We have come to the end of our Studies. If we have been looking for ways to obtain finance and the wherewithal for upkeep and housekeeping in our Churches then we will have been somewhat disappointed. If, however, we have been led out into the eternal arena of true giving, receiving and thanksgiving then our Studies will have been most useful.

I propose, now, to try to show that the giving of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the great event of the Atonement shows to us the amazing vistas of giving of the Three Persons and the Triune God, as giving which is certainly beyond grasping by us without the true revelation of the Holy Spirit. The passage of I Corinthians 2:6–16 confirms this claim. In our fallenness we are against giving—though not against getting—because we are distrustful of all motives for giving. We also have the unconfessed guilt of being ungrateful to the God who gave us all we have, and who seeks to lead us into the unbelievable inheritance that comes to us by grace. Paul, in the passage mentioned, says, in effect, that it takes the communication of the Holy Spirit that we might understand the gifts bestowed upon us by God. The word ‘gifts’ is not explicit, but the verb *charizomai* can be paraphrased ‘to give freely’ (*ta hupo tou theou charisthenta hemin*, ‘the gifts bestowed on us by Christ’).

We mean that the most powerful rhetoric we can use will not convey the greatness of God’s giving of Himself—His fruitfulness in the Three-Personed ministry of the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension. Unless we grasp this, and unless it is constantly in our minds and hearts, thanksgiving will be virtually absent from us. Only he who receives grace as a bankrupted sinner, will be stirred to rich love and gratitude, and only he will burst into the life of giving, receiving, forgiving and thanksgiving. It is no wonder, then, that Christ instituted the practice of what we call ‘the Lord’s Supper’. Paul once said that he resolved to know nothing among the Corinthians but Jesus Christ and him crucified. He also said that God forbid he should glory in anything but the Cross. Even so, he accepted the fact and practice of the Lord’s Supper, as I Corinthians chapters 10 and 11 show us.

At this point we take notice of the Prayer of Consecration from the 1662 Prayer Book, as the heading for this study is drawn from it:

Almighty God our heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption; who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins

of the whole world; and did institute, and in his holy Gospel commanded us to continue, a perpetual memory of that his precious death, until his coming again; Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech thee; and grant that we receiving these thy creatures of bread and wine, according to thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed Body and Blood: who, in the same night that he was betrayed, took Bread; and, when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat, this is my Body which is given for you: Do this in remembrance of me. Likewise after supper he took the Cup; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins: Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me. *Amen.*

In I Corinthians 11:23–26 we read Paul's account of the events of the Last Supper:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

In verses 21 and 25 Paul uses the term *anamnesis*, 'Do this in remembrance [*anamnesis*] of me'. Some debate surrounds the word, especially if the word 'memorial' is used. What is clear is that Jesus wanted not so much the Passover meal to be remembered, as the act of the Cross. Sometimes theologians speak of 'a bare remembrance', as against 'a dynamic remembrance'. The dynamic does not rise from the way of remembering, so much as the Cross is the point of power (cf. I Cor. 1:18), and so, in refusing to forget, lies the power of remembering. What we mean is that all the dynamics of giving and receiving, known to the Three Persons and evidenced by them, come also to us in *anamnesis*. 'Lest we forget' is a good warning. 'We dare not forget' is how it is. In our previous Study we used a quote from Thomas Torrance, which is now apt for us at this point, because it refers to the Holy Communion:

If we insist over against both Catholics and Protestants that the Giver is identical with the Gift and the Gift is identical with the Giver, then such an immediate self-giving of God to us in his own divine Being and life through Jesus Christ must be understood as one that takes place *in the Holy Spirit* who is not just an emanation from God but the immediate presence and activity of God in his own divine Being, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, himself the Lord the Giver of life. Moreover, this is a real presence of Christ to us, creating a union between himself and us, and us and himself in the Spirit, such as he has with the Father eternally in the same Spirit, the Spirit who comes to us from the Father through the Son and who gives us access through the Son to the Father.<sup>2</sup>

We see now that in the real presence of Christ there is also the real presence of the Father and the Spirit. Their holy communion is present in the Immanent Trinity, but in the ritual of the Last Supper the holy communion of the Three Persons is present to us, and *we are present to it!* In the context of *having given* himself for us on the Cross, Christ is in holy communion with the other Two, and we are reminded of their high giving in the event of the Cross. Its incredible dimensions of giving for our benefit can be seen afresh, and pondered upon with deep emotion and amazement. It is the communion for all: the Three Persons, and we who remember the event of the past, and the

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<sup>2</sup> T. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, 1996), p. 132. This Study does not deal in particular with the Holy Spirit as the purveyor of the blessing, of Christ, and of the Father's largesse, but Torrance's quote does that efficiently.

events of the present leading on to the ‘until he come’ of the future. The presence did not come only at the point of the Holy Meal, for it was always with us—they as One were always with us.

This is the truth of the indwelling. On that last night of the first Holy Meal he told them that the Spirit, who had been with them because he had been with them, this Spirit, he said, would dwell within them, and then he went on to say that were they to obey his commandments then His Father would love them, and the Father and he would both come and dwell within them. So what men are pleased to make unique to the hour of the Meal, as though this were rare apart from the Meal, he made to be for all time, for all who believe—the indwelling of the Three Persons. It must never be said (though it has been said multitudinous times) that he dwells in the elements, and is present to them. From the moment of our birth he has ever been present to us by dwelling in us—he, and the Father and the Spirit. We acknowledge the present presence in the Holy Meal, but then it is a presence to us all in the holy communion of us all—us blessed by this grace, and they who bless us by grace. What feasting this, the agapitic love of the wondrous Triune God.

If this knowledge does not arise in the *anamnesis*, the remembrance, of that first fellowship night, then our knowledge of the blessing of the Godhead is fearfully dim. Indeed, as though it never had come. Perhaps it is as deliberate a refusal not to remember as the man in II Peter 1:9 deliberately forgot. O, the obligation which comes in the remembrance, as love breaks on us afresh like the high waves crash and deep calls unto deep, as ‘all thy waves and billows have gone over me’. In some way we have contracted to forget what we should have remembered with passion. Our backwards look to the Cross must always be in the context of ‘Until I come’—the forward look to the *telos* and the great events of it, and the fruit of it: namely, the New Heaven and the New Earth, the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, the Holy City, the New Worship, the Paradise of God, the River of Life and seeing Him face to face.

### The Fruits of His Sacrifice

We speak of ‘the fruit of the travail of his soul’ in Studies elsewhere, but one evident part of that harvest is surely shown in references to the manner of his death. Ephesians 5:1–2 is calling for the same holy behaviour as Christ showed on the Cross:

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

Again, in I Peter 2:23–24:

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

We are saying that his behaviour in the act of sacrifice is an example for us to follow. This too, can be seen in Romans 12:1–2:

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

We are now to offer our living bodies to the daily act of sacrifice, as did he.

True sacrifice also has in it the marks of rejoicing and thanksgiving. So it was with Christ's sacrifice. That is why it must be through him, the true *leitourgos*, that we even dare to offer genuine sacrifice, as is shown in I Peter 2:5, 'like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, *to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*'. Also Hebrews 13:15–16, 'Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.'

It is his sacrifice which begets ours. We remember two sacrifices given, one being of Cain, the other of Abel. Only that offered in faith, even in the faith of the propitiation-making God which constituted what we here have called 'holy behaviour'.

### **CONCLUSION: WHAT WAS EVER PLANNED IN THE 'ALL THINGS' WAS THE INHERITANCE**

We have spoken briefly of this in our previous Study. Without enlarging on what we have said, we simply comment that, as on the human level many people have an eye to their earthly inheritance, so within the Kingdom are countless people of faith who look to inheriting that very Kingdom, and with it, the fulfilment of the many promises of God. We have seen that true sons of God are overcomers or conquerors, and that they work to fulfil the mandate firstly of Genesis 1:28–29, and secondly the commission to go out into all the world, proclaiming the gospel and baptising those nations which would be Christ's disciples. All such activity will prove to be 'the fruit of the travail of his soul', and will involve knowing 'the fellowship of his suffering'. Looking back in the day of inheritance, we with him 'will be satisfied'. We will be those who understand giving and receiving and receiving and forgiving in the context of 'the whole blessing'.