

Study One

The Giving of God: God the Giver

INTRODUCTION: THE GIVING OF GOD

In this year of 1999 I propose to take up the theme under the same heading as LFS 3, *The Giver, the Gifts and the Giving* (NCPI, 1976). My reason for doing so is the fact that worship, which contains both praise and thanksgiving, is based on the nature of God. This is the preoccupation of all celestial creatures and of created terrestrial things, and ought to be the preoccupation of all mortals, but this is not always the case. He is worthy to be praised, honoured and blessed. Giving to God in worship and service does not mean anything is added to God, but that what he is, is recognised, acknowledged and applauded, and the adoring spirit of the worshipper is edified. Thus the creature itself and himself is lifted to the heights of communion. Of rebellious Man it was said, 'He did not honour God, neither was thankful'. Thankfulness, gratitude and thanksgiving elevate Man to his highest level of experience.

The simple hymn lines which say, 'Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done', teach us that recognition of God's gifts edifies us. Yet it is not possible for us to quantify or enumerate these gifts. What enriches us is the recognition of the giving heart of God. In this first study we will simply seek to see the nature of God as Giver. Our motive is not utilitarian, but the fact is that knowing the nature of God as Giver will bring rich dividends, such as 'taking no thought for the morrow', confidence that our needs will be supplied, that the measure of God's giving is 'commensurate with his riches in glory'—and so on. This will mean a lack of worry on our part, and the settling of gratitude in our hearts. This seems to be the primary message of the Sermon on the Mount. It will also teach us the principle Paul gave to the Philippian church, 'I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want'. Surely he was saying that God knows best how to give to a person, that God's giving is not willy-nilly, but that he knows the way of giving according to the person's needs, exclusive of what the person wants.

This present study will seek to cover the fact of God as the Giver, and the following studies to cover Creation as the Receiver—including Man as a special receiver—and then the nature of the gifts which we might roughly call 'natural' and 'supernatural', or 'creational' and 'spiritual'.

A Purpose to Our Series on 'The Giver, the Gifts and the Giving'

Man, living in selfishness—often denying his gifts are from God, or demeaning those gifts and thus demeaning himself, misusing and abusing them, denying the love that would give him the use of gifts where he needs such use, and so making him without true purpose and so without true hope in life—needs to see what we have so briefly stated, that 'Every good giving and every perfect gift is . . . from the Father of lights'. If we add to this that God 'gives to all men generously and without reproaching', and 'everything created by God is good, and nothing

is to be rejected', for God 'richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy',¹ then to oppose what is the ontological reality of God's giving nature is to have a burden on one's conscience. The refusal to respond to Divine giving, and the Divine expectation of our giving to others, as well as thanksgiving to him—God—means that we have a key into some of the existential misery of Man, to say nothing of our own when we act in like manner. The purpose, then, of our series on the matter of giving is for us to see afresh, and even in a fuller way than ever, the amazing nature of the God who withholds not his only Son but offers him up freely for us all. With Paul, we exclaim, 'will he not also give us all things with him?' Learning of life and having the spirit of receiving and giving makes us better able to have pastoral ministry to others.

A Difficulty in Communication

Many times we have noted that, whilst we may seek to communicate a truth, nothing can be successfully communicated where there is not willing hearing. What we have to see is that Man—humanity as a whole—is creaturely. That is, Man is wholly dependent upon God for his being, and every part of his living. As Paul put it to the Athenians, 'The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything, since *he himself gives to all men life and breath everything*'. Under the Christian doctrine of providence or preservation we see that 'all flesh is but grass' and is wholly dependent upon God for its continuing existence. This is what fallen Man is not prepared to admit or accept. Hence his delusion that he, unaided, hunts, cultivates, manufactures and creates that which will keep him alive. He generally believes that he can—given the time—conquer most diseases. He admits he cannot conquer death, but rationalises this in the way that it is part of life and as such inevitable. He has not wholly given up on trying to conquer this. Humanism has been with the human race since the primal couple's fall in the Garden.

We have a difficulty, also, in communicating our theme to some people who believe in God and know that he has made a covenant with Man. The difficulty here is that many believers consider God's gifts—and giving—to be contractual. That this is not so is shown clearly from Matthew 5:43–48. Supportive of this is Psalm 104. God is seen by some as giving, but on certain terms, which, if they are not observed will close God's hand. God's statements about judgments for covenant-law-breakers are not the punitive part of a contract. Such judgments are for those who abuse the free giving of God. If, to begin with, we think all giving of God is contractual, then we never really see him as pure Giver, and his work of grace is likewise interpreted as conditional. He who receives contractually also gives contractually.

Perhaps the greatest practical difficulty in communicating the idea of Divine pure giving and human true giving, is that in most cultures such giving is almost wholly unknown. Often there is elaborate giving, but it is done on the principle of *quid pro quo*. This is serious business. To receive and not to give back at least the equivalent is to deceive the first giver. It is understood that all giving is in the nature of a bribe, however disguised this may appear to be. Many cultures do not have the term 'thank you', and the Western ways of giving which have sprung from the gospel are looked upon with great suspicion. In the West children have always been taught to say, 'Thank you', for no child has ever said that naturally. Thus most cultures understand their gifts and sacrifices to deities as bribes of sorts. It was this sort of approach to gifts and sacrifices against which the prophets in Israel warned.² It is this sort of view that many have in mind in their strong objection to the substitutionary atonement as set forth in the New Testament.

¹ James 1:5, 17; I Tim. 4:4; 6:17.

² There is an excellent article by C. W. Emmet in the one volume *Dictionary of the Bible* (2nd. ed., T. & T. Clarke, 1963) pp. 329–330.

We ought also include the fact that only God gives. The idols cannot give. Thanksgiving to an idol is a hollow mockery, and it conditions the worshipper cynically. He may be held by superstition and fear but eventually the idol will be exposed. Giving is at the heart of God, for he loves his creation. The cynicism found in people outside the hearing of the gospel explains why they find it so difficult to believe in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In passing we may consider how different is the concept of giving and thanksgiving to those caught in pagan cultures. It helps us to understand their suspicion of a God who gives and does not take bribes.

GOD IS THE GIVER

Whatever we discover and come to know about God is truth which can help us to understand Man as God created him. Man, being in the image of God, certainly reflects the nature of God. God alone can radiate himself, but man can reflect him. To discover that God is by nature the perfect Giver is for Man to realise that giving is an essential part, also, of his own humanity. Fallen Man is not exempted from the *knowledge* of giving, even though his acts of giving may be imperfect. It was to such human beings that Jesus said, 'If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children . . .' 'Good gifts' here must mean 'gifts that are good for children' as against gifts that are not. One easily gathers from a general reading of the Scriptures that God gives. Even so, since giving is an uncertain kind of exercise in human experience, we need to discover the kind of giving it is that belongs to God.

James stated, 'Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change'. The lights of whom God is Father are, seemingly, those of the heavens—the sun and the moon and the stars. These, by their movements, cast shadows and their light waxes and wanes. Not so with God: his giving is perfect and without false motivation. He never seeks to bribe Man. Human motivations for giving are often questionable. James is claiming that the acts of giving—endowments—and the actual gifts are both perfect. This is not the way all human beings see the gifts of God. To many theologians human giving is an analogy of God's giving, and since analogies originate at the human level, they cannot convey God's perfection. The analogy of faith is the only valid analogy that can be used because of God's revelation of himself, within what is called 'the mystery of God'.

The Godhead: the Fountain That Flows and Overflows

The aggregation of many Scriptures which state the fact of God as Giver may be of certain value, but they may just be taken as statistical. Since it is given to those who believe to penetrate and live within the 'mystery of God', then it is there we need to start. The equivalent of living in God through the revelation of himself by his word, his Son and his Spirit is the unveiling of his glory. Stephen said, 'The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran'.³ God gave a revelation of himself to Abraham and he came to know God. In the New Testament John claimed of the apostles—and perhaps others, too—'We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father'. Our simple point is that God has always been revealing himself, and certainly from our vantage point in history we can see God as the Triune One, maintaining that he has always been such, but that without the revelation of his glory we could not know that Godhead.

³ In Romans 9:4 'the glory' is nominated as a gift, but at this point we will not be treating it as such. In a later study we will take up the matter of 'the glory' as a gift of God which is innate in his 'everlasting covenant'.

The Giving of the Three Persons: The Giving of God

According to one reckoning we can speak about the internal giving of the Persons (*ad intra*) and the external giving (*ad extra*). The eternal generation of the Son by the Father really speaks of *God giving wholly to his Son*. So the Son incarnate speaks of ‘the glory which I had with thee before the world was made’, and adds, ‘my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world.’⁴ In John chapter 17 Jesus fourteen times uses the verb ‘to give’, and eleven of these refer to what God has given him and three to his own passing on the gifts to his disciples. Most, if not all, seems to have been given to him ‘before the foundation of the world’. The fact that the Father loved him before creation says it all. ‘To love is to give’: biblically this is an immutable axiom. In Colossians 1:13 he is called ‘the Son of his (the Father’s) love.’

Our view of the Son’s giving to the Father *ad intra* is not from explicit references, so much as recognising his filial obedience. This is seen in his work in creation as ‘the Word’ (John 1:1–3; Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:15–17; cf. I Cor. 8:6). Likewise the ‘Spirit of life’ gives of himself in that same creation, creation being a Triune work. The Three Persons incohering in their intrasubjectivity constantly act in the *perichoresis*. As One they give to each other.

Some theologians see *ad intra* as a fountain flowing over and expressing itself as *ad extra*, so that when it is said that ‘the Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand’ (John 3:35; cf. Matt. 11:27), then the giving may not be so much *in* the incarnation as *for* it, and so prior to it. We refer to the special passage of John 5:19–38.

Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment’.

Some elements here are nominated as in the world, that is at the time of his incarnation, ‘in the days of his flesh’. The glorifying of the Son spoken of often in John’s Gospel, and in the Synoptics at the baptism and the transfiguration, are the Father giving glory to his Son, and yet the Son’s desire and endeavour is to glorify the Father. Glorifying is giving. Thus when the Spirit does not glorify himself but the Father and the Son (John 16:12–15), then the Spirit is giving. The Father’s glory raises Jesus, but so also does ‘the Spirit of holiness’, by whom the Son offered himself at the Cross.

We shall have occasion, later, to advert to this giving–receiving action of the Three Persons, but we have said sufficient to show that in himself God is by nature *the Giver*. He is the fountain of all giving. We now have the basis for looking at God’s giving to Man and creation.

GOD GIVES TO MAN AND CREATION

The first of the gifts God gives to Man is *creation*, that is, (i) life to Man to be Man, and (ii) life

⁴ John 17:5; 24.

to all creation from which Man draws his sustenance to go on living. By the breath of God's mouth all things were created, and should he withdraw this breath all things will perish. 'He gives to all men life and breath and everything'. He 'breathed into [man] the breath of life; and man became a living being [soul]'. The same breath sustained all sentient creatures but—unlike Man—they were living animals and not 'living souls'.⁵ Because, later, we are enlarging on the gift of creation—a gift wholly non-contractual—we will simply see it here as embracing all creatures for all time, and not excepting the non-creatural. What we want to indicate for this moment is that Man, made in the image of God, will have the indispensable propensity to receive and to give. Selfish Man does not so much receive as take, and give so much as withhold or bargain for a return when giving. 'If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children', does not mean that this kind of giving always obtains, and in any case 'your children' may well be a part of an ego-system.

The Scope or Expanse of Creational Gifts

Genesis 1:28 is the mandate God gave Man for his place and work in creation: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'. God then went on to say, 'Behold, *I have given you . . .*' Then follows the list of what has been given to man for food and for use, as also for ruling, that all things might benefit from Man's stewardship; a point we will expand in our next study.

I Peter 4:19 advises us that we can 'entrust [our] souls to a faithful Creator', that is, that he will not act falsely within the creation he has established. Following the Fall humanity deteriorated into such corruption and violence that it was said of him that, 'every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually', and even though God judged the whole race by means of the Flood, he established that covenant which had been for all mankind and which was, so to speak, reiterated for the whole creation 'with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth'. So then, 'While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease'. Thus God is the 'faithful Creator', always giving his gifts. In the Psalms of Israel, Man with all creation, including sentient and non-sentient elements, are called upon to give worship and thanksgiving to God. In some Psalms it is clear that this is what they are doing. Having received they now give. 'Thanksgiving' presupposes God's giving. We can say that through creation and the covenant of God there is an ontological pressure upon all things to be thankful for the gifts given, and we suppose this a powerful proof of the fact of the gifts. We are also stimulated to see Paul's statement is true; 'The gifts and the calling of God are without recall'. However much Man and rebellious celestial creatures may abuse and misuse the gifts they are not recalled.

God Redeems Man and Creation

Our following Pastors' Study (No 2), *The Gift of Creation*, will explore more widely the nature of gifts which Man, as created, possesses and uses in both good and evil ways. Since we are formulating a bird's-eye view of God's giving, from Creation itself and through to the New Creation, we will not here enter into the particulars of God's redemption of Creation. This, of course, includes the redemption of sinful Man, but often our theology has led us to think that Man is primary, and that God has little thought for the creation which, for some, is merely as a backdrop to Man's being and his saga of history. How deficient is that Man-centred view! If we

⁵ This is not to suggest Man is not an animal, but he is not only animal, but is a creature with a soul, with the gift of intelligence and personal identity.

see creation was born in and with the covenant of God, and that it—creation and the covenant of God together—pertained not only to Man but to all creatures and the whole of the elements of creation, then we can see that God’s plan of redemption, formulated even before the creation was brought into view, must in some way be inherent in his covenant. Then, also, we can see something of the meaning of ‘God so loved the world’ Whilst Genesis speaks of the ground being cursed for Man’s sake, it does not state explicitly that there was any *moral* curse on the earth. The *effects* of the curse were on Man. Romans 1:18–32 speaks of Man’s rebellion against God and the futility into which he delivered himself. Romans 8:18–25 speaks of the creation being subjected to futility (vanity, emptiness) and that with the glorification of Man, the creation will be freed from its bondage to corruption and participate in ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’. Thus we see God’s love for the whole of creation: he is redeeming the gift of creation, freeing it from elements resulting from the fall of Man.

GOD’S POWERFUL GIFTS IN REDEMPTION

By listening to Christ’s words about his relationship with the Father and the Spirit we can gather much of the *ad intra* relationships—the inter-personal giving, receiving, honouring and serving of the Three Persons. Probably we will never probe the depths even of that which is written for us, and then these will have to be known in living within the mystery. Clearly revealed to us are the gifts God gives for human redemption. All are contained within the gift of his love. As Father he gives his Son, delivering him up for the sins of the world. John 3:16 and I John 3:16 are the classic references to this. He gives all things pertaining to salvation into the hands of his Son.⁶ For example, he gives him honour at his baptism and transfiguration. He gives him glory and he gives authority in regard to forgiveness and the Sabbath. He gives him the Holy Spirit to help him fully enact the Fatherly will. He gives him a body which is to prove the perfect sacrifice. He gives him the gift of a unique priesthood. From the passage of John 5:19–29 we can see what powerful matters God has given into the hands of his Son.

The Gifts Which are the Fruit of His Redemption

The primary gift is eternal life. When Paul exclaims, ‘Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!’ he is undoubtedly speaking of Christ,⁷ but he is also speaking of eternal life, indeed of the *charis* which has wrought these things in the atonement which includes the resurrection. In his earthly ministry Jesus was always offering eternal life to believers. At the same time the life of the Godhead alone is eternal, and God is offering repentant, believing Man participation in this life. In this sense, ‘He that has the Son has [eternal] life’.

Eternal life is gained through the gifts of faith, repentance and conversion. Each of these is designated as a gift. With their exercise come forgiveness, purification, regeneration, sonship (adoption) and sanctification. All of salvation comes gift-wise.

The body which the Father prepared for the Son and which the Son gave for the sins of the world, now becomes the risen, reigning, ruling, proclaiming body, and in that sense ‘is his body, the church’. It is this church—now his Bride—through whom he works as he brings the nations to submit to him. He gives the church his fullness. Perhaps we could say, incorporates her in himself as he works. The fullness is that of various gifts and weapons of warfare. She worships the Father in gratitude, is under the Lordship of the Son and no less the Lordship of the Holy Spirit.

⁶ When he gives all things into the hands of his Son these things are not limited to the redemption of the world.

⁷ The word here is *dorea* and not *charisma*. In Romans 6:23 eternal life is God’s *charisma*.

Spiritual Gifts

We see, too, that Christ offered a share of the spoils when he overcome the ‘strong man’ (Luke 11:21–23), and was possibly referring to Isaiah 53:12, ‘he shall divide the spoil with the strong’. Paul uses Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men’.⁸ These gifts certainly resulted from his death and resurrection, and are ‘the gifts of Christ’. In Ephesians they would seem to be part of Christ’s fulness (*pleroma*), all of which he gave to the church (1:23). These might be called ‘ministry gifts’, being ‘apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers’. Some of these gifts—called *domata* in Ephesians 4:8⁹—are among the *charismata* of I Corinthians 12:28. The *domata-charismata* all flow from the *dorea* of Christ and can be said to constitute his fulness, so far as the church, his body, is concerned.

To sum up; Christ is the gift of the Father—his unspeakable gift—and Christ wins (perhaps retrieves from the ‘strong man’ the gifts filched from Man at the Fall) the gifts which he gives to the church. These gifts—constituting the fulness of Christ—are called ‘spiritual gifts’ or ‘the spirituals’, and they are distributed in the body of Christ to all members by the agency of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ In this sense there is a Trinitarian gifting of the church. Such gifts can only be used effectively in love since all true giving is from the love of God, and the use of these gifts is intended to be the action of God’s love (I Cor. 13:1–5).

Weaponry Gifts

With the gifts of Christ are also his weapons. These come as gifts for the spiritual warfare in which all Christ’s members are involved. The idea of this armour is found in Isaiah 59 where the Warrior King intervenes (intercedes) for his people, since no one else will stand in the breach. It is a picture of Christ who now stands in the breach in intercessory prayer (intervention) and bids all put on the armour *in* him. We need not here seek to explore this set of gifts which are for those who wrestle not ‘against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’. They are to do with the clash of two kingdoms; that of Christ and that of Satan. The weaponry of the first is spiritual, of the second it is ‘carnal’ or ‘worldly’, i.e. of Satan’s Kingdom.

The Gifts for Christian Living

Faith, hope and love are a triad of gifts which are, by nature of the case, inseparable. They are always found together, and the Christian person cannot live without them. Faith, hope and love are not abilities which one can sum up from one’s self. Each is designated, Scripturally, as a gift.

We conclude, then, that the church with its several members, is plentifully gifted, and sufficiently equipped for the ministry it shares with its Lord. It is no wonder that thanksgiving is an integral part of its life and its worship.

⁸ Psalm 68:18 says, ‘Thou didst ascend the high mount, leading captives in thy train, and receiving gifts among men, even the rebellious, that the Lord may dwell there’.

⁹ In Ephesians 4:7 ‘the gift of Christ’ is called *dorea*. The use of *charis* with this term leads us to think that God gives grace (*charis*) for the enabling of the members to work within the gift of Christ, and to utilise the gifts given by him.

¹⁰ Here we make the point but do not press it, that Man at creation was in possession and use of gifts which we now might think are supernatural, or, perhaps, occultic. Perhaps Christ as Jesus the man used these gifts because they were part of true, obedient humanity. These ideas appear to be speculative, but they might have substance. Satan may have filched and Christ may have restored.

THE PROFOUND MATTER OF THANKSGIVING

In our studies this year we will traverse this ground time and again, that is, of creation and redemptional gifts—to say nothing of the eschatological gifts and the eternal blessings. Thanksgiving is closely linked with giving. As we remember ‘they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him’ was the immediate result of Man’s rejection of God, so thanksgiving is the immediate response of those who wittingly receive great gifts from God. Under the Mosaic covenant thanksgiving was mandatory and prescribed because the Lord was their covenant God, the creator of the world and of Israel, and the Redeemer of the people once enslaved in Egypt. In the New Testament, during the few years of Jesus’ ministry, praise and thanksgiving breaks out by those who see the wonderful works of God which Jesus executes. The joy shown at the realised resurrection of Jesus, the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost, again bring praise and thanksgiving for ‘the wonderful works of God’.

Our subject that this point is not so much thanksgiving as the giving of God, but the dynamic effects of God’s giving now show themselves in the lives of the new believers:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.¹¹

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.¹²

The rest of the Book of Acts, to say nothing of the Apostolic Epistles, show us that thanksgiving towards God showed itself in giving towards others. A key thought is, ‘No one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own’. Quite a remarkable statement when pondered. It reminds us of Paul’s injunctions; ‘Let each of you look not to his own interests but to the interests of others’, and ‘count others better than yourselves’. The statements are preliminary to showing this was what Christ did in his *kenosis*, his self-emptying for our sakes. This is giving at his richest, most profound action, just as the Father abandoning his Son up to the Cross is another expression of *kenosis*. The causes for thanksgiving in worship can be found in the Book of the Revelation, as also in the Gospels and Epistles, and these we may discuss at another time, but the love of God, the grace of salvation, and the restoring of Man in the image of God, as he participates in the full image and radiation of God—Jesus Christ—give us cause for thanksgiving. Thanksgiving in the forms of gratitude and doxology are many, and we close this section with a few injunctions for the same. Of course, we have just touched on the edge of the subject. What we lack here will be amply supplied by a concordance.

Always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father (Eph. 5:20).

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God (Phil. 4:6).

May you be . . . giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light (Col. 1:11–12).

¹¹ Acts 2:44–47.

¹² Acts 4:32–37.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:17).

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (I Thess. 5:18).

CONCLUSION: THE GIVER, THE GIFTS AND THE GIVING

If this study has any value it is as a witness to the vast subject we have undertaken for the year. In particular it witnesses to the goodness of God in his giving, and to the response it draws from that part of his creation which is grateful because it is within the mystery of God, as also the mystery of Man, and understands the nature of God and is grateful for his goodness. For us as pastors, elders and workers in the church, it may have provided a refreshing of the memory and even come as a strong reminder that, if we are lacking in thanksgiving, it is because we have grown dull in comprehending the God who is the loving, giving One. A renewal in thanksgiving will not come by direct effort in that direction, but by a renewed looking at the one who is the Giver, and in whom we need consciously to live and move and have our being, tasting his delights, being sustained by his giving, and using the gifts he has placed at our disposal for the edification and salvation of others.

All of this will prove to be good training for the day when the holy things of the eschaton and the *telos* will induct us into God himself, as they do into our eternal inheritance.

Study Two

The Giving of God: The Giving of Life

INTRODUCTION: THE GIVING OF GOD IN CREATION

In pursuing our theme of ‘Gifts and Gratitude’ I have come to see the magnitude of the subject. An unusually strong impression was made upon many by our first Study. Then, in discussion, it seems we have struck a strongly significant note, which is also a key to the heart of all things. I think our venture into giving—giving to God and to Man—and receiving—receiving gifts from God and Man—is going to take us on an adventure of high importance. The question is, ‘How much have we fortified ourselves against the action our theme requires of us, in love?’ That is, how do we look at first securing ourselves before we give gifts? Jacques Ellul says:

Let me give a very simple example. How to overcome the spiritual ‘power of money’? Not by accumulating more money, not by using money for good purposes, not by being just and fair in our dealings. The *law of money* is the law of accumulation, of buying and selling. That is why the spiritual ‘power’ of money is to give our money away, thus desacralising it and freeing ourselves from its control. And these benefits accrue not only to us but to all men. To give away money is to win a victory over the spiritual power that oppresses us. There is an example of what the fight means. It requires us to give ourselves and to use specific weapons that only Christians know of and are able to use.¹

The Gift of Creation is the Gift of Life

To enter into the matter of God’s gift of creation we need to understand what is the gift of life. Strangely enough this is something which we believe universally that we know, yet is a matter very few comprehend.

When God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth’, we who hear these words are being told that Man in his life is other than, and higher than, all sentient creatures in their life. Every creature has, according to Genesis 7:22, *neshema*, that which God breathed into Man (Gen. 2:7). All have *ruach* (breath, spirit, etc)—perhaps synonymous with *neshema*. Ecclesiastes 3:18–21 has the Preacher writing:

I said in my heart with regard to the sons of men that God is testing them to show them that they are but beasts. For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth?

In this passage it would seem that there is no difference between an animal and a human being.

¹ *Violence* by Jacques Ellul (Seabury Press, 1969) p. 166.

This is not the case, except in the fact that from them both the *ruach* which keeps both living is withdrawn by God and returns to God. However, when God breathed *neshema* into Man then Man became a living being or soul (*nephesh*), which is not said of the animals for (i) God did not breathe into them as he did into Man, and (ii) animals are not described as souls (*nephesh*). In Ecclesiastes 2:24; 4:8; 6:2–3, and 7:28 a man is described as a soul, and perhaps more correctly, as being a soul.² Whilst the animals and humans turn to dust at death and the *ruach* (spirit) goes to God, the Ecclesiastes text does not tell where the *nephesh* goes because its principle at this point is simple: ‘Better a live dog than a dead lion’. Even so we must note the distinction of Man and creatures. Man is a living being. *Nephesh* almost stands for ‘person’ or ‘personality’.

It is precisely this matter of *being* that Man accepts without question, and assumes as a kind of inalienable right that he thus *be*. That his being a *being* and having life is an extraordinary reality scarcely seems to enter his thinking. True, in religion and philosophy he often discusses the matter in order to rationalise it, but that God has made him and given him as the gift of himself, and the creation around him also as a gift, is something he either does not wish to believe or cannot afford to believe. Abraham had seen God’s glory and so his belief was in ‘the LORD God Most High, maker of heaven and earth’. This was not just monotheism as such, since one can believe in *one* God without believing in him as Creator, Redeemer, and so on.

WHAT IS LIFE, PARTICULARLY HUMAN LIFE?

To ask such a question may seem foolish and to answer it may seem a Gargantuan task and an impossible one. We know from Scripture that ‘God gives to all men life and breath and everything’. That is, Man lacks nothing that is essential to his being and living. ‘Life, breath and everything’ all go together. Yet while God breathes into man the breath (*neshema*) of life (*chayyim*) so that he is a soul (*nephesh*) he describes what that life-being is. It is a creature made in the image and likeness of God. No other creature—whether celestial or terrestrial—is the image of God or like God as Man is. So we see Man reflects all that God is whilst yet being nothing that God is, God having deity and Man being human. That Man has unique affinity with God, and so unique relationship, tells us all we need to know. This is what human life is, and what it is about. When Jesus said that to *know* God and Jesus Christ was, in itself, *eternal* life, he was speaking about life that was even more than the life Man would ordinarily have known had he not fallen.

We can arrive at one conclusion, ‘Life is having relational being with God and thus acting in conformity with that knowledge, with that relationship, involving as it does having true relationships with all other members of humanity, and with the entire creation’. This would, of course, involve many things, and these are spelled out in the first couple of chapters of Genesis—as having lordship over the creation, as being fruitful and multiplying, as naming the creatures, as keeping the garden of Eden and tending it, as having the Sabbath rest of God, as being one flesh as man and wife—so that relationship with God would mean relationship with all things. This could be described as life. In the same breath it could be called ‘worship’, that is, acknowledging the worth of God—as do the celestial creatures in heaven—and serving him in the paradise in which he placed them—Eden.

The last paragraph needs to be unpacked. We are concentrating on matters of unspeakable joy and delight, of serenity and vocation, which need manifesting to the mind of Man who is fallen, and who requires these elements to be spelled out in the richest of vocal and literary terms. His

² The AV and RV translate ‘soul’ in these references but the RSV and NRSV do not. It seems a pity to have made a freer translation in the latter versions.

own gift of art in all its forms—a gift given by God—sometimes falters in its endeavours to spell out the beauty of the universe, the colours, the sounds, the loveliness, the glory. Great art, in the forms of painting, sculpting, music, writing and the like, is often intense in its communication of the metier of creation in which we live. The mystery of Man himself keeps us spellbound when described by those who seek to penetrate its depths, and the brilliance of technology today indicates that the wonders of science will never be finally encapsulated.

When it comes to the understanding of God via his intention to reveal himself and doing this by his actions and all forms of revelation, then we know that life is knowing God, Man and creation, but that such manifestation/s of himself are teleological in intention. By this we mean that the climaxing of all creation in the holy things of the end, all of which are with a view to true worship, is the goal which, in some way or another, has always been present to Man since the creation and the formation of Eden, the place of primal worship.

So then, we must not quickly pass over Man's relationship with the Creator *and* the creation. In Genesis 1:26–31 we see (i) the fact and working reality of Man as the image of God, and (ii) the things God has given to Man:

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

So we see the nature, vocation and environment of Man, all of which go to show us what life is, so far as Man is concerned. We ask then, 'Is not Man's life an extraordinary matter, ought he not be filled with endless doxology and thanksgiving for the gift of life?'

MAN'S EVALUATION OF HIS LIFE

What is quite clear is that Man, even fallen Man, values his own personal life most highly. This does not mean he values the life of other people as highly, or, in many cases, at all highly. It is interesting how we often equate 'a life' with 'a person'. This tends to support our view that life has to do with relationships, practice of acts, recognition of vocation, environments and, most all, worship. Whilst we talk of biological life (*bios*) we also have the idea of life (*zoe*).³

For a moment we can talk about this evaluation. In Psalm 8 the Psalmist is amazed that God should give such regard to Man that he is always minding him and caring for him.⁴ He sees the immensity of creation and figures that, comparatively speaking, Man is infinitesimal. Why should God regard him? The answer lies in the fact that God has virtually put Man over all things, given him high honour. In the New Testament Paul says, 'We will judge angels', and this is consonant with 'You have made him a little less than God'. In Psalm 144:3 David repeats the words of Psalm 8:4. We note that Man is conducted to the evaluation of his life via God. The Psalmist sees the value as God places it upon Man.

³ C. S. Lewis had built his doctrine of life on these two Greek words, seeing *bios* as 'biological life' and *zoe* as a quality of living which is not confined to its biological elements.

⁴ In Job 7:17–21 Job repeats the thought that God never takes his eyes off Man. For him this is painful, but the fact is he can speak to God in a way no other creature does.

Many ideas crowd into the mind such as Elijah's complaint, 'They seek my life to take it away'. Paul's statement, 'We were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself'. Then the rather wonderful description of the saints, 'They loved not their lives even unto death'. We remember David pouring out the water of Bethlehem to the Lord rather than drinking it because it had almost cost the lives of his soldier-friends. He said, 'Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their *lives*'. David thus reminds us of the common phrase 'drinking the blood' which was often said of persons. To drink their blood was never literal.⁵ It was to *take life*. Leviticus 17:11 reminds us that 'the life of the soul is in the blood'. Blood was highly sacred in Israel and never a word for jesting. In the New Testament drinking the blood of Christ was never literal since 'the blood of the grape' was to be drunk, but it pointed to the death given in sacrifice, rather than being an entity of life taken in by the one drinking it. The life of the animal was a substitute for the offerer and was highly respected. The 'blood of Christ' is always related to the fact of his death which was powerful to *give* life.

When we consider the injunctions against killing, we are faced with the fact of the value of life. So far as we know Cain had not been explicitly told his murder of Abel would call for the killing of himself, but there seems to be ontological awareness of this fact. After the Flood the injunctions regarding murder are given, and these are reinforced in the laws of Israel, down to the difference between murder in hot blood and cold blood.

We do not need to go further than our own thinking to know that we value life and fear death. Even suffering in the extreme does not, generally, make us want to surrender life. We have the matter of suicide but it is regarded as foolish and wrong, even if, sometimes, the suicide of a person from fear, shame, pain and other such matters seems partially to justify it.

Whilst we have been discussing life as against the threat of death or the possibility of suicide—death by another's hand or one's own hand—we may miss the reason we value life. Behind it is the ontological concept of life fulfilling vocation, life being rich because of relationships, the pleasures of the mind and body, the delight of arts, the use of one's own life for others and for valuable actions. It is true that comparatively few of humanity have these rich pleasures, and some have them at the expense of others, but even degraded living is preferable for most of us rather than face death. The extents to which we go to ensure life is lived to its last limit is a proof that we value it highly.

The Anti-Gift Mentality

As we have hinted a person may kill or murder with a view to saving his or her own life. Where there is not direct killing there may be such cruelty and violence as to merit the term killing. Some people live at the selfish expense of the fullness of life of those they oppress or manipulate. This is well-known in the annals of human history. This is 'drinking blood' without immediately the letting of blood, that is, slaying. It is this which denudes the 'life' of those seeking to live. True wisdom is knowing 'things as they really are', and living in accordance with these principles. Only when a human being sees another—and others—through the evaluation of God, can that one recognise that the lives of all are to be lived without exploitation and domination. Seeing another through God's love shows that one's own life is valuable, and the lives of others no less. Only then does one 'not look to his own interests but to the interests of others' and 'account others better than himself', that is, to be considered even before oneself.

In Jude 10–13 is a powerful passage which has the phrase 'the way of Cain':

⁵ There is a prohibition against eating the blood of animals (cf. Lev. 3:17; 7:26–27; 17:10–14; 19:26; Deut. 12:16; 15:23). References to drinking blood—meaning causing the death of—are found in Numbers 23:24; Deuteronomy 32:42; cf. I Chronicles 11:19; Revelation 16:6; 17:6; 18:24.

But these men revile whatever they do not understand, and by those things that they know by instinct as irrational animals do, they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they walk in the way of Cain, and abandon themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error, and perish in Korah's rebellion. These are blemishes on your love feasts, as they boldly carouse together, looking after themselves; waterless clouds, carried along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever.

We might think that 'murder' is the way of Cain but in fact it is not just that. It is 'the way of worship' and in Cain's case, false worship. Whilst it does not seem so at first sight we realise that Cain murdered his brother over a matter of worship. Worship was to be one with God, have fellowship with him, offer propitiation for sins,⁶ and to give thanksgiving, all of which included serving God and not one's self. Cain believed he should have been accepted for his worship, and he was violently against 'Abel's way'. There are many ways of looking at this since we know Abel was a prophet, the first mentioned as being a child of God and a person of faith. Cain had a 'works righteousness' and Abel a 'by-faith righteousness'. 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.⁷

'The way of Cain' includes 'looking after themselves', that is, preserving their own life. People of faith perceive God as the Giver, giving in love, and so they voice thanksgiving. Those not in faith see nothing of this, and indeed, do not wish to see things in this way. They wish to see life as coming from themselves and as always depending upon themselves, and any demand for thanksgiving and free giving is the cause of violent reaction. This is of course the Adamic autonomy insisting on its own way and wisdom. Romans 1:19–25 shows how all this is developed in rejection of God, his honour, and worship of him, in favour of worship of the idols and 'the worship of the creature'.

The Anti-Gift Mentality and Violence

God has created all things and finds them to be 'really very good'. The root of violence is violent reaction to any portrayal of God through the image of God, and through creation, to say nothing of the incarnation of the Son of God. Hence Cain's slaying of Abel. At this point we can insert a brief note on vandalism, graffiti and blasphemy. These elements are of the one nature and always directed against that which is beautiful, good and fine: they are 'bad-mouthing'. Genesis shows that Cain's violence was increased in volume by Lamech, who—it would seem—expected multiple vengeance to be executed for him in killings he might do. Genesis chapters 6 to 9 carries the story of increasing violence and corruption—'Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence'. The judgment of the Flood was visited because of this violence and its concomitants. After the Flood directions are given regarding violence and murder, the heart of it being that all acts against the image of God—Man—are acts of violence done to God. Again we need to look at Romans 1:18–32 to see that Man sought refuge in the idols against the ontological confrontation of the Holy God himself, and Paul shows the three times or stages of evil to which God, in personal judgments, gave Man up:

⁶ In previous studies we have seen Wenham's comment on 'If you do not well, shall you not be accepted', as meaning 'shall you not be forgiven'. The sacrifice, then, was in part, propitiation. Cain must have seen no need for this or thought his gift of sacrifice ought to have been sufficient.

⁷ One thing is certain, that when we attack cultures we attack the cause and heart of culture, namely the *cultus*, the worship core which gives rise to cultural mores and practices. Probably cultures should be seen as peoples going their own ways as against the giving of pure worship to God. This is not to say that cultures are thoroughly wrong but that nothing is gained by attacking them.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them

(Rom. 1:24–32)

If we add to that I Timothy 1:8–11 we see the capacity of evil in its most ghastly forms—violence to others and violence towards oneself:

Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

So then violence is of many kinds; cruelty, gossip, malignity, and towards God, blasphemy and worship of idols. Self-killing is self-violence and is forbidden on the principle that God alone is the Determiner of the cessation of the gift of life. Of course suicide is impossible in the sense that one cannot destroy one's self; only one's body. Bonhoeffer observes, 'Suicide is the ultimate and extreme self-justification of man as man, and it is therefore, from the purely human standpoint, in a certain sense even the self-accomplished expiation for a life that has failed'.⁸ Violence against self is, like all other forms of evil, that which is 'contrary to sound doctrine'. It is not in God's order of things. In the Bible wisdom is knowing 'things as they are', as God has created and appointed them to be and to function. Knowing these things and living in conformity with them is wisdom.

THE FEAR OF DEATH AND THE JOY OF LIFE

It is certain that when Man has his mind fixed on rejecting the gifts as coming from God, and when he seeks to devise all things after his own mind, and when he loses the joy of gratitude—especially when he sees it as a cursed, legal obligation—then he is inevitably caught in the fear of death. His fear comes from what he has done against the Creator when he has acted against the creation. He has 'suppressed the truth in [acts of] unrighteousness' and his Creator is rightfully wrathful; since creation is the apple of his eye, his whole purposeful action as God. Man is therefore all his life in the fear of death. He torment comes from the fear of punishment, and as well in feeling the wrath which is always upon him.⁹ So Man is driven on to make the most of creation, to get out of it all he can, especially by aid of the idols he devises and whose slave he becomes. This dread of death is a mere smog in which humanity lives, and it seeks to devise its own antidote in pleasure, lust, and the incredible perversion of the use of each of the gifts of creation

Koheleth, the writer of Ecclesiastes, skilfully shows the anger of a person who builds his great bulwarks of wealth, possessions and power, and is enraged when he realises he will lose it

⁸ See *Ethics* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (SCM, 1955) p, 142 (see pp. 123–128).

⁹ Hebrews 2:14–15; I John 4:18; Romans 1:18ff.; cf. Psalm 7:11; Ecclesiastes 8:11–12.

all at death and it will go to some squandering fool. To such a person, and to others of his ilk, all of life—that is, all of creation, vocation, relationships and the rest—seem vanity or ‘a striving after wind’. True, because this person looks at ‘all things under the sun’, all things as being on a horizontal level. No one has accomplished a viable philosophy or religion of the horizontal. The vertical is as ontologically part of God’s *schema* as is the horizontal and they are both of the one entity, the creation of God. Koheleth avers that ‘the whole of Man is to fear God and keep his commandments’. That is, Man is to be Man under the kindly aegis of God, and God’s law is his own way of life given to man to exercise in his [God’s] creation.

For those who see it this way Koheleth has joyous news which is scattered throughout his writing. One example is:

There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the man who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man’s mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; also that it is God’s gift to man that every one should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil. I know that whatever God does endures for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has made it so, in order that men should fear before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away (Eccles. 2:24–3:15).

And another:

Behold, what I have seen to be good and to be fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life which God has given him, for this is his lot. 19 Every man also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and find enjoyment in his toil—this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart (Eccles. 5:18–20).

It was Jesus who spoke most powerfully on the joy of life. Indeed the Sermon on the Mount is really the way of joy and peace. One has to be amongst the ‘blessed ones’ to realise this joy and serenity. It is to creation that Jesus points when he enjoins trust in the Heavenly father and his creational doings:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matt. 6:19–21).

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we

wear?’ For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well (Matt. 6:25–33).

The apostolic writers of the Epistles exhort and encourage in the same metier. James is the one who tells us of the Father giving gifts in all purity, and is liberal to those who ask for wisdom about how to live in this world. Paul speaks of wonderful gifts and they are not all simply ‘spiritual’ as we might be tempted to name them. Leaving aside in this Study the spiritual gifts of which Paul speaks, we hear him say, ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it’. Therefore God is the only Giver. Paul takes up the vexed question of eating meat offered to idols; or simply the one of a person of weak conscience being a vegetarian, and another of strong conscience eating meat. He is gentle in this matter. Some do not have the freedom to eat all things: let not ‘the strong ones’ be contemptuous of ‘the weak ones’, nor for that matter let the weak ones be contemptuous of the strong ones. One, because of fallenness, has to learn how to use the creational gifts.

Even so, there is a principle in using the gifts. ‘Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour’. This is the same as ‘Look not only to [your] own interests but also to the interests of others’, and ‘Count others better than [that is, before] yourselves’. In this case no one will think any of his possessions is his own. At the same time ‘God . . . richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy’. Every tree of the garden (Eden) was ‘good for food’ and ‘pleasant to the sight’. Creational blessing is on a vast scale: only selfishness has led to selfish worship, and selfish possessing of things, to preserving oneself as far as possible against death, and doing so at the expense of others.

Enjoying God’s gifts is a matter of principle. As we have said, if we do not see the vast table he has set before us then there will be no thanksgiving. In a sense it is to the degree we see the dimensions of God’s giving in love—and giving *as* love—that we become doxological. If preserving life takes away the joy of life, then thanksgiving will be absent, and in its place a continuous anger that life has to be this way! So Paul’s principle is, ‘So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God’.

Paul also warns us against those who would demean God’s gifts, making them morally evil; things such as marriage, and ‘foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth’, that is, the truth of creation and the Creator God—the ontology of all things. Paul explains, ‘For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer’. This must mean that there is no deficiency in anything God has created. It is ‘good’, that is, functionally good, and not made impure by any action of humans or demons. If, then, we are to ‘eat or drink, or whatever we do, do all to the glory of God’, we need to acknowledge that it comes from God, and this is the essence of thanksgiving. So we *receive* it with thanksgiving, and with this ‘the word of God and prayer’ consecrate it. ‘The word of God and prayer’ can mean the prayer of thanksgiving, but if it is to be used to God’s glory then the food and the act must be in the form of worship; only that which is holy may be used for worship, so that now food is made or categorised as holy.

In this simple act of worship, Man is one with God as Creator and one with God’s creation. This is the true worship offered by Abel, the action according to true doctrine, the act arising out of the authentic life God had breathed into Man. This is worship in which there is thanksgiving, the acknowledgment that ‘all things come from thee, and of thy own have we given thee’. This is the principle of glorifying God by praise and thanksgiving, and this is utter enjoyment of God’s good gift of life. Only in this act do all the biblical passages concerning creation’s joy in God and its delighted worship make sense.

In the light of the above we understand the wisdom of creation. Often we are told that God made all things in wisdom, that is, that all is functional and purposive and nothing is out of kilter

or evil. The wise man knows this and lives in accordance with the creation. He recognises alien elements within the creation, such as the serpent and its breed, fallen humanity that refuses to glorify God for the gifts he has given and withholds thanksgiving which would give him delight in the Creator–Giver. God is seen as an enormity, a grim contractor, a severe spoilsport, and so much a withholder of delight and pleasure, that Man must somehow—especially with the aid of the gods—make his own pleasure, be his own hedonist-god, and this by making bawdy all that is pure, perverting all that is holy and blaspheming all that God is. In his own twisted way, fallen Man, following the way of Cain as against the way of Abel, will offer his sacrifices with a mean and miserable spirit, and become violent when his offering is rejected. Nor does he see the enormity of his violation of God’s holiness and the rejection of his grace and mercy which have been his nature before even the world was created.

CONCLUSION: THE GIFT OF LIFE AND ETERNAL LIFE

The most we know is that God breathed into Man the gift of life, making Man ‘a living being’ or ‘soul’. We know that if Man had eaten of the tree of life he would have lived for ever. He ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and death came to him. Christ came as the incarnate Son of God offering eternal life to all who believe in him. This indescribable gift is not the subject of this Study but of coming ones. Its essence is ‘knowing God the Father and [his Son] the Lord Jesus Christ’. In Eden, Man knew all he needed to know of God, whatever that may have been. The peerless life God gave him should have been the source of utter joy, delight and satisfaction, as undoubtedly it was, until through the serpent, he chose death in the face of life.

Thus began on the one hand ‘the way of Cain’ and on the other—via the mighty grace of God—‘the way of Abel’. The first is mean, twisted, miserable, full of hatred, homicidal, whilst the second is filled with acceptable and holy worship. Both operate within a creation which is essentially good, but ‘to the pure all things are pure’ whilst to the unbelieving ‘all things are corrupted and defiled’. One has the privilege of thanksgiving and the other the ascribing of all evil to the Creator. We ask ourselves in no mean spirit, and with no deadly legalism, ‘How is my thanksgiving and what forms does it take?’ This may drive us back to the rich and lovely revelations God has given us of himself, of the creational blessings which he has not rescinded but which have become sour in the mouths of many. Ingratitude destroys the spirit of Man and brings *accidie* of the worst kind. By ingratitude Man swells in ego and shrivels in reality. Thanksgiving is the sign of healthy life and the delight which takes us through the worst of suffering, which, too, is one of the great gifts of God.

Study Three

God's Blessings & Cursings

SOME ASPECTS OF GOD'S BLESSING IN THE SCRIPTURES

We need to review our last two Studies to catch a bird's-eye view of the idea of blessing in Scripture. Even those two Studies are lacking in fullness. As a review the following points need to be considered.

The Blessing of God

- (a) God blesses the sea creatures and the birds (Gen. 1:22; cf. 9:8–17). Note that blessing Noah is in the context of a restorative covenant.
- (b) God blesses Man in the giving of the mandate (Gen. 1:28, 52; cf. 9:1ff., the latter being in covenant context).
- (c) God blesses Abraham, and through him those nations which will bless themselves by Abraham.
- (d) The blessing is given to Abraham, then Isaac and then Jacob, and Jacob passes it on to his sons, especially Joseph. This blessing is named and given afresh through Moses, Aaron, Joshua, David and Solomon.
- (e) So far as Israel was concerned Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 must be read to see the nature of blessing God will bring to his obedient, covenant people. (*Note*: these blessings need to be traced through the centuries.)
- (f) In the New Testament the blessing of Abraham is linked with Christ's coming (Luke 1:68–75; Gal. 3:13–14).
- (g) In Christ God blesses his people with 'the whole blessing' (Eph. 1:3). This is 'the fullness of the blessing of Christ' (Rom. 15:29).
- (h) All creational blessing is to do with the wellbeing of creation—creatures, land, and Man — and to this end the blessing of God is upon all.
- (i) All covenantal blessing has, as its end, the same purpose. If we take creational covenant and creational blessings, then they are the one, coalescing, so to speak. Thus creational and covenantal blessings are likewise eschatological.
- (j) Thus the first two chapters of Genesis must be read protologically of the *telos* to come, and so the blessing proceeds to the fulfilment of things eschatological in the *telos* (see 'Conclusion' of this Study).

The Heart of the Cursing of God

- (a)The earth is cursed because of Man's original sin.
- (b)The earth experiences the nature of curse in the murder of Abel and his blood in the soil.
- (c)The whole earth knows the curse of the Flood, but, this having happened, God will no more curse the earth in this way.
- (d)Cursing is linked with the Abrahamic covenant. Nations who name Abraham are blessed and those who do not are cursed.
- (e)Israel affirms God's rightful blessing and cursing according to the conduct of the people. Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 need to be read closely. The Book of Lamentations needs to be studied closely to see Jeremiah's confession that Israel deserved the terrible cursing God brought upon it. In principle the land, its vegetation and its creatures feel the effects of the curse when Israel is disobedient to Yahweh the Covenant God (cf. Isa. 24), and the worst of the cursings are the judgments of exile. Such cursings are intended to bring back God's covenant people to blessing.
- (f)Much of the Old Testament describes (i) the condition of people from the Fall to the Flood; (ii) designates the nations which derive from Ham, Shem and Japheth—Noah's sons—and Noah's cursings and blessings on his sons; (iii) the nations who are under judgment such as the Amorites (Gen. 15:16); (iv) the nations in good relationship with Israel or against her; (v) the various 'burdens' or 'oracles' which show God has not ignored the nations through some—imagined—preoccupation with Israel, some of these portending judgments and some having certain praise; and (vi) prophecies concerning nations coming to Jerusalem and Israel and being joined in worship with Israel. Isaiah 25:6–9 is an especially beautiful one of these, particularly as contrasted with a state of curse in Isaiah 24.
- (g)Much of the New Testament is given over to the matter of the nations and God's will to bring them into the Kingdom: (i) Christ speaks of these nations in Matthew 25:31ff. where some are goats and have everlasting judgment, whilst others are sheep and have everlasting joy in the Father's presence. These latter are called 'Blessed of my Father'; (ii) Christ sees those who think they are in the Kingdom being cast out whilst those of the other nations (Gentiles) enter the Kingdom; (iii) the import of the gospel is to bring in all nations who will respond to the gospel; and (iv) at the end the nations that respond will bring their glory into the Holy City. God has always been the God of the nations, both for blessing and cursing. Cursing may simply be the absence of blessing, but blessing is more than the absence of cursing.
- (h)What cursing there is in Genesis 3 is protological of the ultimate curse which shall wipe out all evil when it has been defeated, judged and the execution of judgment effected. What is evil can never again interrupt the blessing. The conflict of blessing and cursing occupies most of the text of the Book of the Revelation.

The Heart of the Principle of Blessing

- (a)God is the one who blesses.¹

¹ It is interesting how many comments there are on 'God the superior, blesses man the inferior, and then Man the inferior blesses God the superior'. I think it is a pity that these two words are used. It is the goodness of God that he blesses Man, but it is not simply from a superior position but a position of his Covenant Fatherhood, his love for Man, his creatures and the remainder of creation.

- (b) The creation, including Man, are blessed by him.
- (c) The blessing of God on Man evokes blessing on God by Man. The Psalmist in Psalm 103:1–5 calls on his soul (i.e. himself) to bless the Lord (Yahweh) for the blessings he has given. In verses 20–22 he calls on ‘you his angels’, ‘all his hosts, his ministers that do his will’, and ‘all his works, in all places of his dominion’, ending with another demand on his soul to bless the Lord.
- (d) Human beings bless human beings, such as Melchizedek, God’s high priest and King of Salem who blessed Abraham who was already blessed by God. The Aaronic blessing is *through* the priesthood *from* God, and is not one human being blessing another. Blessing another is almost a ritual, it being the best one can do for another. However stereotyped such blessing of another may be, it springs from the original wish to have God bless another as he had blessed the recipient himself, or herself. This invocation of blessing is quite widespread in the Old Testament.

The Nature of God’s Blessing

If we seek to know what is the substantial nature of God’s blessing, that is to say, what it produces and what continually obtains from it, then we commence with the blessing to the water-creatures and the birds in Genesis 1:22. In principle it is fruitfulness and multiplication of numbers, helping to fill the earth. For Man, in Genesis 1:28, 5:2, and 9:1ff., it is multiplication of offspring, Lordship over all things, and the subduing of them under that Lordship. Whilst God’s command which follows his act of blessing is ‘Be fruitful and multiply’, it is implicit that God is giving the ability to do so, and therefore that the blessing is constantly active, and the sense of the state of the blessing is found in following the command. The command is really the giving of the ability to fulfil it. It has been said that whilst the term ‘blessing’ is not always used, wherever there is a promise the prospect of it is *in* the promise.²

In Genesis 17:5ff., although the word ‘blessing’ is not present, the promise is to Abraham of innumerable descendants as well as the future possessing of the land of Canaan. In the same chapter (vv. 15ff.) the blessing of Sarah is explicit: she shall be the mother of many nations. In 17:18, Abraham virtually asks a blessing for Ishmael and God answers, ‘As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly’. In 22:15–18, the promise of 12:1–3 is virtually repeated, and included is the multiplication of Abraham’s descendants and the nations being blessed when they refer themselves to Abraham’s seed. In 25:11, Isaac is blessed after his father Abraham dies. Part of this blessing is referred to in 26:12 as it relates to fruitfulness and possessions, and in verse 24 God appears to Isaac and reiterates the covenant blessing he had given to Abraham. Thus the substance of the covenant blessing is ‘giving vitality, prosperity, abundance or fertility’.³ In 49:25–26, the blessing Jacob gives to Joseph has to do with fecundity, possessions and so on. It would seem that the idea of ‘spiritual blessing’ is not delineated, but we have to keep in mind that Man was blessed by being created, given the creational mandate and put into Eden, the paradise, the sanctuary, the place of communion with God including all that is Edenic; all of which is protological or proto-historical of the eschatological and gives a sense of wellbeing to Man as *shalom* which, in turn, derives from the rest of God (Gen. 2:1–3; Exod. 20:11; etc.).

With the Fall, the loss of Edenic bliss, worship and communion with God means that whilst the blessing is not revoked, there is the presence of the curse. Often it seems that the very blessing of God goes counter to the curse and keeps Man, by grace, in a true state of being with

² cf. the article on *brk* by O. Schilling in *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans 1975, pp. 279–316).

³ *op. cit.*, p. 294.

God. The essence of covenant blessing is the promised Presence of God. ‘I will be your God and you shall be my people’, is more than the physical blessing of multiplication of offspring and growing success in crops and cattle and riches. Even so, these are not foreign to, but part of the blessing of God’s Presence.

We are now more in a position to see what a person experiences in the state of blessing which is assured by creation–covenantal blessing. What is clear is that, with the giving of blessing, God expects gratitude and obedience; not as one might demand for a ‘hand-out’ but as a Creator–Covenant Father might require of people who live in true blessing, in his *shalom*. It is interesting to read Genesis 26:1–5, where God appears to Isaac to warn him against going down to Egypt, and promises again the blessing of the covenant given to Abraham his father because of Abraham’s obedience.

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. And the LORD appeared to him, and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give to your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves: because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.’

Note the, ‘because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws’. God is passing on to Isaac the blessing given to his father because Abraham was obedient. Note that there is no element of contract here, but obedience is the logical outcome of being given, and living in, the blessing. It would be puzzling to know how one could possess *shalom* if one were disobedient.

THE BEATITUDES OF GOD

Now we come to the heart of this Study—what it means to be in a *state* of blessing. We have pointed out that whilst *barak* and *asher* in the Old Testament are somewhat synonymous, *brk* is primarily the *root* of blessing, being blessed, giving blessing to others, whereas *asr* is linked with the *state* of the possessor of blessing. So in the New Testament, generally speaking, the verb *baraka* is translated by *eulogia* and *asher* by *makarizo* (used only in Luke 1:48 and James 5:11), and is found mainly in the adjectival forms *makarios*, *makaria*, etc.

I think it would be good to quote fully the passages which are to do with the blessed in both Old and New Testaments. It will be good to see what are the various states. If what we have said above regarding the substantial nature of the blessing as (i) fruitfulness, fecundity, and fulfilling God’s creational mandate, and (ii) living in the rest of God, being in communion with him, hence worshipping and blessing him in thanksgiving, then we should see that a *state* of blessing does not arise from what we *do*, so much as what we *do* arises from the *state* of blessing, which in turn is based upon the actual blessing with which God endows us. It is important that we grasp this principle otherwise we will fall into the error of seeking to do certain things in order to obtain blessing, and so unfortunately the contractual principle will be affirmed.

Of course, those who are under God’s covenant of creation, but who have subverted it and live in a state which is not pure, are still given blessing. Even so, those who are given blessing are open to the curse and cursing, and need to repent, come to God, and from the heart come under the cover of his covenant which is now one of grace. Such a person who sincerely seeks the blessing of God will find it, but his obedience will be consequent upon his redemption, and so his obedience will be his response to grace and by no means the cause of it.

We could conclude, then, that he who is blessed will act in certain ways, and will know

delight, peace, joy, happiness, security—in short, *shalom*—as in conformity with the blessing his behaviour is right in the sight of God. Seeing what certain folk do who are blessed can be a paradigm for us by which we can recognise whether we are living, or not living, in a state consonant with the blessing God has already given us in Christ. Where we see elements which are missing in us, then we can rectify them in fresh obedience, not in order to increase the blessing, but to live consonant with it, always remembering that there is no such thing as a blessing which is apart from union with the living God, ‘from whom all blessings flow’. This emphasises the powerful principle that we do not seek to evoke blessing from God, but simply seek to live appropriately within ‘the whole blessing’ already given.

Beatitudes of the Old Testament

Psalm 1:1f: Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinner . . . but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Psalm 2:12: Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Psalm 32:1–2: Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Psalm 33:12: Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!

Psalm 34:8: O taste and see that the LORD is good! Happy [blessed] is the man who takes refuge in him!

Psalm 40:4: Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods!

Psalm 41:1: Blessed is he who considers the poor! The LORD delivers him in the day of trouble.

Psalm 65:4–5: Blessed is he whom thou dost choose and bring near, to dwell in thy courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, thy holy temple!

Psalm 84:4: Blessed are those who dwell in thy house, ever singing thy praise!

Psalm 84:12: O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in thee!

Psalm 89:15: Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.

Psalm 94:12–13: Blessed is the man whom thou dost chasten, O LORD, and whom thou dost teach out of thy law to give him respite from the days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked.

Psalm 106:3: Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!

Psalm 112:1: Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!

Psalm 119:1–2: Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart.

Psalm 128:1: Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!

Proverbs 8:32: And now my sons listen to me: happy [blessed] are those who keep my [wisdom’s] ways.

Proverbs 8:34: Happy [blessed] is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

Isaiah 30:18: Therefore the LORD *waits* to be gracious to you; therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who *wait* for him.

Isaiah 32:20: Happy [blessed] are you who sow beside all waters, who let the feet of the ox and the ass range free.

Isaiah 56:1–2: Thus says the LORD: ‘Keep justice and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.

Daniel 12:12: Blessed is he who waits and comes to the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days.

Note: a most profitable exercise would be to adduce the numerous principles of human action in which the states of blessing obtain.

Beatitudes in the New Testament

Matthew 5:3: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:4: Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Matthew 5:5: Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:6: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Matthew 5:7: Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Matthew 5:8: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Matthew 5:9: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Matthew 5:10: Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:11–12: Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(Note: for the Lukan version of Matthew 5:3–12, see Luke 6:20–23. For Matthew 24:46–47, see Luke 7:23; cf. 12:42–43. For Matthew 13:16, see Luke 10:23–24.)

Matthew 11:6: Blessed is he who takes no offence at me.

Matthew 13:16–17: But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Matthew 16:16–17: Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'

Matthew 24:46–47: Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find him so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

Luke 14:13–14: But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

John 20:29: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

Acts 20:35: . . . the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Romans 4:7–8: Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin.

James 1:12: Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.

Revelation 1:3: Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near.

Revelation 14:13: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'

Revelation 16:15: Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!

Revelation 19:9: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Revelation 20:6: Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection!

Revelation 22:7: Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

Revelation 22:14: Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

THE UNUSUAL NATURE OF THE BEATITUDINAL STATES

It is noticeable that almost none of the beatitudinal states is final and fixed. For example, the Matthean beatitudes speak of being poor in spirit, mourning, being meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, being merciful, pure in heart, being peacemakers and being persecuted. These states are somewhat like those found in the lives of the men and women of faith in Hebrews 11. They lived by the promises but in this life did not receive their fulfilment. He, therefore, who would covet beatitudinal peace and joy must be exposed to many difficulties as he lives in obedience to God and love to all neighbours and brethren. He must participate with God in the anguish of the human scene, yet without guilt and shame of evil. His is a life filled with hope, with anticipation of the holy *telos*.

THE NATURE OF THE STATES OF CURSING, OF JUDGMENTAL SUFFERINGS

We have seen the differences which obtain in 'the way of Cain' and 'the way of Abel'. The first is enmity to God and man, and self-justification springing from a false 'knowledge of good and evil'; the second from love to God and Man, and trust in God's true knowledge of good and evil, namely the pursuit of God's will in his law and his purpose for history. To be on the wrong side of God's law and his will is no light matter. Nothing will escape the divine judgment.

CONCLUSION TO 'GOD'S BLESSINGS AND CURSINGS'

The Studies we have done so far in the gifts of God, in giving, receiving and thanksgiving and the matter of blessings and cursings, all encourage us to think that God is the Giver, and that for us who receive, the greatest blessing lies in giving to others what we have received from God. At the same time there is a knowledge of God's will which is 'the knowledge of his will in all insight and wisdom', namely that as Creator he placed man in Eden, in a Paradise where he would train him to spread the life and principles of that Paradise across the whole world. This is what God has pursued in creation, in blessings that are congruous with his creational covenant, and with cursings on those who would refuse that covenant and replace it with their own devisings. Thus through the covenants God has not only kept alive the paradisiacal purpose but is bringing it to its *telos* through all history. Thus the last chapters of the Revelation speak of the ultimate cursings, the judgments which deal in finality with the evil which began with 'that old serpent, the devil'—who sought to subvert God's plan in Eden—and his end in the lake of fire. Along with him all cursings are completed with the judgments at the great white throne. The last chapters of the Revelation deal with the climax and completion of the blessings in the New Temple, the New—Holy—City, the 'profound mystery' of the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, and the Paradise which is the Holy City, in which the River of Life flows, and the Tree of Life is fruitful in every month of the Holy Year, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. In this great Sanctuary God and the Lamb are worshipped in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

This is the true blessing and all experience the beatitudinal blessing in the beatific situation 'in the city of the Great King', the New Jerusalem.

Study Four

The Several Gifts of Israel

ISRAEL AND THE EIGHT GIFTS

I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race. They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen.

In Romans 9:1–5, Paul addresses himself to the whole matter of Israel, a matter he pursues for three chapters. Sincerely describing his anguish, claiming that in the Holy Spirit his conscience is pure and so he does not lie, but would, like Moses of old, wish himself accursed for Israel's sake.¹ This, of course, could not be possible, and Paul is part of Israel, that is as Paul would call it in Galatians 6:16, 'the Israel of God.' In 11:11–14 he will say that he wishes to provoke his brethren to jealousy by exalting his apostolic ministry. Having become jealous they will join him in the gospel of God and so no longer simply be of Israel after the flesh, but—as we would say in later theology—'Israel of the Triune God, the elect people of God'. Here, in Romans 9:1–5, he is showing how Israel had been blessed with the gifts ranging from adoption, the glory, the law and the worship, to the patriarchs and Christ himself. It is clear that he is sorrowing for his kinsmen—the Jews who have not accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Until the end they will be his kinsmen, but they must come to that obedience which will ensure they are in the true Israel.

He sees them as Israelites, and as such they should be regarded as the authentic people of God. The thrust of Romans chapters 9–11 emphasises that they are not of the people of God, not anyway until their election is fulfilled. In 1:15 – 3:31, Paul has argued that true Israelites are those who act spiritually according to Israel's tenets. A Gentile by race can be a Jew (Israelite) by appropriate spirituality.² Not that Paul is taking up the argument specifically to include Gentiles in the people of God. In chapter 4 he pursues this further. Even so, here in 9:4, he is saying these kinsmen are Israelites, but rather with the emphasis that they are in the people of God until they reject Christ. This is because they are God's elect ones. Consistent with being of the people of God they are required to believe on Jesus by faith since he is one of the 'gifts', that is, 'according to the flesh is the Christ.'

We could nominate eight gifts if the term 'gifts' would cover them— (i) the adoption, (ii) the glory, (iii) the covenants, (iv) the giving of the law, (v) the worship, (vi) the promises,

¹ The old matter is present which has haunted Israel down through the centuries and which is the curse on the nation for its apostasy, as declared in Deuteronomy chapters 27 to 30. In 28 the principle of obedience to the covenant brings blessing whilst disobedience will have the curse come upon them and overtake them. Chapter 30 is the climactic chapter which says that God will break through the curse with his elective love. He will, so to speak, force them with his love to repent of their apostasy and recant of their disobedience because, 'The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live' (Deut. 30:6). Until then the gifts of God are without recall.

² We are not here discussing the whole substance of the three chapters nominated. 3:27–31 asserts that believing is the way for both Jew and Gentile to come to justification, that is, belief in the propitiatory work of Christ nominated in 3:24.

(vii) the patriarchs, and (viii) the Christ. What we may not see immediately is that these eight gifts constitute the very life and being of Israel. In one sense they are all inseparable one from the other. Any reader of this Pauline passage who is familiar with the Old Testament will recognise that fact without difficulty.

Israel Without Discontinuity

Paul's argument in chapters 9–11 commences overtly at 9:6 when he says, 'But it is not as though the word of God had failed'. He argues that 'it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants.'³ We cannot here enter into the general Pauline argument which goes something like this:⁴

When the Jewish critic of God's method of the gospel accuses the word of God as having failed, he does not understand that much which some might call 'failure', is indeed God's own action in establishing the 'all Israel' which shall be established. The gospel of God and of Christ is the power of God for salvation for all who believe. By it both Jew and Gentile are justified. They are also sanctified, that is, are effectively included in the one people of God which is the true Israel. God has fulfilled his promises to Israel, including the truth stated by the prophets. At Pentecost thousands of Jews were assured of their being in true Israel.⁵ There was no entrance into the people of God—the Israel of God—but by baptism. In this sense Pentecost assured both continuity and discontinuity. The Sanhedrin had officially rejected Jesus as the Messiah. So Paul argues that God has his plan in their rejection of Christ and the gospel, but that all who are elect—the Jews first and then the Gentiles—will ultimately 'come in'. Note in 11:25 that he says a hardening has come upon *part* of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles come in. This hardening is not on *all* Israel, because that would mean within Paul's argument everyone would be hardened. This is because, in his mind, all who are Christian believers *are* Israel (Gal. 6:16). When all the elect Gentiles 'come in', then—in this manner—*all* Israel will be saved. This means that 'all Israel' will have in it the believing members of Israel—firstly Israelites 'after the flesh', and then Israelites in the 'true Israel of God' by belief in Christ—and the Gentiles who have come in. Together they will constitute 'all Israel'.

To Whom Came the Gifts?

Our question is, 'Who, then, possess the eight gifts?' The answer must be, 'The true Israel of God', or 'The people of God'. It is important that we see this because the gifts were certainly always possessed by Israel prior to Christ, and whatever their function and significance to those of Israel 'after the flesh' but not yet in Christ, is not stated. It may even be that Paul's sorrow for his brethren lay in the fact that they were a people asymmetric, out of focus, unable to realise these gifts in their experience.⁶

If the gifts were always with obedient Israel—and they were—then Paul must be saying, in

³ After a slightly different manner Paul argues this in Galatians 3:6–29.

⁴ I am not saying that this is Paul's particular or full polemic, but what is here presented is roughly the apostolic understanding.

⁵ In Acts 2:14–36, Peter preached the gospel of Christ and climaxed it by saying, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him'. And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation'. So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:38–42).

⁶ It may sound strange to say that the gifts were not recalled (cf. 11:29) and yet were not effectual because of the disobedience of Israel 'after the flesh'.

some way that it is the continuing true Israel of God which no less possesses the same gifts. It is difficult to see how it could be otherwise, although the nature of their operation may have changed. For example, glory in Israel and glory in the church may have differing aspects. Law being common to both the old *qahal* and the new *ecclesia* would nevertheless be different aspectually.⁷ The same would go for worship and adoption.

It is essential, then, as we look at these several gifts, that we understand their nature first in the Old Testament, and then in the New Testament. In doing so we should keep in mind the continuity and discontinuity of Israel. By this we mean that whilst Christ is said to be with Israel in the Old Testament era, yet it is only as he establishes the New Covenant that he appears overtly—this by incarnation—and this speaks much in regard to the gifts.

Why Did the Gifts Come to Israel, the Israel of God?

We ask this question in order to show that the gifts were indispensable to Israel being Israel. Undoubtedly the gifts were the means of grace, the means by which the covenant people of God existed. Without them there would not even be the shreds of covenant, and in particular the absence of the gift of adoption of sons, would mean no comprehension of the mystery of God as Father and no participation in that mystery.⁸ When we have in mind that God was bringing a renewed revelation of himself to the world, and that his intention was to do so via Israel his redeemed and sanctified people, and especially by the Abrahamic (single) seed within Israel—the Second Adam, the last Adam—then we can see that without participation in these gifts Israel would have been as any other nation,

THE GIFT OF SONSHIP, OR ‘ADOPTION AS SONS’

Paul is asserting in Romans 9:4 that to Israel belonged the sonship.⁹ Whatever Paul understood by that—and we think Romans 8:1ff., Galatians 4:17, and Ephesians 1:5ff., lead us to some thoughts he had—he was claiming Israel to be either a son as adopted by God, or that Israelites were the children not only of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but of God. Israel had no nominated practice of adoption as generally known by us today. It certainly existed within cultures contemporary with Israel, but some concept must have been understood for Paul’s words to have made sense to his readers. Especially this would have been so regarding that event when God told Pharaoh, ‘Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you “Let my son go that he may serve me”; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son’ ” (Exod. 4:22–23).

In a sense Sarah was adopting the fruit of the womb of Hagar (Gen. 16), but the term ‘adoption’ was not used or even conceived. The child belonged to the husband’s true wife; in this case to Sarah. Moses could well be said to have been adopted, there is no law regarding such a custom as adoption if it ever existed in Israel. God was revealing to Pharaoh that he had a son, Israel. Later Luke in his genealogy of Jesus was to reveal that God had a son, Adam. Paul who knew the story of this son was to tell the churches that there was a Second Adam who was really the Last Adam, the only begotten Son of God who became incarnate for the salvation of his Son, Israel, and all Israel was to be in that Son. Paul, at the same time could tell the Athenians that all human beings—humanity *en bloc*—originated in that one Man, Adam, and as such all persons should see themselves as the children of God, and cease making false and

⁷ Israel live. 10:4). See my treatment in *Sweeter Than Honey; More Precious Than Gold* (NCPI, 1996).

⁸ In Romans 11:25, Paul says the hardening which has come in part upon Israel is a ‘mystery’. Mystery is understandable to those to whom it is shown by God, and cannot be understood otherwise.

⁹ Whatever difficulties we may have in seeing ‘the sonship’ of Israel as a gift of God, it nevertheless was. Paul reported it to be so, and this is the apostolic assertion so that ‘sonship’ certainly was a gift to Israel.

incongruous icons of the living God, who in reality is Father.

If in the Old Testament there are few literal references to Yahweh as ‘Father’, there are nevertheless some references. So Yahweh is Father to all in Israel. Deuteronomy tells them, ‘You are the sons of the Lord your God; you shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth’ (Deut. 14:1–2). This powerful statement is to be linked with Exodus 19:5–6 and Leviticus 11:44. Israel is the holy family of the household of God of which Jesus spoke in John 8:34 (*passim*), and to which the writer of Hebrews (3:1–7) referred.

FATHER FROM FIRST TO LAST

The Old Testament Revelation of the Mystery of Fatherhood and So of Adoption of Sons

It was before the foundation of the world that ‘[the Father] destined us in love to be his sons¹⁰ through Christ Jesus’. The first son of God was Adam and his was the task of fulfilling the creational mandate in the context of the creational covenant, but to this command he was disobedient. Has there, then, been no anguish in the human spirit, no chasm of terror, no abyss of fear for the loss of fellowship with the one who is innately ‘one God and Father of us all; who is above all and through all and in all’? The truth is that the martyred son of Adam, Abel, is declared by John the Apostle to be one of the (many) children of God, those whom the writer of Hebrews calls ‘the people of faith’. In the stream of history Abraham is turned from the futile idols to turn and serve the living God, and himself being Abram—‘exalted Father’—to Abraham, ‘Father of a multitude’ [of nations].

This is Yahweh, the Yahweh concerning whom Moses asked the people, whether God was not indeed their Father.

Do you thus requite the LORD,
you foolish and senseless people?
Is not he your father, who created you,
who made you and established you?
Remember the days of old,
consider the years of many generations;
ask your father, and he will show you;
your elders, and they will tell you.
When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,
when he separated the sons of men,
he fixed the bounds of the peoples
according to the number of the sons of God.
For the LORD's portion is his people,
Jacob his allotted heritage (Deut. 32:6–9).

In Isaiah 1:2, God addresses Israel as ‘Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me’. Later, in the midst of suffering from their disobedience, they cry out:

We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

¹⁰ NRSV has, ‘He destined us for adoption as his children, through Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of his will’.

There is no one that calls upon thy name,
 that bestirs himself to take hold of thee;
 for thou hast hid thy face from us,
 and hast delivered us into the hand of our iniquities.
 Yet, O LORD, thou art our Father;
 we are the clay, and thou art our potter;
 we are all the work of thy hand.
 Be not exceedingly angry, O LORD,
 and remember not iniquity for ever.
 Behold, consider, we are all thy people.
 Thy holy cities have become a wilderness,
 Zion has become a wilderness,
 Jerusalem a desolation.
 Our holy and beautiful house,
 where our fathers praised thee,
 has been burned by fire,
 and all our pleasant places have become ruins (Isa. 64:6–11).

It is to him they turn on the basis of his Fatherhood:

Look down from heaven and see,
 from thy holy and glorious habitation.
 Where are thy zeal and thy might?
 The yearning of thy heart and thy compassion
 are withheld from me.
 For thou art our Father,
 though Abraham does not know us
 and Israel does not acknowledge us;
 thou, O LORD, art our Father,
 our Redeemer from of old is thy name (Isa 63:15–16).

Long ago he had told them:

Fear not, for I am with you;
 I will bring your offspring from the east,
 and from the west I will gather you;
 I will say to the north, Give up,
 and to the south, Do not withhold;
 bring my sons from afar
 and my daughters from the end of the earth,
 every one who is called by my name,
 whom I created for my glory,
 whom I formed and made (Isa 43: 5–7).

It was to these he once said through the prophet Jeremiah, ‘Return O faithless children . . . I thought how I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land. a heritage most beautiful of all nations, And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me’ (Jer. 3:14–19).¹¹ To cap these Old Testament ‘Father’ statements is the one of Malachi 2:10, ‘Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?’

As we have suggested, in the fact of God’s relational, covenantal Fatherhood, ‘the adoption’

¹¹ These references add up to one thing; whether God is regarded metaphorically or ontologically as Father—God is Father to Israel. From Adam onwards all may be regarded as his children. It is in the New Testament that we know the proper response of our humanity, of being Adam the original Son; it is to cry ‘Our Father!’ When a person cries, ‘Oh Father!’, he or she does not think the expression is metaphorical.

means that the hearts of God's children—Israel—had access to inner fullness of his *chesed*, his steadfast love, his familial, paternal love. Without this. Man is not truly Man. In one sense all humanity awaited the full revelation of the Divine Fatherhood.

The New Testament Revelation of the Mystery of Fatherhood and So of the Adoption of Sons Through Christ Jesus

We have seen that before creation God predestined his elect in love that they should be his sons, to the praise of the glory of his grace, and to the praise of his glory. As Isaiah 43:6–7 put it, 'bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made'. This Father is the One 'for whom and by whom all things exist,' who, 'in bringing *many sons to glory*, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering'.¹² Being sons in glory is a grand hope, so well stated by Paul in Romans 8:14–30 and by John in I John 3:13, and to which we shall shortly look.

THE SON'S REVELATION OF THE FATHER: THE FATHER REVEALING THE SON

With the coming of the Word to be incarnate, the revelation of the Father is brilliant and fine tuned. No: there are no shadows about Yahweh as Father. 'No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known'. 'We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father'.

So the Son opens the life he had with his Father before the foundation of the world, when the Father had glorified him, had loved him, and had prepared him for the revelation he would give of his, the Father's, Fatherhood. Thus Jesus could talk about the Father loving the Son and giving everything into his hands. He talked about the great love of the Father for the whole world, shown in giving his Son for the life of the world, so that none who believes should perish but have eternal life. He talked to the woman at the well about the new form and power of worship which was to be evoked by the Father, and be for the Father 'in Spirit and in truth'. The Father has everything by reason of his perfections, but these he gladly passes on to the Son that as he, the Father works, so may the Son. The nature of the Father is seen in the Son, by looking at that Son and seeing his actions, because not one of them arises initially from the Son but from the Father. To see the Son is to see the Father.

The term, 'your heavenly Father'¹³ is used liberally in Matthew's Gospel, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. Here a rich intimacy between the Father and his children is indicated. So much a mystery is the Father–Son relationship that only the Father can show the Son, and the Son show the Father. Otherwise the mystery is never revealed. Perhaps this is why God's fatherhood could only partly be shown in Old Testament times and writings—because the Son was not seen as incarnate, and because the Father could not indicate their relationship.

The greatest of the Father-revealing events is the Atonement. Christ himself and the Epistles make much of the Son's portrayal. In John 17 we have the Son seeking active and functional

¹² Hebrews 2:9–10.

¹³ In Matthew 6:7–14 (cf. Luke 11:1–4), the disciples are commanded to pray and enjoined to address God as Father. Less than this is not sufficient. Karl Barth in his *The Christian Life (Church Dogmatics, vol. 4, part 4)*, has a long Essay on 'The Children and Their Father', in which he deals with the fact of this imperative, but shows the indescribable power of the vocative, with all its relational ontology involving him as Father, his Son, his children, his family, and all the outcome of this ontology flowing in action. It seems to me that we are blinded to a biblical revelation which could be the healing of the world, and one which is not ideological. Again the key to operation is participation in the Divine Nature, 'a sharing in God's holiness'.

Fatherhood at the Cross, in order that the Son being shown as wholly Filial, may awaken history to the momentous event. In Hebrews 2:9–10 the Son is glorified similarly¹⁴ that he might bring many sons into glory, the glory of which Isaiah often speaks, and Paul exhibits as one of the great purposes of creation. It is a great matter to John ‘that we should be called the children of God, and so we are!’ Sonship is given to us!

There are many other elements in the New Testament, especially those of the Letters and the doctrines of regeneration (new birth) and adoption. That God is ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ is now apparent. We might even read back a later credal term that they are of ‘the one substance’. Even so, God is the Father not only of his Son, Jesus, but of us who are now made his children by regeneration and/or adoption. The latter term is literally ‘the sonship’, and so one must not lock out adoption ideas, or lock out the regenerating action of the Father, via the Spirit which results in Man’s proper filiation.

ISRAEL AND THE UNIVERSAL GRACE OF FILIATION

Keeping at the back of our minds that God purposed our sonship before time, we will see that this era is the era of Fatherhood, Sonship and the sonship of those in the Second/Last Man or Adam, Jesus Christ. In Galatians 4:1–7 we see that Israel’s sonship was of an immature nature. Now they must come to adult sonship. This cannot happen until Christ is ‘born of woman, born under the law, to redeem them who were under the law, that we might receive adoption as sons’. In other words the rich outcome of Christ’s death and suffering was the birth of many sons, all now of the true Israel of God. The outcome is that the Spirit causes the believers to articulate, ‘Abba! Father!’, that is, ‘Dear Father!’ This is an intimacy born not merely of figurative language or ideas, but of the true Father–Son relationship. The sons or children of God are inducted into this intimate relationship of the Father and the Son, participating in it.

In Galatians 3:26–29, being baptised into Christ, through faith, makes us the children of God. That is, we partake of the Son’s Sonship. His Sonship is ours. Lest there seem to be a minimal understanding of this relationship, ‘the Spirit of his Son’ is sent into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’, and we are led to cry that also. What we might call ‘conscious sonship’ is then established and with it the rightful inheritance once promised to Abraham in covenant. In Romans 8:14–30, we have a magnificent repetition of much we find in Galatians chapters 3 and 4, and even more, but also the work of the Holy Spirit in shaping us up into filial fullness. Indeed, we may say, into that glory which was always part of the life and experience of the people of God. This is the inheritance promised to Abraham (cf. Rom 4:13) and which gives a charge of meaning to the term ‘Father of glory’, and Paul’s injunction to recognise that his family is ‘the glory of his inheritance in the saints’.

THE FATHER AND HIS FAMILY

We need to keep in mind that the adoption of the community of Christ, the Israel of God, has in view the practice of ‘family’. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, all the materials are laid out for a fascinating study of the Father, the Son, the Spirit and God’s Family, within which domestic paranetics are set out. So we look at 1:2, 5ff., 17; 2:11–22; 3:14–19; 4:1–6; 5:1–2, 21–33; 6:1–9, 23, and see the Father, the Son and the family. When we understand the church (*ecclesia*) as the

¹⁴ It is at the Cross that God’s glory is shown supremely in his Son, that is, in his giving of the Son, and the Son’s giving of himself. I John 4:9–10 shows this to be supremely the act of love. Doubtless incarnation is the demonstration—and actuation—of God’s love, but without the redeeming, sanctifying work of the Cross and Resurrection, the purpose of incarnation is not revealed nor effective.

family (*patria*, deriving from *pater*, father), then the whole Epistle, including all its paranetics, may be seen as related to family, that is, truly domestic.

Before we draw our conclusions to the gift of adoption there are numerous elements we need to consider. The first set we may term ‘affectional’ after Jonathan Edwards’s use of the word. Human fatherhood–sonship, human parenthood–childhood, are not true analogues of the Divine. Even so, it is acknowledged that these relational ties are the strongest of human relationships. Husband–wife relationships are, of course, very strong. The use of the term ‘emotion’ is often decried but there is an ontological desire for affectional relationships; by them we are emotionally fulfilled. To speak of God being Father; to speak of him being Love; to speak of him being ‘the Holy Father’, is to introduce us to the whole range of affections. To see the family as having fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, is to use Johannine terms and thinking. ‘Brotherly love’ is a powerful factor within the family. ‘We love because he first loved us’, opens the wide world of enriching and affectional relationships. To say we love God—as well Cain may have thought he did—is to be a liar, since—as Cain undoubtedly was—according to I John 4:21, not to love one’s brother is not to love God, but to hate him.

We are tempted here to diverge from theological commentary and enter psychological commentary. The matter of the emotions, the affections, the negative emotions and affections, the break of relationships, the denial of ontological domesticity and the fragmentations of society including the conflict of nations, can be discussed within the widest understanding of ‘family’. Even so, we must resist ideology. Just the one, heartfelt, uttered cry ‘Abba! is enough to place us in the heart and depths of the Holy Fatherhood, Holy Sonship, and via the Holy Spirit, the Family of God.

ESCHATOLOGICAL FAMILY AND ADOPTION

We have seen that the whole creation is waiting for the unveiling of the sons of God so that it may be liberated from its bondage to corruption into ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God’. All sons will be in the likeness of the Son. Suffering in this world is the way to sonship and its concomitant glory in the next. The band of sinful children shall become the ‘multitude which no man can number’, who have been redeemed. It will be the gathering in the holy city, of the glory of the nations. There shall be one family and ‘one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and through all and in all’.

Even so, the suffering of the family is portrayed vividly in the Book of the Revelation. In 7:1ff. the 144,000 are sealed from untoward harm. In 14:1–5, the seal is shown to be the name of the Lamb and of the Father written on every forehead. In 22:5 this seal still obtains. This must not be treated as mere facticity since it is a most dynamic sealing for God’s possession.

Whilst the seal speaks of election and protection, it speaks primarily of relationships between the Father, the Lamb and the family. Thus when in Revelation 21:1–8 the blessed and the cursed are spoken of, God proclaims, ‘He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son’. ‘He who conquers’, takes us back to the mandate of Genesis 1:28 where Man is to conquer and rule. It reminds us of Genesis 9:1ff. where Man is again enjoined to conquer and rule, and it brings us into the whole stream of covenantal injunctions—with promises—regarding the everlasting covenant and the everlasting Kingdom of God.

In turn we are reminded of Psalm 2 and the Messiah–Son, as the nations kiss his feet; of Psalm 110 where the Messiah–Priest has the nations placed under his feet. All the power for ‘family’ is in God’s gift of adoption which will, at the last, mean the resurrection, ‘the redemption of the body’ and the glorification. Linked with this is the teaching of the first Adam having failed and gone to dust, the Second and Last Adam offering his obedience for the disobedience of Adam, and ‘bringing many sons to glory’. More than that, the eschatological

life and growth of the church is within this Second and Last Adam. As the first Adam was to be a subduer of the creation and lord over it, but failed, yet the New Adam—who encompasses all the old—subdues all things under his feet. He is the conqueror not only of Genesis 1:28, but of I Corinthians 15:24–28 and of Revelation 1:7. The life of the church and of the members of that body are all in that one who is now ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’, in whose Sonship is ours and in whom we grow to the measure of the stature of the fullness of him.

Then shall be seen that ‘one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and through all and in all’, and then shall be seen the conquering people who are ‘a kingdom, priests unto their God’. This is Family!

CONCLUSION: THE PASTORAL POWER OF ADOPTION

This gift was essential in the protology of the first Adam, in the witness of his son Abel, in the moving history of the patriarchs and in Israel where it blossomed. Disobedience to the covenant is the misuse of adoption in Israel. In the New Testament the revelation of what we may call ‘the mystery of adoption’ is essential for the true nature and practice of the church. Whilst it is true that the Father of glory has raised his Son to be head over all things for the church—hence his being Lord of the church—yet the Father is the one ‘who is above all, and through all and in all’. In the mystery of Fatherhood lies the mystery of Sonship, and in both, the mystery of adoption. In ‘the adoption of sons’ lies the power and life of the Family, and in the Family lies the rich resources for human family living.

Our understanding must be in depth. It commences with the husband and the wife, with the parents and the children, with families and society, with societies and nations, and with the international family of the first Adam, now being transformed by the Last Adam. Beyond this family there is none other. God’s predestining of sons will have been completed.

Study Five

The Several Gifts of Israel—II, Glory

THE CHURCH AND THE SEVEN GIFTS

In our last study, we saw the principle that the Church is Israel continuing to be ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16)—whatever might be the destiny of ‘Israel according to the flesh’. Not only has the Church come under the Abrahamic Covenant in that it is in the New Covenant and the Kingdom of God—Christ being the Mediator of the New Covenant, and the new King of the Kingdom—but Pentecost ensured the continuity of Israel, and made way for those ‘who were afar off’. Along with this principle, we saw that the seven or eight gifts as nominated in Romans 9:4–5 were indispensable to Israel being Israel,¹ and are indispensable to the Church being the Church. The movement of God’s glory in Israel was most remarkable, but no less remarkable in the Church of Jesus Christ. We shall therefore seek to see glory in both Testaments and gather some of its significance for Israel before Christ and the Church from its inception and forward to the *telos* of God for creation.

Note: The amount of material available for studies on glory is too vast to encapsulate in this one study, nor does it warrant two studies in this our present Series. It is one of the most self-evident of the gifts, covering God, Man and creation, being protological, historical and eschatological. For this reason, much of the material will be stated without commentary.

THE MEANING AND NATURE OF GLORY²

We are advised, of course, to seek the etymological derivations of the word, but without here spending time on the various words—apart from the Old Testament word *kabod*, and the New Testament word *doxa*—the synonyms, though important, do not have the full significance of these two. *Kabod* comes from the idea of heaviness, substantiality; even wealth, honour, possessions and status—those things which command respect and indicate status—but linked also are the ideas of beauty, radiance and a special state of being. Paul does not give any adjective for glory in Romans 9:4, but the Scriptures certainly speak of the glory of God, the glory of Man and the glory of creation. It is clear from Exodus 33:20 and other related passages, that no one can see God’s face—God’s glory—and live. ‘You cannot see my face . . . and live.’ Yet in Revelation 22:4, it is stated that ‘they shall see his face’. I John 3:1–3 (cf. Romans 8:22, 28–30) tells us that to see God as he is, is to become fully glorified, to be truly in his image. Somewhere—ontologically, we may say—is the truth of I Timothy 6:15–16, ‘. . . the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see’. Paul may be speaking from an historical and not an eschatological point of view.

¹ See section below, ‘Israel and the Glory’.

² I would suggest reading my LFS 47, *The Glory of God, Man and Creation* (NCPI, 1980), the articles on ‘Glory’ in the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. Two*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Zondervan, 1975), and *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans, 1982).

When we ask, ‘In actuality what is God’s glory?’, there are many answers. John Calvin said, ‘The glory of God is when we know what he is’, and Bengel writes, ‘The Glory is the Divinity manifest.’ In short, ‘God’s glory is what he is, and is known to us when he chooses to manifest himself’. John could say of the Son, ‘. . . full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father’.

A Plain Understanding of Glory and Its History

Without doubt, the word ‘glory’ brings to our minds all the things we have spoken of above. Any person might have a reasonable and useful understanding of glory. Even so, there is a history and, we might say, a plan of glory. It can be put as simply as this: God made all things that they might glorify him—celestial creatures, Man and the creation—and the day will come ‘when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea’. This will amount to *perceived* glory. We could say that history is really the history of glory. All things began in glory, and all things glorified God. Even so, linked with the Fall, much of that glory was lost. Man had to be renewed in glory—in seeing it and living in it—hence we have a statement such as ‘the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia’, and the various theophanies in which something of God’s glory was shown. Even so, it is with Israel that the LORD becomes the LORD of glory—a point we will later take up.

With the coming of the incarnate Word, Christ, ‘. . . full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father’. Christ was the Father’s glory, and all his doings are connected with glory, even his eschatological appearing—his parousia—when he will come in the clouds in glory, in what has been called the *shekinah*—the glory of his presence, often shown in cloud form. With the end climaxing of all things, there is nothing left without glory. All God’s people—his sons—will be brought to glory, planned before the world, a plan of glorification.³

An Understanding of the Link Between Holiness and Glory

In Isaiah 6:3, the *trishagion*—‘Holy! Holy! Holy!’—is linked with the glory of God; ‘the whole earth is full of his glory’, or ‘the whole earth is the fullness of his glory’. In respect of this, J. A. Motyer says:

Isaiah is here the normative Old Testament man. This transcendent holiness is the mode of God’s immanence for *the whole earth is full of his glory!* ‘that which fills the whole earth is his glory’, i.e. it is not only the one thing that is capable of filling everything but the thing which actually does so. Holiness is God’s hidden glory; glory is God’s all-present holiness.⁴

J. D. W. Watts says:

But the seraphim claim *his glory* to be the *fullness* of the entire earth. The *holiness* of God seems opposite to physical nature . . . holy denotes God’s *innermost* nature, while ‘his glory’ describes the appearance of his being. God is known through his work.⁵

In regard to glory and holiness, it is interesting to note that in Revelation 4:8–11, where the *trishagion* is used by the celestial creatures, it is linked with the act of creation and the creation,

³ We will later amplify this but at this point we can examine Isaiah 43:1–7; I Corinthians 2:7ff.; Hebrews 2:9–10.

⁴ *The Prophecy of Isaiah* by J. A. Motyer (IVP, 1993) p. 77.

⁵ *Word Biblical Commentary* vol. 24, ‘Isaiah 1–33’, by John D. W. Watts (Word, 1985), p.74. Some theologians see God’s immanent glory as a general glory; whilst theophanies and such phenomena as the *shekinah*, or theophanies, as his special glory.

and so God is worthy to receive glory and honour and power because of this. This must mean, at least in part, it is the creation which inspires the celestials to glorify God in this way.

It is notable that when Isaiah entered the temple it was the glory of God which he saw—‘my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts’. God’s holiness was not consciously seen, but his glory was. The seraphim then proclaimed in powerful song—the *trishagion*—the holiness of God. When the *glory* was seen, then Yahweh’s holiness was realised by the prophet, the seraphim’s song being necessary to that full understanding of the glory. We could say that when the glory was present, then the holiness which is God’s hidden glory was also present. We rightly conclude that when we speak of God’s glory, then it must be bound up in what we say is the liturgical declaration of his holiness.⁶ Later we will see that eschatological glory and eschatological holiness will be bound together in the *telos* since it is God’s intention not only to *glorify* all things, but *also to sanctify them*.⁷ This certainly gives meaning to Motyer’s statement, ‘Holiness is God’s hidden glory; glory is God’s all-present holiness’. In the ultimate, glory would be terrifying were Man and creation not sanctified. Man is sanctified and glorified simultaneously⁸ in the *telos*, in the ultimate purpose God has for Man and the rest of creation.

With the coming of the incarnate Word, Christ, ‘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’. Christ was the Father’s glory, and all his doings are connected with glory, even to his eschatological appearing—his *parousia* when he will come in the *shekinah*, of the Father. With the end climaxing of all things, there is nothing left without glory. All God’s people—his sons—will be brought to glory, planned before the world, a plan of glorification.⁹

CREATION AND THE GLORY

Creation is the Fullness of God’s Glory

If the earth (creation) is *filled* with God’s glory, or *is* the fullness of God’s glory, then this is surely a way of saying that, whilst creation has *kabod*, creation itself *is not kabod*. In fact, the earth being the fullness of God’s glory surely means he is King over all the world, over all of creation. This can be seen from Psalm 8, where, when Man is crowned with honour and glory, all the creation is subjected to him. Glory is not an abstraction, but something tangible; God, so to speak, in active form, tangible but not physical. It is true that, in some cases, Man’s soul is his *kabod*, such as in Psalms 16:9 and 30:12, so that everything has its glory in this sense; but such glory is derived, is something given by God. By it, Man can relate to God’s holiness as though ‘soul’ were such a faculty, but neither glory nor holiness are inherent in Man, or what we call nature. Idolaters would have invested their idols with glory and holiness; that is, they would have invested them with what only God has intrinsically, and he will not give this glory to another. Creation is not creation in its ontological norm, apart from God filling and possessing it. In the ultimate, we can say that we can see God’s glory—even ‘his power and deity’—*in* the things that are made, but not *by* them. That is, we see the active working of God in his various

⁶ H. Ringgren in his *Israelite Religion* (SPCK, 1966) p. 74, says, ‘Yahweh is frequently connected with light and brilliance. His glory (Heb. *kabod*) is clearly associated with light phenomena (see, for example, Ezek. 1—2), and at least Isaiah 6:3 sees a close association between holiness and *kabod*.’

⁷ J. A. Motyer’s statement, ‘Holiness is God’s hidden glory: glory is God’s all-present holiness’, needs to be linked with J. D. W. Watts’ comment, ‘God is by definition “holy.” But he reveals his “holiness” by his decisions and his acts.’

⁸ Hebrews 10:10–14 and related passages show that Man is sanctified through the Cross, and his sanctification is a present category in which he seeks to live out practical holiness. All such categories are received by faith, but at the end, hope will be fulfilled when present sanctification will become final and irreversible.

⁹ We will later amplify this, but at this point we can examine Isaiah 43:1–7; I Corinthians 2:7ff.; Hebrews 2:9–10.

ways in the living creation, which also includes Man.

Creation Declares the Glory

Psalm 19 insists that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork. Psalm 8 twice says, ‘how majestic is thy name in all the earth!’ Psalm 148 says that all things celestial and terrestrial give God glory in praise, and Psalm 150 urges ‘let everything that breathes praise the Lord’.¹⁰ Paul, in Romans 1:19–20, says that:

What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.

In spite of what has happened at the Fall, the seraphim can still proclaim, ‘The whole earth is the fullness of his glory’, and Paul would seem to be saying something like this: that, were Man to desire to know God, creation could tell him, if, of course, he were to desire to read it aright—something Paul seems to deny that Man, unaided, can now do.

Creation and the Hope of Glory

As in all biblical mystery, we can only debate about the present state of nature. For example, we take it by nature that ‘the earth is the fullness of his glory’. Paul shows clearly that creation was subjected to futility by him who subjected it in hope—the God of glory. There is hope in creation of escape from this bondage of corruption at the *telos*, but meanwhile, creation can still praise God in marvellous ways. Creation exists in hope, and creation is the fullness of the glory of God. We have to proceed with these twin pieces of knowledge, but at the same time we are aware that evil powers represented by ‘that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil’ are seeking to twist and distort and to demean the creation of God. It is God’s glory they attack, but God has said that his glory he will not give to another, neither to a god nor a man.¹¹

MAN, PART OF THE CREATION IN GLORY

I Corinthians 11:7 has been much debated. Its statement, ‘For man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man’, must certainly arise from Genesis 1:26 (cf. 5:1–3; 9:1ff.). It is not said in Genesis 1:26–27 that God made Man in his (God’s) own image *and glory*, but Psalm 8:5–6 says:

Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honour. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands, thou hast put all things under his feet,

so this is little less than what is said in I Corinthians 11:7, Man ‘is the image and glory of God’. Doubtless here it is referring to Adam, but this does not exclude Eve being in the image of God, as she is not said to be in the image of the man, but only to be his glory.¹² Some indication is

¹⁰ The rather wonderful, yet intriguing, Psalm 29 tells us of the *action* of God’s glory in what we call ‘nature’, but is better called ‘creation’. Psalm 19 says ‘The heavens are telling the glory of God’, whilst in Psalm 29 ‘The voice of the Lord makes the oaks to whirl and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all cry, “Glory!”’.

¹¹ Isaiah 42:8; 48:11.

¹² Some theologians contest the fact that man *is* the image and glory of God. They contend that he is *in* the image and likeness of God and contend that only Christ *is* the image and glory of God. Whatever the case, Man at best reflects the image and glory of God, whereas Christ radiates the glory (cf. Heb. 1:3; *apaugasma*). In this Corinthian context the woman *is* the glory of man. Whether Adam simply reflected the glory of God is a matter open to debate. God does not give his glory to another, but

given that fallen Man has failed to reach the glory of God—‘fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:23)—and this appears to indicate that, prior to the fall, he was not short of it; hence his was the glory of the image.

There is also a sense in which it can be said that a person has a glory of himself/herself. As we mentioned above, in the Old Testament the word which has on a few occasions been translated in English as ‘soul’ is in the Hebrew—on those few occasions—that person’s ‘glory’.¹³ Certainly Man, whether fallen or not, has a glory when it comes to his hierarchical position in creation. What we need to reiterate is that, when Man fell, the creation was at that point subjected to futility or limitations in its operations, and that when Man is rehabilitated, there creation will also be rehabilitated to its pristine situation, and will be granted glorification.

In the Old Testament, though not in the New Testament, certain buildings—the tabernacle first and then the temple/s—are sanctified and have a physical glory.¹⁴ Furniture too, has its holiness and glory, and the robes of the priests are exceptionally glorious. We might, then, observe in passing that Man has sought to establish, as male and female, certain beauty which signifies glory, certain assets and status which indicate glory. We could develop a whole subject of Man trying to make up with visible elements for his Fall from the original beauty of glory and holiness which was inherent in creation.

When we consider the matter of God’s glory, and Man’s glory prior to the Fall, or their glory when Man-in-grace-and-in-covenant relates to God, then we see the glorious prospect which is before both. Here God is one with Man who is one with the creation, and so ‘in his temple all cry, “Glory!”’ (Ps. 29:9). This is the eschatological prospect for God, Man and creation, and it is incredibly beautiful, giving rise to ‘the hope of glory’ which motivates man with powerful anticipation. When Man sees no glory of God and himself in union, then he is locked into himself and away from others. In modern terms, he disesteems and even demeans himself, for his self-image is stripped of its created glory and he is ‘without hope in the world’. So powerful, then, is the glory God gave to Man in creation and which he restores to him in salvation.

In a more collective sense, we read, ‘In a multitude of people is the glory of a king, but without people a prince is ruined’.¹⁵ Likewise we think of ‘glory in the church’ and ‘the glory of the kingdom’; phrases which have collective connotation.

GLORY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In some sections above, we have covered much of this, and have taken it for granted that Man knew God in his glory and worshipped him prior to the Fall. He, properly speaking, lived in God’s Sabbath and thus knew God as holy and glorious, and worshipped in accordance with this. In his disobedience, he fell short of that glory. Stephen, before the Jewish Sanhedrin, speaks of ‘the God of glory’ appearing to Abraham in Mesopotamia where Abraham was an idol worshipper. The revelation of his glory caused Abraham to become a person of faith in Yahweh, the covenant God, and in his covenantal promises. True worship is a recognition of the holiness

it seems he gives of his glory is open question. Each time we are faced with such questions, we are helped by seeing these things as a mystery, without using the term as a retreat from examining the theology of glory.

¹³ See Genesis 49:6; Job 29:20; Psalm 4:2; 7:5; 16:9; 30:12; 57:8; 108:1. One can also speak of ‘the law (*torah*) of a person, and so, perhaps ‘a law’ and ‘a glory’ may be reasonable epithets. The NRSV sometimes translates ‘soul’ (*kabod*) as ‘glory’ (*kabod*). Normally soul is *nephesh* or *leb* in Hebrew. We find no parallel in the New Testament where *psyche* is translated ‘glory’.

¹⁴ In the ark there was a glory and a holiness expressed. I Samuel 4:21f. shows that there was a loss of glory when the Philistines captured the ark; so much so, that Eli’s daughter-in-law said, ‘[Ichabod] the glory has departed from Israel’.

¹⁵ This should be compared with Revelation 21:24–25, where the Holy City is shown to be all light, ‘and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it’. This may mean ‘bring their peoples into it’. John repeats, ‘they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations’ (cf. Ps. 78:61; Isa. 17:3; 21:16).

of which the glory is the outshining. From that point onwards we see God's glory in his appearances (theophanies) vouchsafed to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, reiterating and confirming the covenant.

The Glory That Was in Israel

Perhaps the most powerful of glory manifestations was that of the burning bush, when Moses saw the phenomenon of the bush burning, but did not recognise it as glory—holiness shown forth—and had to be warned. From that point onwards, the birth of the nation of Israel by reason of God's signs in Egypt, the liberation of the slave people, their journeyings through the wilderness, their entrance into Canaan and the establishment of the nation.

The brilliant phenomenon of what might be called 'special glory' was manifested to Moses when he requested to see *all* God's glory.¹⁶ At Sinai, God's glory had been manifested, as indeed it had been in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, always attendant on Israel. God would also meet with Moses in the tent of meeting, the cloud descending upon the tent, standing at its door, and causing all Israelites to worship at their doors. *God's glory is God manifest!* In Exodus 33—34, God shows but a little of his glory in what we take to be a manifestation of light, but God's innate glory—his glory towards Israel—is revealed by words, the wonderful words of Exodus 34: 6–7:

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'

Other appearances of God's glory were his glory-presence at the dedication of the tabernacle (Exod. 29:43; cf. 40:34ff.). At times of grumbling or rebellion (such as those of Dathan, Korah and Abiram) in the wilderness, the glory of God appeared and acted appropriately in each situation.

Again, at the dedication of Solomon's temple the glory of the Lord was identified with the *shekinah* cloud:

When the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, 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 (I Kings 8:10–11).

Most powerful is the manifestation of God's glory in Ezekiel. Ezekiel is a book filled with manifestations of God's glory in visionary form, though not in a material state. In chapter one, we have the mystery of the creatures, the wheels and their action, and even though we cannot particularly analyse the sequence and meanings of the appearance, it is summed up for us in 1:28:

Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face . . .

In this book, the glory of the Lord is the same as the presence of the Lord (cf. 9:3) and the working of the Lord, but, from Israel's side, there is the terrible matter of idolatry and impurity and abominations. From the beginning, God had spoken against idolatry. Calvin has said, 'As often as any form is assigned to God, his glory is corrupted by an impious lie'. God had

¹⁶ He recognised the fact that glory meant enablement, and if God's glory was not sufficient for so difficult a task, then he dared not attempt to take them to Caanan.

commanded in the strongest terms the rejection of idolatry, telling Israel that when they heard his words at Sinai '[they] saw no form'. To even compare God with anything in creation is to say that in some way he is part of the creation. This he is not: he fills creation, but is nothing of creation, otherwise he would in some sense be created. Immanence does not mean participation. So, in Ezekiel 11:22ff. the glory of the LORD—that is, the LORD—departs from the temple. It is true that Israel is promised the future presence and the sight of the glory of the LORD (43:2ff; 44:4). In Haggai 2:3, 7, 9, glory was promised to those building the 'second' house of the LORD. The glory manifested at Solomon's temple would be less than at the second temple. In Isaiah 40:5, it was prophesied in a more general, more universal way, 'And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken'.

Universal Glory Prophesied

With the promises given to Israel of the return of the glory of the Lord and of God's presence remaining with them forever we read such statements as 'Over all the glory there will be a canopy and a pavilion' (Isa. 4:5). In the meanwhile, God will destroy the glory of the nations. Isaiah 66:18–21 speaks of the drawing in of the nations to God's glory, to see it and share in it:

For I know their works and their thoughts, and I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Put, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their cereal offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.

Interpreted, this must mean that all nations have lived on the whole earth which is God's glory, but they have misinterpreted it. They have given their gods, lords and idols the suzerainty of it, and God's *kabod* to them. God's glory, however, moves amongst the nations, judging and punishing them—until the time comes, via these judgments and his mercy—that God will 'gather all nations and tongues'; a dynamic principle played over, time and again, in the Old Testament, and worked out through the gospel in the New Testament, that is, 'to the uttermost parts of the earth'.

Again, in Ezekiel 39:21, we have a repetition of Isaianic prophecies which have God's glory destroying the glory of other nations in order to instate them in the ultimate glory which shine over all nations: 'And I will set my glory among the nations; and all the nations will see my judgment which I have executed, and my hand which I have laid on them'. It is in the midst of these prophecies that God says more than once, 'My glory will I not give to another,' meaning 'to another nation, other than Israel whom I keep for my glory'. Even so, Isaiah 43:1–6, comporting with other nations, appears to be a universal call of God's people—Israel or Gentile nations—to come to God's fulfilment, the making of sons and daughters created to show forth his glory. So, also, in Isaiah 11:10, '... him shall the nations seek, and his dwelling shall be glorious' (11:10; cf. 56:1–8; 24:23).

We conclude, then, that the glory which Israel possessed was indispensable for God's purposes for it and the other nations. Prophecies of the glory of the Lord covering the earth as the waters cover the sea become clearly intelligible. In those days, the 'general' glory of God will become a special glory to all the nations. God will reveal himself through the Suffering Servant, 'A light for revelation to the Gentiles [nations] and for glory to thy people Israel'. Israel awaits the day of Messiah and his kingdom of glory. Romans 9:4, in saying that to Israel belongs the glory, is making a richly significant statement.

GLORY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Christ and the Glory

In the New Testament we are met with many references to God's glory. All the time we have to keep in mind the truth of God's glory as it is presented in the Old Testament. It is perhaps best to see Christ as the glory incarnate, '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',¹⁷ He was an historical person who bore witness to the Father's glory. Indeed he was filled with it. In John 17:1–5, 24, it is clear that he had received this glory from the Father, a gift of his love from the beginning,¹⁸ which may be said to be that gracious act of *perichoresis*. Likewise, exegesis of I Peter 4:14 shows the Holy Spirit to be the Spirit of glory.¹⁹ We must keep in mind, however, that whilst that glory was shown at special times, such as at the birth, and the transfiguration, it was still unseen to eyes that did not believe. Only at, and after, Pentecost did the glory show forth to believers. Paul, who was shown the glory on the road to Damascus, is one of the rare exceptions.

We must recognise that Christ's glory shows through in his acts. In John 2:11, it is said of the miracle of changing water into wine, that Jesus 'manifested *his* glory: and his disciples believed on him'. Seeing and believing go together in John's Gospel, and believers saw his glory. Glory in that sense redeems. Likewise, in 11:40, Jesus tells Martha, 'Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?' Here belief precedes seeing the glory. Jesus' glory was in fact the Father's glory (John 1:14)—glory from the Father—and he sought to glorify the Father (5:41; 7:18; 8:50).

Most powerfully, Jesus' death is described as glory in action. In 17:1–5, Jesus prays for the Father to glorify him with his (the Father's) glory, so that he might glorify the Father as Father.²⁰ In John 7:39 the events of the Cross and Resurrection are pointed to as Christ's glorification. Indeed, Hebrews 2:9 indicates he was glorified *for* the death, and not only *because* of it.²¹ Certainly he died thus in order to bring many sons into glory (cf. Isa 43:1–5). He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father (Rom 6:4). This raising was in order that we, raised in him, 'might walk in newness of life'. Perhaps it is both the Cross and the Resurrection which the disciples remembered 'when Jesus was glorified' (12:16), and certainly in 12:28–31, the Father and the Son are referring to the Cross which glorifies both Jesus and the Father.

Jesus came in the divine glory when the angels sang at his birth and glory burst through to the shepherds.²² He died and rose in the glory of God, and he prophesied his coming again in glory, indeed in the *shekinah*—the cloud of his presence as the Presence of the Father (Matt. 26:64)—and he will sit on his throne of glory (Matt. 19:28). The statement in Acts 1:9, that 'a cloud took him out of their sight', is surely the ascension in the *shekinah*, the cloud of glory.²³

¹⁷ Some exegetes see this as exactly the parallel of Exodus 34:6–7.

¹⁸ In John 5:41, Jesus says he does not receive glory from men, inferring such was only from God

¹⁹ In John 16:12–14 the Holy Spirit is the one who glorifies the Father and the Son to the minds of men and women.

²⁰ It is worth noting here that, in I Corinthians 2:8, Paul says the rulers of this world would not have crucified Christ had they known he was 'the Lord of glory'.

²¹ I am aware that there are two possible interpretations; (i) the one I have described above, and (ii) that he was glorified because of his death.

²² We must keep in mind that God's glory was fully in Christ. As Moses could not have accomplished the Exodus without the aid of that glory, so Jesus could not be the Second Moses who was to accomplish an Exodus at the Cross (Luke 9:31). Indeed this statement was made in his special glorification at the Transfiguration. Yet all the time he was testifying to, and being filled with, 'the glory of the Father'. The Cross was to be the source of making the glory of God cover the earth as the waters cover the seas. This glory must be shared amongst his followers who are to be part of this accomplishment.

²³ Note that after Jesus had been raised, God gave him the glory (I Pet. 1:21). He was 'taken up in glory' (I Tim. 3:16) and Stephen saw him in glory at God's right hand—the fulfilment of Psalms 2 and 110.

GLORY IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST JESUS TO ALL GENERATIONS

Ephesians 3:20–21 is a doxology—a glorifying of the Father and the Son— when it says:

Now to him who by the power of work within us is able to do more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations.

It is the church which is filled with his glory and which ascribes glory to the Father and the Son. Just as David at the assembly of Israel had said, ‘Thine O LORD is the greatness and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty’, so Paul is giving a similar ascription, but this time he is seeing the glory in the church. Why is this? It is because the church is to be the helpmeet of Christ, the Bride of the Bridegroom, and is to be at work to bring *sight* and *action* of the glory of God to all the nations, so often prophesied in the Old Testament. Thus, I Corinthians 15:24–28 describes the triumph of Christ over the enemies of God and Man, and the handing over to the Father the Kingdom whose elements of evil have been defeated by him. In one sense he is returning the glory back to the Father—that glory which had enabled him to triumph—so that God may be ‘all in all’; that is, the all glorious One whose glory has triumphed throughout creation.

When Christ gave his fullness to the church (Eph. 1:23), he gave all that he was and had, so that those in the church worked from his glory. We take it that Romans 9:4, with its mention of glory, is maintaining that, in ‘the Israel of God’, this gift obtains and of course works in the proclamation of the gospel and the building up of the people of God ‘to the uttermost part[s] of the earth’. Hence the doxological ascription of Ephesians 3:20–21. II Corinthians chapter 3 is a marvellous comparison of the glory that belonged to the old dispensation of Israel, and the new dispensation of Christ’s grace and the Spirit by which God continues his work. We will not undertake at this point to describe the distribution and effectual workings of this ‘glory of his grace’.

ESCHATOLOGICAL GLORY

From both the Old Testament, and what we have seen to this point in the New Testament, we have been shown that the ‘end-glory’—although the glory never ends—is the triumph of God’s glory in the establishment of his Kingdom throughout the earth. What we have called ‘general glory’, interlaced as it has been with ‘special glory’—light, brilliance and dynamic evidence of the presence and working of God—is now shown as *total* glory, in that the glory always pervasive in all the earth is now triumphant in the winning and subduing of all nations and the destruction of all evil. That glory is apparent to all, and it takes, so to speak, two forms; the first being the glory that triumphs over all, and the second the glory with which God invests his people, ‘the Israel of God’.

Christ and the Coming Glory

Regarding the first expression of that glory, we see the Son of Man coming in the *shekinah*, in ‘the glory of the Father’.²⁴ We saw in Isaiah 40:5 that God would reveal his glory to all, and this he does in the *parousia* of his Son, and the triumph already achieved. Christ, then, shall come ‘on the clouds . . . with power and great glory’ (Matt. 24:30). He shall sit on his throne of

²⁴ We need, now, to realise the eschatological work of the Three Persons of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit who is ‘the breath of his mouth’—the mouth of the Father and the Son—will judge and destroy all evil. The Father has given the authority of judgment to his Son, yet will, with the Son, judge all things. Likewise, the glory of God is the glory given by the Father to both the Son and the Spirit, the Spirit being the one who glorifies both Father and Son.

glory (Matt. 25:31; cf. Dan. 7:13f.). In II Thessalonians, Christ will be glorified in his saints, which reminds us of Proverbs 14:28 ‘In a multitude of a people is the glory of a king’. His will be ‘a great multitude which as no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes . . .’. This is indeed the glory that covers the earth, the triumph of glory. All of this explains the eschatological action of Christ in bringing all things to their glorification. Hence the universal doxologies to the Lamb in Revelation 5:11–14 and 7:9–12:

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, ‘To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!’ And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshiped.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!’ And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.’

Christ, Man and the Coming Glory

We remember the glory of Man before the Fall, seeing all things under him. Hebrews 2:5ff. is a rerun of this truth, but this time Christ is in our sights, and he is about to be crucified, thus being the Son of man under whom all things will be subjected by virtue of his Cross, and by which he will ‘bring many sons to glory’—the promise of Isaiah 43:1–6.

Paul speaks of a mystery, ‘But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification’. The rulers of the world did not understand this mystery, or they would not have crucified ‘the Lord of glory’ (I Cor. 2:7–8). That Christ is ‘the Lord of glory’ means not only his practical use of glory, but also that the glorification of his people was his task. Thus Paul says that as we behold him, we are being changed from one stage of glory to another (II Cor. 3:18), and elsewhere Paul shows that Christ is the true image and glory of God and that we, being renewed in the Spirit of our mind, are being renewed in, and by that image (II Cor. 4:4; Ephs. 4:24; Col. 3:10; cf. 1:27–29),

This New Man, Christ, as the Last Adam, is a life-giving spirit, hence we will have a new eschatological body for ‘we shall bear the image of the man of heaven’, and not be in the image of the man of dust, Adam (I Cor. 15:43ff.). Hence Paul says:

But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself (Phil. 3:20–21).

In this we see Christ’s ‘body of glory’ as the most desirable thing a human being can know, hence Paul’s other statement, ‘awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (Titus 2:13).

The reason we ‘love his appearing’ is that already Christ is our hope—‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’ (Col. 1:27). As we have seen, he is already transforming us from one stage of glory to another, and he is our actual hope, and actually dwells in us and among us. The same thought is repeated in greater measure in Romans 8:17–25, where ‘the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed [*in us and*] *to us*’. That will be the time when Christ will show his everlasting glory to us (John 17:24), and, as we shall see him (I John 3:1–3), we shall become like him. Paul, in Romans 8, speaks of the whole creation being

liberated from its bondage to corruption when we shall enter ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God’. Both in this chapter and in II Corinthians 4, he shows us that the present life of ministry involves immense suffering, but it is comparatively a light thing when we realise it is building up for us, and in us, ‘an eternal weight of glory’.

CONCLUSION: THE GLORY OF GLORY

In II Peter 1:16–18, the writer says:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

What is apparent from the above quote, is, namely, that the Son has all the glory of the Father, that at the Transfiguration the three apostles heard the voice borne to Christ ‘by the Majestic Glory’, so that the Son’s mission was not only authenticated, but also empowered. All of this seems to be the nature and purpose of glory. The glory of God—Father, Son and Spirit—is ever in action, whether we care to call it ‘general’ or ‘special’. In reality there is no general or special glory: there is only glory, which is God’s very Being in action. He is *actus purus*, not merely having a potential, but being ever in action according to his purpose and plan. Without this, creation would not subsist. Without this, God’s plan for creation could not be fulfilled. Without this, the glories of the eschaton, such as the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, the Holy City, the New Temple, the Paradise of God, could not reach their fulfilment. Nor would Man be glorified and divinised, and so made fit to be inducted into the Triune God.²⁵

We may say, then, that the glory which Israel possessed was God’s glory, which, when out-worked, was the glory that was Israel. Likewise, in the Church, under the New Covenant, nothing could be accomplished in winning the nations, defeating the enemy, and fulfilling God’s plan for creational glory and the glorification of all things. No wonder Moses felt he needed to know the dimensions and power of that glory, and no wonder Israel had to be taught the same. It is no less a wonder for the Church, for it must see not the things which are transient but the things which are unseen.

So we close our study with relief and gratitude that the gift of glory is ever with ‘the Israel of God’ and is never recalled. If the church has a heyday, it has it by virtue of God’s glory, holiness and love. If it has times of desperation, then it needs these in order to recover and go on until all things are glorified, until God is ‘all in all’ and ‘everything to everyone’.

²⁵ We are speaking here of Man *participating* in the Divine nature, not *being* in it. The sanctification of Man and his glorification can never be apart. There is no glory without holiness, no holiness without glory. What is so for God is likewise so for us. Not that we have glory or holiness *of ourselves*. These are gifts, and used in the way that dependent humanity would use them.

Study Six

The Several Gifts of Israel —III, The Covenants

The Church and the Seven Gifts, Then and Now

In looking at the gifts we do so from what they signified for Israel and what they signify for the Church or the ongoing 'Israel of God' (Gal. 6:18). We see how they influenced the thinking and prophetic anticipation of Israel, and the thinking of the Christian *ecclesia* since its inception at Pentecost, its continuity in and with the household of God. If these several gifts are not understood, then neither the life of Israel as we have it in the Old Testament, nor the Church as we have it in the New Testament, can be properly contended. We note that Romans 9:4 speaks of 'the covenants'. Some exegetes suggest it should be in the singular but most that the harder reading in the plural is the correct one. In one sense it does not matter, seeing all covenants ultimately constitute the one, namely, 'the everlasting covenant'. Directly, Israel was concerned with the Abrahamic, the Sinaitic and the Davidic covenants. Yet this is not to say they were not concerned with a creational covenant which, in turn, could be linked with an Adamic and Noahic set of covenants.

The Creational and Noahic Covenants

So far as night and the day are concerned, God has something of a covenant with them, a covenant which is unbreakable. Thus, in Jeremiah 33:19–26, we have information of this:

The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 'Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David my servant, and the Levitical priests who minister to me.'

The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 'Have you not observed what these people are saying, "The LORD has rejected the two families which he chose"? Thus they have despised my people so that they are no longer a nation in their sight. Thus says the LORD: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his descendants to rule over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes, and will have mercy upon them.'

Thus covenant is inherent in creation: the sun rules by day and the moon by night (cf. Genesis 1:14). Genesis 9:8–17 shows that with Noah, God made a covenant not only with him and his family, but with all mankind and all creation:

'Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it

shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.' God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.'

The question then is, 'Did not God have a covenant with Man and creation at the time and act of creation?' Was it not implied to Man that, if he did not eat of the tree of the knowledge and good and evil, he would live, and if he ate of the tree of life he would live forever? That he did not destroy Man in the day of the Fall must speak of grace; that he destroyed, virtually, all but Noah's family is surely speaking of an original covenant of relationship and obligation through covenant, though not of contract, as such.

The Linguistic Argument for a Creational Covenant

We know that from the beginning God had cared for Man and creation. Only as the Fall brought into being 'the sons of God' and the 'daughters of men', that is, the faithful from Seth's generation and the evil from Cain's, did corruption commence and compound with the coming together of these two. Because of that violence and corruption, God caused the judgment of the Flood. Most English translations speak of God *making* a covenant with Noah, as though that were the first covenant which had been made with creation and Man. It has been claimed by some commentators¹ that the use of *heqim berith* in Genesis 6:17–18 and 9:8ff.—'to establish a covenant'²—is not the same as *karat berith* which is 'to cut a covenant'. The writers quoted in our footnote, William Dumbrell and Gordon Wenham—amongst others—point out that God did not 'cut a covenant' with Noah, but simply 'established' or 'affirmed' the covenant already in place. This would have to be the covenant of creation.

It could be argued linguistically that *heqim berith* and *karat berith*, whilst technically different, may yet be equivalents. God is simply making a covenant with Noah and does not have to cut it. His word is as good as any ritual. If, however, 'establishing the covenant' contains a truth of great significance, then the argument may not stand on linguistic grounds, when the strongest use of the linguistic is *for* the covenant of creation. Our conclusion is that God made a covenant with Man at creation.

When we come to the Abrahamic covenant which was cut by God, we are in a dynamic renewal of covenant which now relates particularly to Abraham's descendants, but generally to all the nations, so that, in this sense, it is still universal (cf. Gen. 12:1–3). Finally, then, we ask, 'Would a covenant made in sinful human history be more in content than one we take to be inherent first in the nature of God and so in the nature of creation which declares the glory of God, in whose image and glory Man is made?'

The Theological Argument for a Creational Covenant

This would commence with our knowledge of the Triune God, that the Three Persons are One and are unitary Love. Man is created in the image of this unitary Love and is one with God. Thus, he has a relationship which makes him one with God. Doubtless, at the Fall he broke this

¹ See William Dumbrell's *Covenant and Creation* (Paternoster, 1984), pp. 11ff., 25–26); Gordon Wenham *Genesis 1–15* in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Word, 1987), pp. 174–175). Palmer Robertson (quoted below in these notes) takes the covenant of creation for granted. On pages 67ff., he outlines the elements of that covenant.

² Reference may be made to Exodus 6:1–9, where was God speaking not of 'cutting a covenant' with Abraham, although he did do this, but of 'establishing' the covenant with the patriarchs, and it is in the light of this established covenant that he now proposes to liberate Israel from Egypt.

relationship with God, but God did not break his relationship with Man. It is reasonable to say that God granted Man to be a covenantal being in Himself. If we recognise (i) that man was not created in grace, but love-wise was gifted with and by creation, then no contractual element will be present as often it is in other views of a covenant with the first couple; (ii) this would constitute the same covenant established—that is, reiterated—with Noah and all creation, the difference being that this covenant would be out of grace, unilateral and again, not contractual.

Israel and the Creational and Noahic Covenants

It is interesting that some commentators think of ‘the covenants’ of Romans 9:4 as only the Abrahamic, Sinaitic and Davidic, including, perhaps, the New covenant as promised in Jeremiah 31:31–34 and other passages. This view is taken by such writers because they fail to see that Israel believed its history began with the creation, that it was indeed begun in Adam. In this view the covenant with Noah was most important, and, in any case, Israel traced its descent directly from Noah, to say nothing of Adam. It would appear that a good case could be made out for Creational covenant and its reiteration to Noah to be regarded by Israel as the principle of creational covenant pertaining primarily to it. Israel thought in terms of the whole history of the human race, and saw itself in perspective central to it.

The Principle of Covenant

Thus far we have not discussed the nature of covenant, although we have hinted that, from the first, it comprises God’s relationality with Man’ and Man’s relationality with God. ‘Covenant’ is a word we use more in law-language today than in general conversation and thought. The fact of life is that we live in many covenants, not only legal ones, but in interpersonal ones. We have agreements, spoken or unspoken, concerning relationship. If, as some theologians claim, a covenant is a bond, or it involves ‘bonding’, then the idea of covenant comes to life. Today we talk of ‘bonding’ as an intimate relational thing—a mother bonding with her baby, and a father sharing in that bonding: in this sense it is relevant. Marriage in the Bible is sometimes called a covenant, and is of course intimately relational. We can think of nothing more bonding than man and woman becoming ‘one flesh’. In the Bible we have covenants between Abraham and Abimelech, Isaac and Abimelech, Laban and Jacob, Jonathan and David; indeed there are many, sometimes being in the forms of varying treaties, even treaties with the land, with things and even with death. The covenant of David and Jonathan has that quality of two souls being knit together—a beautiful bonding indeed.

O. Palmer Robertson defines a covenant as ‘a bond in blood sovereignly administered’. When God enters into a covenant relationship with men, he sovereignly institutes a life-and-death bond. A covenant is a bond in blood, or a bond of life and death, sovereignly administered’.³ Generally speaking, this definition holds well, but when we ask whether this was always the case we face some problems. Whilst, in some cases, covenants do involve bonding, yet the origin of the primary covenant, the one we call ‘the covenant of creation’, issues from the creational relationship of God and Man rather than from some ritual or agreement which is intended to make them one. We need, at the same time, to have a reliable understanding of covenant, and M. Weinfield in his article on *berith*⁴ has the following valuable note:

The most plausible solution seems to be the one that associates *berith* with Akk. *biritu*, “clasp”, “fetter” (cf. the Talmudic *byryt*). This is supported by the Akkadian and Hittite forms for treaty: Akk. *riksu*, Hitt. *ishiul*, both

³ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Presbyterian & Reformed, Phillipsburg, 1980) p. 4.

⁴ M. Weinfield, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975), p. 4.

meaning “bond”. The concept of a *binding* settlement also stands behind Arab. ‘*aqd*, Lat. *viniculum fidei*, “bond of faith”, *contractus*, “contract,” and is likewise reflected in German *Bund*. This etymology might support the reading *ma’asoreth habberith* in Ezek. 20:37 (“I will make you enter into the *bond* of the covenant”), suggested long ago. The Greek terms for covenant, *syntheke*, *harmonia* (*Iliad* xxii.255), *synthesia* (ii.339) and *synemosyne* (xxii.261) also express the idea of binding/putting together. The “bond” metaphor explains the use of “strengthening” or “fastening” to convey the idea of the “validity” or “reliability” of the treaty. Thus we find in Akk. *dunnunu rikstate*, “to fasten the bonds” (= to validate the treaty), or *riksu dannu*, “strong persistent bond” (= a valid and reliable treaty), and similarly in Aram. *lethaqqaphah ’esar*, “strengthen the bond” (Dnl. 6:8). The Greek term for annulling the pact is *lyein*, “to loosen,” which, also points to the understanding of the treaty as a bond.

If we commence with the Hebrew word used for covenant, namely *berith*, we are faced—as immediately above—with a number of opinions as to its derivation. Even so, the nature of the covenant is fairly apparent in the Scriptures. Whilst admitting that contemporary customs such as ‘covenant’ may influence people such as Israel to think along these lines, yet we must also remember that Israel knew God and had its ideas of covenant which went back to Noah, if not to Adam at creation.

THE WAY GOD APPROACHES COVENANT

There are a number of terms in the Old Testament which give us certain views of the covenants God makes. Various translations use equivalent terms such as ‘league’, ‘treaty’, ‘compact’, ‘solemn compact’, ‘agreement’. The bonding, then, is no light thing. The mode of covenant is also defined. *Karat berith* is ‘to cut a covenant’. *Heqim berith* is ‘to establish a covenant’. *Natan berith* is ‘to grant a covenant’, *sim berith* ‘to set down’ and *siwwa berith* ‘to command’ a covenant. In their contexts the use of the various verbs is understandable. Linked with covenant are ideas of God having commanded his law, his statutes and the mention of his judgments which related to Israel’s transgressing, breaking, sinning against and rejecting his covenant. The bond between God and Israel is not to be taken lightly, for breaking the covenant brings cursings, just as keeping it brings blessings. In one sense, as we shall further see, the covenant of God and the law of God are virtually one: they are as synonymous.

All God’s Covenants are Unilateral and Non-Contractual

Whilst we have spoken of human covenants which have elements of the contractual, this cannot be said of God’s covenants. They are by his initiative and must be seen as such. When God commands a covenant then he also places a covenantal obligation to obedience in response to his goodness, for such covenants are for blessing. The obligation is simply for the continued obtaining of blessing and as a way of avoiding cursing. We must avoid thinking that God makes parity agreements, for the elements of covenants which appear to begin with Noah and continue into the New Covenant are covenants somehow or another linked with grace.⁵

⁵ We must grasp the fact that, since God’s covenants are primarily relational and not contractual, they are not legal agreements. The agreement is that God will bless where the covenant is observed and curse where it is broken. The Book of Deuteronomy spells this out repeatedly. Especially in Chapters 26–30 we see that blessing follows obedience and cursing follows disobedience. Even so, God prophesies that he will eventually break the hard heart, circumcise it and—so to speak—force Israel to love him.

The Matter of ‘The Covenants’

We have two choices in thinking of the plural—‘the covenants’—and they are (i) Paul was thinking only of the covenants which pertained to Israel which would be the Abrahamic, the Sinaitic and the Davidic, with a possible keeping in mind of the prophesied New Covenant; (ii) he was thinking of the Covenants as being related to the creational or Adamic covenant, and thus that the Noahic covenant was universal and everlasting, that the Abraham covenant was the Creational covenant coming into view by God’s treaty with Abraham, and was the continuance of the initial everlasting covenant. Thus the covenant with Abraham explained God’s saving of Israel from Egypt and his special covenant with them at Sinai. The Davidic covenant would be a particularising of the Creational covenant, linked with the matter of the Kingdom of God and possibly being at one with a coming New covenant.

In this study we would take the latter view, much as the position of ‘(i)’ could be strongly held to be biblical. Our problem with a special grace covenant for all creation (the Noahic) and then a more directly soteriological covenant (the Abrahamic) is that no covenant of any kind exists from creation to Noah, and no soteriological covenant from Adam to Abraham.⁶

We take it that if we have read aright ‘the covenants’ then we have a continuum from creation to the new creation—the *telos*—so that the Creational covenant ultimately achieves the purpose God had for it. Theologically it makes sense to know God is always the Covenant-God. We will now look briefly at the covenants.

1. The Creational Covenant

In this God makes full relationship with Man and creation, so that being at One in his own unitary love and its *perichoresis* he can give all to Man within creation, and enable him with the inflow to him of the Divine *perichoresis*.

2. The Covenant with Noah

Because Man has broken the Creational covenant, God gives the proto-evangel of Genesis 3:15, causes the birth and continuance of a blessed faith-and-love family, and a cursed people who refuse his grace. Noah, after the cursing has taken place, sacrifices appropriately to God and has the Creational Covenant reiterated, that is, established afresh, for ever.

3. The Abrahamic Covenant

God establishes a grace covenant with Abraham and all his descendants. His choice of Isaac as against the first born Ishmael⁷, and of Jacob instead of Esau shows his determination to have a covenant people of his own will. Genesis 12:1–3 and other references show this was to prove to be a universal covenant. All nations who blessed Abraham—that is, the God of Abraham—would be included in the Abrahamic blessing (cf. Gal. 3:10–14). Whilst this covenant pertained to possession of Canaan, its goal was far beyond that (cf. Heb. 11:9–10; Rom. 4:13). In the New Testament we see that persons of faith are the children of Abraham (Gal. 3).

⁶ Genesis 3:15 poses a problem here. Here is soteriological promise, but seemingly without a covenant context. To speak of a contractual covenant made by God with Adam destroys the creation as a *gift* to Man. Man’s freedom is thus impaired. That he misused his freedom and that it broke a creational covenant does not affect the *giftness* of creation. Man’s sin is seen as deep because he misused and abused his freedom of will.

⁷ Ishmael cannot be counted as authentically the first born since he was born of the slave Hagar (cf. Gal. 4:23), not being born of the Spirit nor being the child of the covenant promise.

4. The Covenant With Israel

Without doubt, God made a covenant with Israel at Sinai. See Exodus chapter 24. Whilst the covenant ritual took place at the foot of Sinai, God's covenant with them had been in action prior to this. Exodus 2:23–25 links Israel with the Abrahamic covenant:

In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died. And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition.

Then, of course, God's acts against Egypt and the saving of his son out of Egypt (Hos. 11:1; cf. Exodus 12), with the defeat of Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, together with the sacrifice of the Passover, all showed God was Israel's Covenant Head. Exodus, then, is a sealing sacrifice of the covenant which has been in action before that ritual.

Any commentary on this covenant needs to be a long and detailed one since Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy spell out its character, its action and its significance. For example the holiness of God, his Presence, the manner of worshipping him, the adoption, law and glory were all unique in history and highly significant. No other nation has such a history. We may say, simply, that the covenant was all-revealing of the grace of God and, indeed, all his nature. Israel was to be the priest–nation among, and to, all the nations.

We cannot speak of it as 'a success' but there was no failure on God's part. Not only was the nation warned regarding disobedience, but that disobedience and its consequences of judgement and exile had been prophesied. The key to God's nature and his glory was—and is— Exodus 34:6–7:

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'

The effects of God's covenant with Israel are innumerable and, ultimately, indescribable. How much that nation and the nations of the world have been shown in history. Israel is still a special nation, one around whom much pivots. Students of her being have endless revelations of the nature and purpose of God.

5. The Davidic Covenant

The prophets began to speak of the Covenant with David which we find mentioned primarily in II Samuel 7:8–17, where Nathan the prophet delivered God's message:

'Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And

your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.’
In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.⁸

This passage is clear enough. Also there is the parallel passage of I Chronicles 17:3–15, which contains some simple differences. At first sight, in both these passages, we might not think of God’s promise to David—of establishing for him an everlasting dynasty—as a covenant, but many Scriptures indicate it was a covenant. Isaiah 55:3 speaks of ‘an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David’, a statement confirmed in Acts 13:34—speaking of Jesus as ‘great David’s greater son’—‘And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he spoke in this way, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David”’. When we come to Psalm 89, the whole of which is an exposition of the Davidic covenant, verses 3 and 4 speak of II Chronicles 7:16, ‘Thou hast said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations”’. Psalm 132:11–12 repeat the thought and word of ‘covenant’. In II Samuel 23:5, David says, ‘. . . he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure’. Jeremiah 33:19–26 places the covenant with David amongst the unbreakable covenants, those God has made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and with the Levites. There are many more references and they all point to the importance of this covenant. Palmer Robertson observes:

The prophetic expansion of the Davidic promise fits into this same pattern. As the kingdom crumbles all about them, these seers anticipate the greater day. A greater occupant of David’s throne shall come. He shall sit on the throne of his father David forever. He shall rule the whole world in righteousness. He shall merge God’s throne with his own, for he shall be Immanuel, Mighty God, God himself.⁹

Ahead of Israel lies this Davidic Kingdom linked with this David Covenant, and both merge into the New Covenant, and the Kingdom of God both come and coming in Christ Jesus, the Son of the living God. That is where we leave the Israel of the Old Testament, meeting her again in the Gospels, but also find the nation as a whole not prepared for Messiah and ‘the Mediator of a better covenant’ to come in the way he does. That is the sad story of Israel not recognising her own Deliverer.

6. *The New Covenant*

Now we come into a new world altogether. This time we are thinking in terms of ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:18) and God’s Covenant with his people. In Luke’s Gospel Zechariah is recorded as saying,

*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people,
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we should be saved from our enemies,
and from the hand of all who hate us;
to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, 74 to grant us*

⁸ The history of all Israel can be said to pivot around the Davidic covenant, that is, it leads up to this promise of God and then on to the coming of the Davidic king—Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God—and so to the proclamation and establishment of his universal kingdom, he, at the same time, being ‘the mediator of a better covenant’, for in him kingdom and covenant meet.

⁹ *op. cit.*, p. 251.

that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

Anyone reading the Gospels, along with the proclamation of the gospel in the Acts and Epistles, will be struck by the enormous difference between what is known as Judaism and Christianity. This is marked out in the Pauline Epistles of II Corinthians and Galatians, and especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The primary term for covenant in the Old Testament is *berith* and, via the LXX use of the term it is *diatheke* in the New Testament, which relates to a testament or will. Even so, it brings into continuity the use of *berith*. In Hebrews 9:15ff., the writer does use the idea of a will or testament which cannot be authentic in action without the death of the testator, and points to Christ being the one whose death makes the testament/covenant effective.

The Effects of the Covenant for the Continuing ‘Israel of God’

At this point, omitting the Pauline theology of the new covenant, we insert a statement¹⁰ on the matter of Christ and the Covenant in the Epistle to the Hebrews chapters 1 – 10. It is quite detailed, but its beauty is that it compares God’s covenant in the setting of Israel as shown in the Old Testament, and as now in the Israel of God seen in the New Testament. We take it that the early church understood covenant in this way and so it is helpful for us today.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, the New Covenant and Christ its Mediator (Hebrews Chapters 1 – 10)

Up to the incarnation of the Son, God has spoken by the prophets. In the last days he has spoken by the Son, the one by whom he created all things, and by whom he upholds all things. This is the Son who radiates the glory of God. The Son is higher than the angels for, having completed his work on earth, he is now seated at the right hand of God and all his enemies are being subjugated to him. God’s intention was completed by Christ, namely to suffer on the Cross and taste death for every human being, thereby pioneering the salvation by which many sons may enter into the glory of God. He became truly human in order to ‘become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people’.

The history of the Son is that he built the ‘house of God’ in which Moses was the prime servant. This house was no less than Israel, but the Letter reveals it was much more—it was, and is, all that God has created *through the Son*. Whilst Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness and lost the promised rest of God, nevertheless God has provided a way for all human beings to enter into his rest. It is by means of ‘a great high priest who has passed through the heavens’.

This high priest is the most significant of all human creatures, far transcending the priests of the former covenant. He is one in the *likeness* of the Melchizedekian order but is not *in* that order, as, say, a Levitical priest was *in* the order of the Aaronic priesthood. Melchizedek was a king–priest of an order superior to that of Aaron, since Aaron in Abraham’s loins paid homage to him. This Melchizedek *resembled* the Son of God but was not him or over him. No earthly priest has a right to appoint himself to the office of priesthood. Nor did Christ appoint himself. He was appointed by the Father.¹¹

¹⁰ This is, in fact extracted from *The Covenant of God*, a series on covenant done by G. Bingham for the NCTM Thursday Morning Class 25/5/95. Its title is ‘Christ the Mediator of the New Covenant’.

¹¹ Note in 5:1–10 that Psalms 2 and 110 are conflated in the pointing to Christ as the true High Priest.

One should remember that the priests of the Levitical order carried out their ministry and died. This new Melchizedekian priest—Jesus—has the power of an endless life. His is such an order and an office that—beyond what the Levitical priesthood could accomplish—‘he is able to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them’.¹² This is because he is a ‘high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens’. So high a High Priest! As appointed, he is one who is ‘made perfect for ever’.¹³

In 8:1ff., the writer is taking Christ’s priesthood as accomplished. Now he is seated at the right hand of God, and now he is ‘a minister [*leitourgos*] in the sanctuary’, that is, the heavenly sanctuary. The heavenly sanctuary is God’s eternal sanctuary and not the one ‘set up by man’. This latter was the copy of the heavenly, the one dictated to Moses for building in Israel. Now, the writer asserts, ‘Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises’.

It is at this point the author of Hebrews contrasts the old and new covenants. If the old had been sufficient—‘faultless’—then a new one would not have been needed. It was needed and it was prophesied in the words of Jeremiah 31:31–34. The prophecy calls for an understanding of its details: (a) the new covenant will primarily be with Israel;¹⁴ (b) even so, it will not be like the old covenant made with Israel when God delivered them from Egypt; (c) it will be a covenant which will make innate to all hearts the holy law of God; (d) knowledge of God will not have to be taught to anyone or by anyone, because all shall know the Lord ‘from the least of them to the greatest’; (e) the rich outcome of the covenant will be God’s forgiveness of sins. It is by the forgiveness of sins they will truly know God.¹⁵ Israel had a vast body of sins to be forgiven and no longer to be remembered. Its history of idolatry, uncleannesses and lawlessness was so vast as to be indescribable, so that the promise of forgiveness is remarkable in the view of the dimensions of guilt and evil that it must cover.

The prophecy makes the former covenant obsolete. The writer then scans the worship of the former covenant and asserts that, apart from the annual offering of the atonement which permitted the high priest to enter the Holy of Holies, there was worship which extended only from the altar up to the dividing curtain between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. That old system of priesthood never opened the curtain to the worshippers. In the ‘copy-tabernacle’ (9:9), as also in 10:1, he asserts that the worshippers could not be made perfect by that limited worship. ‘Perfect’ in the writer’s later terms must mean, ‘wholly forgiven, wholly purified, wholly sanctified’. By contrast ‘when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come,¹⁶ 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,¹⁷ *not by the blood of goats and calves,*

¹² We will later see that his intercession consists of (i) the act of his offering himself as an oblation at the Cross, and (ii) the continuing effects of that oblation in his intervening in the lives of his people (cf. Rom. 8:33).

¹³ One of the fascinating elements of the Epistle is to see how the writer outlines the development of Jesus as the High Priest. In 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’. In 5:7–10 the elements of essential suffering are introduced by which ‘being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek’. In 2:10 it is said he was made ‘perfect through suffering’, and it would seem in this verse that the Father withheld nothing of the suffering of the sins of humanity, so that in that sense his action is ‘perfect’ or ‘complete’.

¹⁴ The general tenor of Hebrews does not allow forgiveness to be limited to Israel, but certainly we should note that it *is* for Israel.

¹⁵ A great theme of the New Testament is that God is known as Love by forgiveness.

¹⁶ Most translations have ‘the good things to come’ in accordance with 10:1, ‘the good things to come’. In 6:5 we have ‘the powers of the age to come’. The question in 10:1 is whether ‘the good things to come’ were salvific ones of Christ’s work of the Cross (propitiation) or the general eschatological ones of which the New Testament constantly speaks. I would opt for the latter.

¹⁷ To this point we follow the text of the RSV, but from this point other translators and exegetes differ from the RSV, and rightly so. I have derived the text that follows from W. H. Montefiore’s commentary *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (A & C. Black, London, 1964, p. 151, with commentary following). Most translations have ‘through his blood’, that is, ‘by virtue of his blood’. The idea of Christ taking blood into the heavenly sanctuary scarcely makes sense.

but by his own blood he entered the sanctuary once for all and secured a deliverance that is everlasting' (RSV, 'securing an eternal redemption').

The writer having revealed the completeness of Christ's priesthood and the total efficacy of his blood shows that these actually purify the worshippers, so that they are purged from dead works to truly worship the living God. Thus he can say boldly that in this way Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant. It is his death by blood-shedding which has sealed the covenant, that is, by that death secured the testament and by which he now has appeared in the true sanctuary 'on our behalf'. He has appeared to put away sin for all time: he has been offered *once*¹⁸ to bear the sins of Man.

The final chapter—chapter 10—on the person and work of the Mediator, is powerfully conclusive. In the first few verses the writer shows that, whilst blood washes away sin, the blood of animals cannot, and the Levitical priesthood had nothing to offer but animal blood. This takes us back to a remarkable verse in 7:12, 'For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well'. 'The law' here must stand for the Mosaic system, rather than for the moral law, or as we understood it, 'the law of God'. That is unchangeable since it is the very law of God himself.

What the writer must mean is that the system of sacrifice under the Levitical priesthood changes when the High Priesthood of Christ is exercised. Christ is not only *the* High Priest. He is also '*the* offering' or what we call 'the oblation'. God has prepared for him a body in order to offer himself as the oblation for our sins. In support of this we say that 'the law made nothing perfect', and that in Christ 'a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God'.¹⁹ We must also keep in mind that in one sense Christ is the altar, that is to say that the Cross is the true altar in the true sanctuary. All that Christ does, and is, is authentic and efficacious. All systems of worship cease to have significance when it comes to 'eternal redemption' and 'entering into the Holy of Holies'.

In 10:5–22 the writer concludes his argument powerfully. Christ's body is prepared as the oblation which is to satisfy and fulfil the will of God. The whole system of sacrifice as known in the Mosaic covenant is thus abrogated. The will of God for the New covenant and in the New covenant, has led to the sanctification of the people of God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ 'once for all'. Christ has 'offered for all time a *single* sacrifice for sins'. By this *single* sacrifice 'he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified'. The writer takes the unusual step of saying that by the prophecy of the New covenant in Jeremiah 31, 'the Holy Spirit bears witness to this'. He means that the New covenant prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31–34 has borne witness to the whole action of God in bringing the forgiveness of sins by Christ being oblation and High Priest in the efficacious sacrifice of the Cross.²⁰

The writer brings his readers to the triumphant conclusion that the old system of worship, which, so to speak, moves from the altar to the curtain in the Holy Place, has been transcended. Now from the altar to the Holy of Holies there is a 'new and living way'. Before it had been the way of dead victims, animal blood and Levitical ministry, so that, in a sense, it can be called 'the dead way'. Now the blood of Jesus—the death of the Cross—has become the 'new and living way'. He has opened the curtain through his flesh.²¹ The house of God, over which Jesus

¹⁸ Now the terms 'once', 'once for all' and 'a single sacrifice' begin to appear to show the conclusiveness and completeness of the salvific work of Christ. 'Once for all' means 'never to be repeated', 'never having to be repeated' and 'sufficient in itself'. It is out of this that the believer has assurance and boldness.

¹⁹ See 7:18–19.

²⁰ The promise of the forgiveness of sins in Jeremiah's prophecy is thus linked with Christ's sacrifice. Otherwise such forgiveness would appear to be gratuitous, not related to the Mosaic covenant and not having a sacrificial basis. It does have that basis in Jesus' death.

²¹ It could be that the flesh of Christ had always veiled the God whom he had come to reveal, but by being rent was now revealing God to men and women, especially by taking them into the inner, heavenly sanctuary, or it could mean that at his death—as the Gospels record—he had rent the veil or curtain which had hitherto prevented access into the presence of God.

has leadership as the true High Priest, is now open to all who would come to God through his intercession on the Cross, and now his continuous intercession at the right hand of God.

Conclusion: The Effects of the Covenant in History

What we have not included in this Study is the essence of my book *Love's Most Glorious Covenant*, namely that in the Creational Covenant there are the basic elements of the mandate for creation, the matter of the marriage which is protological of Yahweh and his Bride, Christ and his Church, and the third element, namely the perpetual sabbath rest of God. These figure largely in the whole of Scripture. They are essential to true living in all mankind, and are vital in the working of covenant as seen in Israel and the church—'the Israel of God'.

The liberating effects of the covenants of grace must be seen in the light of the climax of the covenant, namely the *telos* of God when God's grace in sanctification and glorification of all creation will be seen.

Whatever the exact meaning of the text, the reality of his opening the way into the Holy of Holies has been effected by his death. That is what matters.

Study Seven

The Several Gifts of Israel—IV, The Giving of the Law

INTRODUCTION: LAW IN GENERAL

We note that in Romans 9:4 ‘the giving of the law’ is what is spoken of law and no other of the gifts. ‘The giving of the law’ certainly means a special giving to Israel. The question is, ‘Was there law before it was given to Israel, and if so, was the law given to Israel a different one?’ The answer to that must lie in Jesus’ use of the well-known term, ‘the law and the prophets’. ‘The law and the prophets’ constitute the whole of the Old Testament, that is, not simply from Sinai to the end of the Old Testament history, but from what is contained in Genesis to Malachi. This will entail knowing the principle and practice of ‘covenant’. As we pointed out in our last study, this will require us to see all God’s covenants are of grace, and are necessarily unilateral. Whilst law or ‘charter’ are always inherent in covenant, it is not law which is *contractual*, but *obligatory* in the light of grace and its motivational dynamic.

THE LAW OF GOD

The term ‘law of God’ can be seen with its preposition being either objective or subjective. If objective, then it is the law which proceeds from God and comes to Man, or if the preposition is subjective, then it is the very law of God himself. That law existed before Sinai is very clear. Genesis 26:5 states, ‘because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws’. Such are not explicitly stated in prior chapters, but it is notable that they are all within God’s covenant. At the same time both Pharaoh and Abimelech reproach Abraham for letting them think Sarah was unmarried and available to them. They tell Abraham they could have suffered judgment for immorality.

The law of God must have had both subjective and objective connotation. It is not our point here to explicate the subjective, but the whole of Scripture brings us to the truth of the Triune God, and that the Three Members live mutually in love relationship. Jesus’ summary of ‘the law and the prophets’ being contingent upon the two great commandments—‘Love to God and love to neighbour’—surely issues from the Fount of love, the Godhead. Thus we are saying that the whole law known as ‘moral’ and encapsulated in the Decalogue is subjectively the very law of God himself, and objectively the law for all the human race.

Another point needs to be raised, namely that of what has been called the Creational Covenant. This is not to be confused with the theological idea of a Covenant of Works given at the time of creation. The Creational Covenant is the principle that God being within himself covenantal, brings through in creation that covenant to Man when he is made in his—God’s—image. Thus the Creational Covenant is inherent in Man and exists from the beginning. If what we have said above is so—that law is inherent in covenant—then the law was present at the time of creation. Romans 5:12–21 seems to indicate this.

Our final thought in this section is that the subject of law—as indeed that of authority,

judgment and punishment—is a difficult subject for discussion, since all born of Adam have an inbuilt prejudice against law and command. The most that some can concede is that it is a necessary evil because of the Fall. Such people would argue that law is not ontological but provisional, and that this lends weight to their belief that grace banishes law. ‘Free from law’ means freedom to do anything.

THE GIVING OF THE LAW TO ISRAEL

Any examination of the law outside the context of the other gifts of Romans 9:4–5 denudes the law of its true meaning and glory. If we commence the study of the giving of the law we could start at Hebrews 12:18–21:

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.’ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear.’

This passage accords with Exodus 19:12–25, but we shall look only at verses 16–25:

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. And the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to gaze and many of them perish. And also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out upon them.’ And Moses said to the LORD, ‘The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for thou thyself didst charge us, saying, “Set bounds about the mountain, and consecrate it.”’ And the LORD said to him, ‘Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them.’ So Moses went down to the people and told them.

This is indeed a fierce introduction to the giving of the law, but then an understanding of the holiness of God, and the seriousness of the law was at stake. More beautifully stated by the aged Moses in giving his last words, is Deuteronomy 33:1–5:

This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. He said,
 The LORD came from Sinai,
 and dawned from Seir upon us;
 he shone forth from Mount Paran,
 he came from the ten thousands of holy ones,
 with flaming fire at his right hand.
 Yea, he loved his people;
 all those consecrated to him were in his hand;
 so they followed in thy steps,
 receiving direction from thee,
 when Moses commanded us a law,
 as a possession for the assembly of Jacob.
 Thus the LORD became king in Jeshurun,
 when the heads of the people were gathered,
 all the tribes of Israel together.

The giving of the law, in this sense, was unique. No other nation was given such a law.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).

Nor was any other nation given a law after the mode of God's direct utterance to the people (4:10–14):

. . . the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children so.' And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone. And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances, that you might do them in the land which you are going over to possess (Deut. 4:10–14).

We should note especially that (i) the Lord spoke directly to the people, (ii) there was no form seen but a voice heard, and (iii) the covenant was declared 'which he commanded you to perform', that is 'the ten *words*', for the term is not 'commandments'. In Deuteronomy 5:6 (cf. Exod. 20:1–3) those ten words are introduced by, 'I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'. What we further need to note is that God in speaking directly to the people revealed himself so that they would know who was speaking, and through the covenant would be in communion with him. Whilst the law was written on the stone and may be called 'hard copy', yet it was God directly speaking. Only the word that is spoken directly from God can be true law. 'Hard copy' is not the law in the truest sense. So then, whereas the primal couple were in *creational communion* with God when He spelled out the creational mandate and the prohibition to eat the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so here Israel is in *covenantal communion* with God. Only in communion does the true nature of law come through. God's special mode of giving and Israel's covenantal receiving are essential for true law understanding.

THE COVENANTAL AGREEMENT

In Exodus 24:3–8, the people were bonded in covenant to God: they were bonded in and by blood. The book of the covenant was read by Moses, and the reading was simply God declaring himself afresh. At the end of the reading, in the midst of the ritual of blood, the people said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient'.

In this sense the law was given by God and received by the people. They knew the nature of God in grace, and they received him as the word revealed him. Later, God was to reveal his glory to Moses, or at least that sight of his glory that Moses was able to sustain. The revelation of God is always essential to the true knowledge of law. Thus in Exodus 34:6–7, God reveals himself and Israel has to walk in this revelation all the days of its being. Since the law is the word ('the ten words') of God, it must be known in personal relationship with God. The moment we detach the law from God we make it not his word, but a block of rules which is an entity of its own and a formidable entity at that.

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'

Now that Israel is God's people and he is uniquely their covenant God, and since they are in communion with him and he dwells amongst them, the nature of law is shown as relational both in its content and intent. There is no question of Israel obeying God in a cold legal way, any more than of disobeying him as a god far removed from them and impersonal in his law. As for the use of the law as the way of self-justification and right standing before God—the concept that developed in later Judaism—that was a principle which did not obtain in the Mosaic covenant of grace. His revelation of himself to Moses in the above words was to stand by Israel in its worst days. Because of what he was—and is—Israel could understand His law. As Moses told the nation (Deut. 10:12–15) the law was given to them 'for your good' (v. 13). It was a functional law which worked for their good:

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I command you this day for your good?

'I Am the Lord Your God'

This is the basis of all things, and in particular the basis of the covenant of grace and the law itself. God had delivered Israel from Egypt by mighty signs and wonders and by his Fatherly hands upon Israel his 'first-born son'. As we keep saying, it was Yahweh who spoke directly to his people from his character of Creator and Redeemer; who remained in their midst, so that his Presence was unmistakable by the pillar of cloud and fire, the tent of testimony and his continuing deeds on their behalf. No wonder that the law was to be understood in relational terms, and to be obeyed from the heart. Should disobedience come, then God's mercy would circumcise their hearts and give them, afresh, a heart to love him (Deut. 30:6).

A Voice But No Form

Moses told the people:

Then the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice . . . Therefore take good heed to yourselves. Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth' [etc.] (Deut. 4:12–18).

In disallowing God to be represented by anything which he made, the transcendence of God is preserved. God could speak, otherwise there would be no word, but not even the image of God—Man—suffices to indicate his true transcendent nature. The creature can never be as the Creator.

This leads us on to a valuable comment by J. A. Motyer,¹ who says:

Man is the personal image of God; the law is the written preceptual image of God. The intention of Leviticus 19 is declared at the outset, 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord our God am holy' (vs. 2). The Lord longs for his people to live in his image, and to that end he has given them the law.

Here, it would seem, Motyer is speaking of something we will later enlarge upon, namely that the law of God—the principle which obtains in the Triune Godhead—is given to Man to be and to do in creation. In our Deuteronomic context it would seem that we might speak of the law as

¹ His article 'Law' in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter E. Elwell (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1984, p. 624).

‘the spoken preceptual image of God’. Certainly when Man hears and obeys he is fulfilling his being as the image of God. By this it can be seen how horribly demeaning is idolatry when it claims its forms to be the image of God, and indeed, God!

The giving of the law, then, was a wonderful action of God, but, as we have observed, the law must not be seen except in the context of the other gifts—the sonship, the glory, the worship, the promises, the covenants, and the Messiah. Law is only intelligible in the light of them, as they in the light of it.

ISRAEL’S APPRECIATION OF THE LAW: THE MEANING OF TORAH

In the New Testament we could be forgiven for thinking the Mosaic law was something of a disaster. Paul speaks so much of its lethal nature—a matter we will later pursue. Rightly understood, Paul is not presenting the law as intrinsically formidable, but it seems this way only because in later Judaism some saw the law as a way of self-justification. Even so, we have the problem of understanding the primary Jewish term for law—*torah*—because when translated into the Greek via the LXX the word becomes *nomos*, and when translated from the Latin, through the Vulgate, it becomes *lex*, and these two words have a more legal connotation, often referring to legislated law. For our part, we have to read the Old Testament continuously to pick up the idea of law (*torah*) as it was known in the Mosaic covenant. For example, Israel was God’s ‘first-born son’ (Exod. 4:22), and Israelites were ‘sons’ (Deut. 14:1f.), and so God was in that sense ‘fatherly’ towards his people. Israel, too, could be thought of as ‘the household of God’ (cf. Heb. 3:1–6). The covenant people would not think of the law as onerous, but there were always those who reacted to any kind of law, those who were covenant breakers, and especially those who hankered after a colourful idolatry. Such would have a hostile view of law.

We need, then, to understand that the Books of the Law, the Former and Latter Prophets, the Wisdom Literature and the Psalms all constitute ‘*torah*’. From perusing these we gather the rich meaning of *torah*. James A. Sanders (*Torah and Canon*, Fortress, 1972, pp. 2–3) says:

The larger sense [Old Testament revelation generally] of the word Torah is older. Within the Old Testament use it denotes bodies of instruction or teachings of priests, prophets and sages, and even of parental advice to children; but it appears that the oldest and most common meaning is something approximate to what we mean by the word ‘revelation’. Priestly and prophetic oracles of the oldest vintage are called torahs. And in the case of the prophets, whole collections of oracles or systems of thought (as in Isaiah) are called torahs . . . Recognising the non legalistic aspect of the use of the word Torah is an aid to understanding how even the Pentateuch is basically a narrative, a story, rather than a code of law. A growing emphasis on the Pentateuch or Torah as a revealed set of laws forever binding—even when the social, political and cultic institutions in which they were originally operated were destroyed or significantly were transformed—is in a sense the history of the origins and development of postexilic (after 540 B.C.) Judaism.

We need to keep recognising that if we see *torah* only as an inflexible set of rules we will surely miss its true nature. The fact that Moses told the people, ‘And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances, that you might do them in the land which you are going over to possess’, must mean (i) that they did not necessarily practice all—if any—of these statutes prior to going to the land, and that (ii) these elements might change with change of location, such as in the Exile. It is good, then, to see how the *torah* was taught by parents (Deut. 6:4–9), interpreted by priests (Jer. 18:18; Ezra 7:6, 10;² cf. Neh. 8:2ff.) and prophets, for example Micah 6:8, where the law is known to all, and

² For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel ’ (Ezra 7:10).

Amos 2:4ff. and Isaiah 1:27–28 where Israel is in apostasy to the law. The prophets do not make new law-demands, but new demands concerning the *torah*. The prophets even predict the law will spread to the Gentiles (Isa. 2:1–4; Micah 4:1–3). Israel’s punishments in breaking the law were already mentioned in the Deuteronomic code, and so no judgments of God which Israel experiences down through its history—especially its history of idolatry—are ‘unlawful’, that is, arbitrary. The blessings and the cursings of the law are overtly stated. All of this is, then, *torah*. Calvin, commenting on Psalm 119:153 (‘Look on my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget thy law’) says, ‘Under this one word—“law”—there is no doubt but that David comprehended the sum of all the doctrine which God gave to his church’. In that sense, all that God commands, and to which he calls in covenant is *torah*. We might add to Calvin that where *torah* is *dabar* (word)—‘Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it’ (Ps. 119:140, AV)—then certainty comes to the lover of the law.

COMING TO KNOW GOD’S TRUE LAW

That law was given in grace we have already seen, for the preamble to the stating of the ‘ten words’, as found in Deuteronomy 5:6 and Exodus 20:2, shows. This preamble is filled out when we look at all the saving acts of God for his people in delivering them from being a slave race in Egypt to a free people in Canaan. The Feast of the Passover was intended to be a dynamic reminder of grace which preceded the giving of the law, and for that matter, other festivals might be called celebrations of grace. The giving of the law did not in any way neutralise or cancel grace, since the whole *torah* contained within itself the sacrificial system which was the way of grace for sinning members of the covenant. Rightly understood, there was daily sufficient provision for the uneasy or wounded conscience.

LAW WAS—AND IS—COVENANT STORY

We better understand the law of the Mosaic covenant when we see it as ‘story’, since it grew out of the rich events of the covenant with the fathers or patriarchs, known to us as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Deuteronomy 4:5–14 makes the point that ‘your wisdom and your understanding’ will come from *doing* the law, and the nations around will say:

‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’. For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?’

Walter Brueggemann in his book *The Creative Word* (Fortress Press, 1982), points out in a chapter entitled ‘The Disclosure of Binding’ (pp. 14–39) that the knowledge of the law came to children when they asked questions and the answers were given (Exod. 12:26f.; 13:8, 14; Deut. 6:20–25; Josh. 4:6f.; 4:21f.). The story—or stories—of Israel constituted the answers to the questions. This was a rich way of pedagogy or teaching. The rituals of the feasts were also stories that taught. Thus the law was related to Israel’s daily living, and was authoritative, not because it was a set of legislation but because it brought the harmony which accorded with the functional and moral way of life. The modern idea of ‘situational ethics’, or working our way through ethical situations by a sense of what is ‘good’ or ‘not good’, was foreign to those under law. They had the assurance of being properly directed. Whilst their knowledge of the law was existential, yet their decision regarding what they should do was not.

CONCLUSION TO THE LAW IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: THE LAW ROOTED IN THE NATURE AND PERSON OF THE LIVING GOD

Certainly Psalms 1, 19, and 119 show that men and women under the covenant loved the law of God. If anyone were to question love of the law by believers in Israel, then they should give many months to the study of these Psalms. We could say that the law, being functional, human beings would be more at ease in obeying than disobeying it. In the former case they would find deep pleasure in obedience and in the latter case they would be ‘going against the grain’, living life perversely.

If we would be attracted by the law as the mind and will of God for his people with whom he was in communion, then the reading of Psalms 1, 19, and 119 will indeed be a good aid. Just to love God with all one’s being, is surely to walk in his law.³ We come to know the *torah* of God and desire to live by it. Another way to know the law and love it is to see the attitude of the New Testament writers to it. This we will later proceed to do, but the Old Testament accounts of blessings received in Israel when it obeyed and cursings when it did not, tell us of the dynamic nature of law. It is primarily relational (i) towards God, (ii) towards others, and (iii) towards all the creation as one meets it.

Otto Weber comments:⁴

The law characterises life in the covenant as life in obedience and thus as historical life. The fundamental ‘I am’ of the decalogue is inseparable from the corresponding ‘Thou shalt’ of the commandments. If the ‘I am’ were isolated, then Yahweh would no longer be acknowledged as the Lord who commands in his grace, nor the covenant the gift which obligates: the covenant with Yahweh would have become Israel’s own possession and would have thus been broken. If the ‘Thou shalt’ were isolated, then the commandments would have become abstract statements of norms which would be subject to ethical investigation. Everything depends on ‘I am’. Historically we see that in Israel both the social and legal order deteriorated when Yahweh was made into an idol or his sole lordship denied in practice. But this ‘I am’ is never separate from the ‘Thou shalt’. The prophets, as defenders of the pure ‘I am’ of the God of Israel, were as such, the attackers of the legal, moral and social decay in Israel.

In all of this matter of covenant and law there is no question raised that obedience shall be other than *by faith*, and certainly self-justification by doing works of the law is totally absent, even as a concept. At the same time, there is no question that the ‘ten words’ and their concomitant ‘statutes and ordinances’ were in the imperative, albeit given on the basis of liberating love and continuing grace (*chesed*). With these ideas in mind, we come to the New Testament to see the relationship of faith in regard to obedience, an obedience which is in no way nomistic, and which—as with Israel—is faith that springs from the salvation of God.

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE LAW

As in previous studies we have tried to show the indispensability of the gifts to both Israel and ‘the Israel of God’, so now we need to look at the law and ‘the Israel of God’—the *ecclesia*. Our understanding of it in the Old Testament, especially as we have outlined it in the paragraph immediately above, should be helpful in our understanding it in the New Testament; namely,

³ Here we repeat what we have said above regarding the law being the functional image—so to speak—of the living God. We quote again J. A. Motyer in his statement, ‘Man is the living, personal image of God; the law is the written preceptual image of God’ (op. cit., p. 624). By this he means that Man is fulfilling his true image by obedience to the law, and such is really obedience to God, yet it is also more in that Man is acting according to the image in which God has made him (cf. Col. 3:9–10). This explains the joy of obeying the law, for the person is thus being renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created him.

⁴ *Foundations of Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1988), p. 295.

that law is rooted in covenant, the covenant is rooted in God's nature, and the law is obeyed only through faith, whilst faith is always dependent upon *chesed* as constantly forgiving grace. How much richer is the law under the richer New Covenant of wholesome grace!

THE LAW OF CHRIST IN THE GOSPELS

It is essential, then, that we understand Christ's relationship with the law, or, better still, his relationship with 'the law and the prophets'. It has been pointed out by many commentators that the Sermon on the Mount is a fine exposition of the law of God in its true, essential being. Whilst it may be a true criticism that the Pharisees and others had developed a legalistic view of the law, in fact they were virtually antinomian, at least in the sense that they reduced the law from its true nature to a humanised version, one which they could pursue and achieve. It was not that Jesus lifted the law above what it had been, or ridiculed it by saying, 'It has been said to you of old, but . . .', for he was revealing the true spirit of the law. The introduction—if we may call the Beatitudes that—set the understanding of true law, one that demanded a certain spirit of being in approach to obedience to the Father. It set it also in the context of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom which Paul later calls 'the kingdom of the Son of his love' (Col. 1:13). The *torah* of Christ has to do with the Kingdom and, in one sense has to do with nothing else. Thus we can rightly speak of 'the law of the Kingdom'. We also observe that, since the Father is mentioned so many times and in connection with so many actions regarding life in the Kingdom, that the Sermon must be of 'the law of the Father', as it is 'the law of Christ' in the sense that he had taken it to himself. If the Sermon on the Mount is the key to understanding love for God and neighbour as set out in the Decalogue, then the Decalogue is the key to understanding the Sermon on the Mount.

We cannot here take the Sermon step by step, but we can observe that Jesus did not see himself as derogating the law of the Mosaic covenant, but rather unveiling its riches and reality. He said:

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

This is, indeed, 'the law of Christ': not only the law that he kept, but the law that he expounded in the name of God. That is, the law of love, and especially in the relational sense, can be seen in Matthew 5:43–48. That his words are true *torah* and *dabar* can be seen by 7:21–27, where Jesus reveals his place of authority as judge on 'that day' (vv. 22–23):

Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'

Verses 24–27 reveal that he has not only been making a commentary on the *torah* of God, but that what he has said *is*, in fact, that very *torah*—the *torah* of God, the *torah* of Christ and the *torah* of the Spirit, even the *torah* of the Triune God.

Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall,

because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.

There can be no doubt that Jesus is claiming his word is as the *dabar* (command) of the *torah*, and in that sense, though Jesus is not here indicated as the new Moses, he is that, and even more than a new Moses. The people had not previously heard such words, nor witnessed such authority. Verses 28–29 indicate this:

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

‘THE LAW OF CHRIST’ IN THE EPISTLES

The two explicit mentions of ‘the law of Christ’ are found in I Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2. In the first Paul says, ‘To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law towards God but under the law of Christ—that I might win the weak’. He says clearly he is not lawless—‘not being without law toward God’—but that he is ‘under the law of Christ’: that is, he is ‘enlawed’ to Christ. To Paul the idea of being without law was unthinkable. In the context of his utterance, his being under the law of Christ, or under the law to Christ, relates to his desire to ‘that I might by all means save some’. He is not under the law only in order to save some, for that would mean his being enlawed to Christ was utilitarian. No: all his life was lived passionately in the law of Christ, a law he would understand to be no less the law of God the Father, or the law of the Holy Spirit.

In the second reference (Gal. 6:2) he says, ‘Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ’. This must equate with the law of love. In Galatians 5:13–14, he has said, ‘through love be servants one of another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”’. This accords with Romans 13:8–10:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

‘He who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law’ is the principle. Note the use of the verb ‘to fulfil’ (*pleroo*) in both the Galatian and Roman passages. Linked with Romans 8:4 and Galatians 6:2 (*anapleroo*), the statements in all references speak of the law being fulfilled in us rather than us fulfilling the law, and this is an important point. In Romans 8:4 and Galatians 5:16ff., the fulfilling of the law arises from walking in the Spirit, for to live in the Spirit is to experience the fulfilling of the law within us. It could not be otherwise.

There is a further reference to ‘the law of Christ’ which, though not explicit, is thinking of law as ‘Dominical’, that is, as the mind of Christ, out of his *torah*. In I Corinthians 7, Paul is giving advice in regard to marriage, the possible separation of spouses and the states of unmarried persons. For the most part he proceeds as though what he is saying is evidently correct, and that the basis for such advice is that it has already proceeded from Christ, the Lord. In verses 10 and 12, he says he is giving a certain charge, ‘To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord’, ‘To the rest I say, not the Lord’, and these statements do not mean that Paul is speaking from his own mind, but really from the mind of the Lord. It is just that Christ had not given explicit pronouncements, but Paul being an apostle could speak *as* the Lord.

There can be no question about the law of Christ being the law of God. What we distil from the Gospels is a review and a conclusion of what we have seen above, namely, (i) Jesus in no

way denigrated law: he insisted that it must be fulfilled; (ii) Jesus did not bring a higher law—as such—but an interpretation of the law which raised it higher than that presented by the lawyers, scribes and Pharisees; (iii) *All law in Jesus' view had—and has—to do with the Kingdom of God* (of heaven). Just as in Israel it had to do with covenant and kingdom—Israel was a theocracy—so in Jesus' teaching. This is clear in the Sermon on the Mount; and (iv) Paul's Epistles speak of 'the law of Christ' (I Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). This could refer to (i) *the commands which Jesus gave* (cf. John 13:34; 14:15; 15:12–13; Matt. 28:19–20; Acts 1:2); (ii) *the law which Jesus followed and fulfilled in his flesh*, or (iii) *the law of love* (Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:13–14; cf. James 1:22–25; 2:8, 12) which was virtually the Decalogue which Jesus summarised as love to God and love to one's neighbour.

PAUL ON LAW AND GOSPEL: THE LAW AS LETHAL

One of the problems regarding law in the New Testament is that many start off in the dialectic of Law and Gospel without first seeing the relationship of Christ to the law. Because Paul points out that sinners are universally under the condemnation of the law (Rom. 1:18 – 3:23; cf. Gal. 2:16ff.; 3:10–20; Phil. 3:8–10) and this means the curse of death on them, some readers and scholars have taken the point that the law is a bad thing. If anything is bad it is not the law—which Paul says is 'holy', 'just', 'good', and 'spiritual' (Rom. 7:12–14)—but the sinner, the one under the condemnation of the law. The law in condemning sinful Man is not 'bad', but it is the sinner who is bad.

Law and gospel are separate entities, but not unrelated ones. Whilst they must never be merged so that they are considered to be the one, yet they must not be opposed the one to the other. They are contrastive but not opposites. Paul makes it clear that it is our *view* of the law as sinners which makes us hostile to it, or causes us to believe we can—and do—keep it. In Galatians 3:19–23, Paul shows that the law was added *after* the covenantal promises given to Abraham, and one reason was to increase the transgression (cf. Rom. 4:15, where the law brings wrath). The law could not bring life to the nomist, but God uses the law to imprison all under the power of sin so that the way of faith is shown to be the only way of coming to life, that is, to justification. With the coming of faith there is no longer any point in seeking to use law for self-justification. Thus the law leads to Christ, so that it is not an enemy but a custodian or disciplinarian whose aim is to lead us to Christ. Romans 8:3 (cf. 2:26) suggests that the law did want to help us to do something, namely fulfil the 'just requirement' it had demanded.

That the law is lethal to sinners is clear from the passages we have quoted above, and if we take just the Pauline view of the law, then we see that it is no basis for justification (Gal. 2:16); brings the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:19); incites sin, increases the trespass (Gal. 3:19; Rom. 7:5); brings wrath (Rom. 4:15); brings the curse (Gal. 3:10ff.); and gives power to evil forces (cf. Col. 2:14–15). At the same time it proves to be that custodian which brings us to Christ. Without the law, the idea and experience of grace could never happen, since the law brings death (Gal. 2:19–21).

LAW AND GOSPEL

Law and gospel are brought together in Romans 8:1–11. Because of the need for brevity we will look at the first few verses of this chapter, since they tell us we are freed by Christ, through the gospel, and by means of the law of the Spirit, to fulfil the *dikaïoma* or the 'just requirement' of the law, thus vindicating the law as 'the law of God'.

The statement of verse 1, 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in

Christ Jesus', could be linked to 7:1–6, for it would carry on naturally from there since that passage speaks of a person always being under law, but then released from such legal bondage to the law of the husband by the death of Christ—'discharged from the law'—so that the person may now be married to Christ 'to bear fruit for God'. Once a slave under the old written code, the person is now a slave 'in the new life of the Spirit'. Thus the statement of 'no condemnation' would make sense. At the same time it seems natural to follow on from the text of chapter 7, so that the plain statement of 25b—that one is a slave to the law of God with the mind, to the law of sin with the flesh—shows nothing has changed in one's justification. Thus verse 2 fits both 7:6 and 7:25b, that is, one is set free from the law of sin and death. The law of sin and death is 'the written code' which, although in itself was 'holy', 'just', 'good' and 'spiritual' (7:12, 13, 14; cf. I Tim. 1:8), yet became the law of sin for two reasons: (i) the person wishing to justify himself by means of it was sinning, since this autonomous act was sinful, being of the human ego and not of God (Gal. 3:10–11; cf. Lev. 18:5), and (ii) the transgressing of the precepts of the law (Gal. 3:10; cf. Deut. 27:26) was the occasion of sinning. It became the law of death to him since the outcome of sin is death. In 7:13, sin works death in the person by means of the law, and in 7:5, 10 and Galatians 2:19, Paul speaks of dying by the law.

Even so, we are now in Christ and in him there is no condemnation. How, then, does this happen to be? It is because—verse 2—'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set [us] free from the law of sin and death'. What is the 'law of the Spirit of life'? Since this law of the Spirit (*nomos*) obtains only 'in Christ Jesus', then it must be the gospel as brought to us by the Spirit. Just as in 7:6 we were 'discharged from the law'—being unable to discharge ourselves—so here this 'law of the Spirit' set us free for we could not set ourselves free. So, then, the law of the Spirit is the Spirit taking the gospel and setting us free from law-bondage by means of that gospel. Yet the Spirit not only sets us free *from* the law as a death-dealing regime but also liberates us *into* a new law, which is not the gospel, but the Spirit himself comes to us via the gospel. We are thus emancipated from again attempting self-justifying action through the 'written code', because we live life freely in the Spirit and in Christ. It is difficult to conceive of a 'new law', for it might seem merely an exchange for the old one, so that we may soon set about justifying ourselves by a new law when in fact there is no new law. It is the law or command of God called 'the law of God' (8:7) and 'the law of Christ' (I Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2), and both of these comport with 'the law of the Spirit of life'. What is primary in this verse is that believers have come into a new aeon, a new era, a new way of living, utter freedom from nomistic burdens, self-justifying pressures, and all of it by the presence and action of the Spirit, and all of it 'in Christ'. 'In Christ' is the only place and situation in which the Spirit works.

Verses 3–4 take us on further for, whilst the law could not do what it would do because of human fleshliness, God was able to so do by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. That is, God judged sin in Christ's flesh and so judged it in ours at the same time (II Cor. 5:14b, 21; cf. Gal. 2:20) in order that being set free from condemnation 'the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us'. What was it that the law could not do? It could not assist us to attain to that place where we could have the 'just requirement' of the law *fulfilled* in us. Of course the law could not so judge sin that it could set us free, since only God in Christ could do that. Christ received our condemnation in his flesh, so that now, in the presence of the Spirit and by his power, 'the just requirement of the law can be fulfilled in us'. Note that we do not, unaided, fulfil the just requirement of the law. We are not freed from law's condemnation so that we may, *ourselves*, fulfil the just requirement of the law. We must realise that we are never put on to fulfil the law *from* or *of* ourselves. Romans 7:13–25 reminds us of the impossibility of such fulfilment. Even so, the 'just requirement' of the law stands to be fulfilled. It is fulfilled by us when God is working within us, as in I Corinthians 15:10; II Corinthians 3:5–6; Ephesians 1:19; Philippians 2:12–13; I Thessalonians 2:13; and Hebrews 13:21.

CONCLUSION: THE PASTORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LAW

We can see that since the law is rooted in the nature of God, then we must understand the reality of the Triune Godhead, the interpersonal relationships of the Three Persons, and the law of love which is in action between them, that law which we call 'the law of God'; the preceptual image of God which Man, being made in the image of God, must of necessity obey since it is the truly functional, ontological way of living and behaving. It is wholly the law of love. For nomism or antinomianism to be allowed to be our principle of life must mean tragedy within the community of Christ. That which can be called 'the law of the Father', 'the law of Christ', and 'the law of the Spirit', must be taught and given full play in 'the Israel of God'. Just as it was always at the heart of Israel, so now it must be—in the context of all the other gifts—the true way of life. It cost the Cross to bring it into full and joyous play.

Study Eight

The Several Gifts of Israel—V, The Worship

INTRODUCTION: THE GIFTS ARE ALL ONE

We must keep in mind the fact that the ‘several gifts’ of Romans 9:4–5 belong to Israel as a whole, and that no gift should be seen as an entity in itself, separated from the other gifts. This is the same for their Old Testament and New Testament references. In our Study on Law we saw that Moses claimed exclusivity for the law God had given Israel (cf. Deut. 4:5–8). At the heart of this covenant law was also covenant worship (cf. Deut. 10:12ff.). John 4:20–24 (cf. Phil. 3:3; Heb. 9:14) makes it clear that the gift of worship to God’s new people of the New covenant is also unique to the Church. This Study is not an attempt to cover the whole of worship, which would entail examining in detail all the *systems* of worship—primal, pagan, idolatrous and covenantal. This would require a second Study, something we are not prepared to do. In this Study we simply seek to grasp the general principle of true worship.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD ‘WORSHIP’

An English dictionary soon shows us what we knew anyway; namely, that we give honour, veneration and sometimes adoration to that which we esteem highly, seeing it as worthy of what we are doing in regard to it. Simply put, ‘worship’ (‘worth-ship’) is giving *appropriate* worth to any being, object or situation in which we are involved.¹ This does not mean that our idea of ‘appropriate’ is necessarily correct or that motives for worship are pure. The fact of idolatry shows us that. To worship God is to give the honour and thanksgiving due to him, but then many do not know him. Paul said, ‘No one understands, no one seeks for God’ (Rom. 3:11), which is clearly a post-Fall statement regarding Man. It is clear from Romans 1:18–25 that Man rejected the knowledge of God, and the elements of this were (i) the rejection of his glory, (ii) refusal to give thanks, (iii) loss of intelligence necessary for worship, and (iv) exchange of the worship of God for the worship of idols.² From these four points (above) we can positively know what is worship in practice.

In the OT the verb ‘to serve’ (*abad*) is often translated ‘to worship’ and indeed these two meanings are synonymous. The noun from the verb (*abodah*) is ‘service’ or ‘adoration’, whilst the word for ‘servant’ generally used is *ebed*, but there is the noun *abad* also. There is another verb for worship (*hishtachawah*), generally meaning ‘to bow down to’, ‘to prostrate oneself’.

The Greek verb *latreuo* (‘to serve’) and the noun *latreia* (‘service’) in the LXX are used ninety and nine times respectively, but in the NT, twenty-one and five times respectively. The

¹ A number of scholars do not agree that worship, as we understand from the English word, is applicable to the primary idea of worship in the Bible. That is, they deny the biblical meaning of worship is ‘giving worth to’. Some suggest human beings could err in ‘giving worth’ to God. Whilst this may be true, yet the first three of the Ten Commandments safeguard the matter of ‘giving worth’. I believe there is a good biblical case for ‘giving worth’ or ‘honouring’, as the English word suggests. True worship springs from revelation and preserves a true view of God.

² See Romans 12:1–2 (cf. Deut. 10:12). True worship of God is ‘reasonable’ or ‘logical’, something of which is missing from frenetic worship and some so-called ‘spontaneous’ or ‘feeling’ worship today.

other Greek word *leitourgeo* (verb), ‘to serve’, ‘to minister’ and *leitourgia* (noun) ‘service’, ‘ministry’ are used in the LXX generally with the priestly ministry in mind, but in the NT both verbs and nouns are fairly interchangeable, and the sum of the matter is that ‘to worship’ and ‘to serve’ are virtually synonymous. The equivalent of *hishtachawah* is, roughly speaking, *proskuneo*, ‘to bend the knee’, ‘to pay homage’. On the whole we can sum up the words as adding up to service and worship being the one.

Whilst a word Study repays the time given, the theological idea of worship is what is of practical value. In this sense we need to see the origins and nature of worship and so we need to know the contexts in which these words are used, an exercise we do not have time for in this Study but which is worthwhile in order to grasp the full idea of worship. Worship has been said to be our response to God’s initiative in seeking us, presenting himself in the act of reconciliation first and then in having communion with us, and thus evoking our response as communion.³ Thus the ideas of honouring and serving are present in all worship.

A SHORT HISTORY OF HUMAN WORSHIP IN THE LIGHT OF COVENANT

The Beginning of Worship

A little further on in our Study we will see that worship begins with, and proceeds from, the nature of God as the Triune God. This knowledge of God as Triune is a latter revelation than that given to Israel. Israel always thought of itself as Adam and so saw its beginnings in him, and so flowing from him would be worship. Where and when, then, does worship begin but in Eden? The principle of it is seen in Jesus’ great statement, ‘God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth’, is clear enough. God is not seen, for he is unseeable. He is not known, because he is ineffable. He is only known when he makes himself known. Human worship of God, then, originates with the creation of Man. Primary worship is Edenic worship where Man had fellowship with God. Man is one in communion with God because he is the image of God, and so worship is communion. It is that response to God of the human heart, as (i) a response to the glory of God, (ii) a giving of worth to God commensurate with his *revealed* glory, and (iii) praise and thanksgiving for his creation of Man and his giving of (a) the creational mandate of vocation (Gen. 1:28f.), and (b) of gifts to him.⁴ All of this is intelligent worship, that is, of the mind as well as of the affections (Rom. 12:2; cf. Deut. 10:12).

Worship Following the Fall

Since worship is communion with God from a pure heart—which presupposes holy love between God and Man—then the Fall constitutes a break between God and Man. The break does not come from God’s side, but it is there. In addition to the account in Genesis 3, Romans 1:19–25 shows us that Man, in rejecting God, lost the intelligence to worship, and devised surrogate objects of worship (cf. Acts 17:28–29). So follows the history of idolatry.⁵

³ An excellent study of worship is David Peterson’s *Engaging with God* (Apollos, 1992). Much of my present Study has utilised the material in the 1995 Western Australian Pastors’ School Notes titled *The Way and Wonder of Worship*. (Hereafter we will refer to these notes as ‘WAPSN/95’.) NCPI published a book of mine by the same title—*The Way and Wonder of Worship*—in 1989, and this could prove useful. I believe there is useful material, also, in the Living Faith Studies, No. 12—*Worship: Its Meaning, Significance and Experience*, and No. 23, *Praise and Music in the Scriptures*.

⁴ Pure worship can be seen and assessed by the vicarious descriptions of the episodes of worship as seen in the Book of the Revelation. This worship is offered in heaven by both celestial and terrestrial creatures, and so lacks the imperfections always resident in earthly human worship.

⁵ See the study ‘The Battle for Worship’, WAPSN/95.

WORSHIP AND COVENANT

Introduction: The Nature and Place of Covenant

In a Study Session such as this there will be some pastors, elders and readers who come from a covenant tradition and others who do not.⁶ Even so, all would know the facts of the covenants of God,⁷ such as those made with Noah, with Abraham, Moses, David and Christ. Some theologians speak of ‘a covenant of works’ as foundational to the idea of covenant, and some add ‘the covenant of redemption’. The covenant of works is supposed to be the covenant God made with the primal couple at creation, namely, that if they did the good works set out by God then he would give them the blessings of the covenant: otherwise, not. There is no such covenant indicated in the Genesis account, nor are any of God’s covenants contractual.

That all theology is covenantal is an old axiom. That all covenants—especially those following the Fall—are unilateral, non-contractual and of grace must fully be seen, otherwise the nature of God becomes ‘contractual’ and all grace disappears. When grace disappears then worship becomes contractual, a burden, and not out of love for the creating, redeeming God.

The Covenant Which Embraces All Covenants— the Covenant of God

The first mention of covenant, as such, is in Genesis chapters 6 to 9. This has been called the Noahic covenant. Genesis 6:18 seems to say God will make a covenant with Noah, and 9:9–17 seems to be saying the same thing, but this is not the case. God is not *making* a new covenant with Noah but *establishing* a covenant already in existence. To ‘cut a covenant’ (*karat berith*) is to make a covenant, but to ‘establish a covenant’ (*heqim berith*) is to confirm what is already in existence, and this is the term used in these chapters.

We do not have a great deal of time and space to deal with so vast a subject, but we can, I believe, rightfully conclude (i) God’s Triune nature is innately covenantal, so that (ii) his act of creation is wholly covenantal. Passages which will help us see something of this are Jeremiah 33:19–26, Isaiah 24:4ff., and Genesis 9:9–17 where the covenant is with all elements of creation.

What we need to keep in mind is that God’s covenant—we can call it ‘the covenant of God’ or ‘the covenant of creation’—is with everything in creation and this means, in regard to all humanity, ‘with every person’. It is true that Man broke the covenant of God at the time of the Fall, but God did not break it with Man. This means Man can rightfully worship God *if he will!* (see Acts 17:24–30).

The Practical Significance of the Covenant of God

We cannot here argue the full case, but simply state that all men everywhere have an idea (image) of God, of covenant, of the law and of worship. They have images we would call

⁶ For example, churches of the Calvinistic and Lutheran Reformed traditions make much of the idea of covenant, whilst churches known as ‘congregational’ or ‘free churches’ do not use covenantal theology very much. All churches speak of ‘the new covenant’ and in that sense all churches have some covenantal theology.

⁷ Two books by William Dumbrell are most helpful, *Covenant and Creation* (Lancer Books, 1984) and *The Beginning of the End and the End of the Beginning* (Lancer Books, 1985). Also most helpful are O. Palmer Robertson’s *The Christ of the Covenants* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), and Herman Hoeksema’s *Reformed Dogmatics* (Reformed Free Pub., 1976). A volume of mine now in the process of publication is called *Love’s Most Glorious Covenant* and should be helpful.

theological, cosmological and anthropological. All these images are wrong, but Man must have them as an ontological necessity because the way he is demands such. Where there is faith in God—this being a gift of God (cf. Heb. 11:4ff.; I John 3:10–11)—then these images can be correct: otherwise not. We should always address others knowing in ourselves that God has them in covenant, even though they reject this relationship. We should recognise (i) that their images are wrong, and (ii) that all outside of God are in idolatry, and the idols have their covenants to bind Man, all of which are strongly contractual and thus tyrannical.

All the Covenants of God

The covenants we here name as (i) of God, (ii) with Noah, (iii) with Abraham, (iv) with Israel, (v) with David, and (vi) through Christ, are each called ‘the everlasting covenant’. In theological fact they are all the one, that is, within the covenant of God are the Noahic, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Davidic and the New covenants.

What concerns our Study is the worship which obtains *within these covenants*. We can gather that knowing God by creation, which Man abandoned at the Fall, the choice he then made was to refuse to honour God, to be thankful to him, and to have a reasonable mind in worship. He deluded himself regarding that wisdom, as he used it for idols, and as he exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for corruptible (mortal) forms—idols. In this way he *worshipped* and *served* the creature rather than the creator.

If we take the reverse of what Man did as shown in Romans 1:19–32, then we will arrive at the nature of true worship, namely (i) honouring God, (ii) being thankful (thanksgiving), (iii) making reasonable (logical) worship, (div glorifying God, and (v) worshipping and serving the Creator.

This, then, is the heart of true worship and this will be true worship for all covenants. We will see that the Three Persons worship in unity by honouring (glorifying), giving, receiving and serving one another. The five points above really comport with the four we will speak of the Trinity. We thus have Man being in God’s image, and so deriving his power to worship and the shape of his worship, by and in his communion with God.

It is reasonable to assume that Cain followed the fallen pattern of worship and he did not ‘do right’. Abel did, but he did it by faith. We assume that Abel knew the Fall meant Man must sacrifice to God by faith, through the grace of God. We cannot know for certain the *manner* of the elements of glorification, thanksgiving, worshipping and serving, but they must have been present, and whilst those elements were not directly propitiatory, the fact that God gave the offering (cf. Lev. 17:11) certainly meant it was propitiatory, since Abel’s sins were forgiven. Noah’s offering to God (Gen. 8:20–22) after the Flood has been a matter of speculation, but since ‘the Lord smelled the pleasing odour’, it would surely have contained all covenantal elements of sacrifice, and most probably have been propitiatory regarding the human race, as well as expressing gratitude to God for salvation from the judgment of the Flood (cf. I Pet. 3:18–22).

Patriarchal Worship—The Abrahamic Covenant

It is a fact of history that peoples worshipped gods. Thus Micah 4:5, ‘For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD [YAHWEH] our God for ever and ever’. Each people had its own sanctuaries, and generally fought other peoples in the name of their gods. Abraham was an idolater (Josh. 24:2–3) but ‘the God of glory appeared to [him]’ (Acts 7:1–2). When God appeared to each of the patriarchs they built altars or memorials and offered sacrifices, refusing to worship the surrounding deities. This brings us to the matter of worship and culture. We have said, in other Studies, that culture comes from cultus. Cultus is

the system of worship a clan or a nation espouses, and cultural elements are consonant with it; indeed derive from it. Thus—at Babel—the scattering of the peoples by means of languages created ‘the nations’ in their strong forms of culture and worship, since they chose ‘gods’ rather than God (cf. Acts 17:26; Deut 32:8–9).

Israel and Worship—The Sinaitic Covenant

Whilst some ancient cults were elaborate, the worship of Israel was different from all and recognised as such.⁸ Israel was to be the priest nation amongst all the nations (Exod. 19:5–6). It was given the ‘apparatus’ for true worship—‘the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises’⁹—and as such had the tent of meeting, the tabernacle, and later, the temple, all built as the writer of Hebrews has pointed out ‘according to the pattern which Moses saw on the mountain’ (Sinai), and this was the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary and heavenly worship. Rules were prescribed for the formation of the priesthood, for true worship through sacrifices and festivals, for cleansing and sanctification. If for the patriarchs God would appear from time to time, yet in Israel God dwelt in the midst of his people. The tabernacle was the place of his dwelling in the Holy of Holies where there was the mercy seat and the overshadowing cherubim. All Israel was holy, but the tabernacle/temple was especially holy—the altar of sacrifice, the holy place, the Holy of Holies (where the Presence dwelt)—all in ascending order of holiness.¹⁰

All of this was known as the worship of the Mosaic covenant, and it was exclusive to one people, Israel. No one could take advantage of this worship, unless he were a proselyte.

Worship in and of the New Covenant¹¹

This is a vast subject and needs to be opened fully, although we here lack both time and space for a full Study. It should be known, because often worship is structured in ignorance of the principles of true worship. The heart of true worship with its great High Priest, Jesus, is set out marvellously in Hebrews and this Epistle ought to be taught in detail. To catch up much that constitutes the idea of New Testament worship, a quote from James Torrance is here helpful:

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus comes to be the Priest of Creation, to do for men what man fails to do, to offer to God the worship and the praise that we have failed to offer, to glorify God by a life of perfect obedience, to be the One true servant of the Lord, in whom and through whom we are renewed in the image of God and in the worship of God. Jesus comes, as our Brother Man, to be our great High Priest, that He might carry on His loving heart the joys, the sorrows, the prayers, the conflicts of all His creatures, that He might reconcile all things to God, that He might intercede for all nations as our eternal Mediator and Advocate, that He might stand in for us in the presence of His Father, when in our failure and bewilderment we don’t know how to pray as we ought, and forget to pray. By His Spirit He helps us in our infirmities.

In that He is the Head of all things, He makes us His Body, and calls us to be a royal priesthood, a corporate priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, that we might be identified with Him and participate with Him in His great priestly work and ministry of intercession, that our prayers on earth might be the echo of His prayers in heaven. Whatever else our worship is, it is our liturgical Amen to the Worship of Christ.¹²

⁸ See Deuteronomy 4:6–8.

⁹ Romans 9:4–5.

¹⁰ Whilst Israelites were free to worship God anywhere, and not necessarily with a liturgy, yet in the Tabernacle (or Temple) everything was done according to prescription. This left no place for experiment or the intrusion of any worshipper’s novel or fancy ideas.

¹¹ Whilst we speak of worship of the new covenant we need to see who is the God of this covenant, and realise that he is the Triune God, and that such understanding will develop our understanding of worship.

¹² J. B. Torrance, ‘The Place of Jesus Christ in Worship’ in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, ed. by R. S. Anderson (Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 348–349.

From this we can proceed to see that Christ as the True Worshipper not only lived in true worship but set up what we might call the structure of New Covenant worship. His was a High Priestly work from the inception of his ministry at his baptism through to his Cross, Resurrection and Ascension. He was, and is, ‘the minister in the sanctuary’. It is to the heart of that sanctuary that we now penetrate through Christ (Heb. 10:19–22). He has obviated the old sacrifices, since his death has once for all finished the matter of sin’s penalty, pollution and power. He is ‘the New Man’; he is the true temple, and has constituted his people as that new temple. He is the glory of God, the true Image, and the Holy Spirit has been given that we might now have what we call ‘Triune worship’, the very worship within the Godhead, and aided by the members of that Godhead.

As we have said¹³, the Father initiates the worship, the Son is the great High Priest, the minister in the sanctuary, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of worship, so that we whose dead works have been purified, have the new consciousness of God and so offer him spiritual worship. As to modes of worship in the New Testament we are unable here to expand. These will be apparent, overall, through all the Studies. Even so, a quotation from Hebrews 12:18–24, and the exhortation of 12:28–29, makes rich and stimulating reading:

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned’. Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear’. But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

WORSHIP OF AND IN THE TRIUNE GOD

Worship of the Triune God *within* the Three Persons

Luther once said, ‘to know God is to worship him’. We now come to that part of our Study where we need to know God as he is in his Triune Self, and the worship which happens first within the Triune Godhead, and the human worship which happens because of that Godhead.

Introduction: What Do We Mean by ‘The Triune Worship’?

We mean two things: (i) the heart of all worship lies *within* the Godhead. The Three Persons of the Godhead have mutual worship within the Godhead, and (ii) the worship we offer to God cannot be offered apart from the Three Persons, for they call us to, and assist us in, worship of the Godhead.

THE HEART OF ALL WORSHIP WITHIN THE GODHEAD

A statement such as our heading cannot be understood unless we know something of the Triune God, and understand the Three Persons to constitute the Divine Family, or Community of love. John’s statement, ‘God is love’ (I John 4:8, 16) has to be fully understood. In the context he is saying, ‘The Father is love’. Nowhere is it said that the Son (Jesus) is love. The

¹³ In sections below we will deal more particularly with the Three Persons and their part in bringing us into worship.

Father is the *fons divinitatis*, ‘the fountain of love’. The Son is called ‘the Son of his love’ (Col. 1:13), and we gather that the Holy Spirit is ‘the Spirit of love’ (Rom. 5:5; 15:30; Gal. 5:22–23; cf. Col. 1:9). We must not understand love to be a factor which binds the Three together, but rather that the Son is eternally generated by the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This means there is a hierarchical relationship, and yet as such, the Son is in the Father, the Father in the Son, the Spirit in both and both in the Spirit (cf. John 10:38; 17:20ff.).

It is expected of humans that they ‘honour all men’.¹⁴ The term ‘honour’ is better than ‘worship’ in modern understanding, but if we do not honour our fellow creatures we do not worship God (cf. Prov. 14:31). All honouring of human beings comes from first honouring (worshipping) God.

We have said that worship is communion and proceeds in the context of communion. The Trinity, often spoken of as ‘ontological’, is a relational community, and within itself acts in the ways we shall shortly examine, and these ways are called *ad intra*. Sometimes spoken of as ‘the economic Trinity’, the works which God does, so to speak, outside of himself, are called works *ad extra*. Some theologians argue correctly that both sets of operations are really the one. We will take four elements *ad intra*, namely:

- (a) **All Three Persons honour one another**—inter-honouring. In John’s Gospel it is clear that Jesus seeks to glorify the Father, the Father glorifies the Son, and the Holy Spirit glorifies both. In the Synoptic Gospels, as also in John, the Father and the Son glorify the Spirit.¹⁵
- (b) **All Three Persons serve one another**—inter-serving. There can be no question about the Father serving the Son in sending him into this world and aiding him in his ministry, for the Son continually applies to the Father. Likewise the Son serves the Spirit in that he is subject to him, and the Spirit serves the Son in that he aids him. Likewise the Spirit is served by the Father and the Son in that he is one with them and draws his ministry from them.¹⁶
- (c) **All Three Persons give to one another**—inter-giving. The Father constantly gives to the Son all that he needs. Indeed he says he has nothing but what the Father has given him. John 17 speaks so many times of ‘the Father has given me’. At the same time the Son renders service and glorification to the Father amidst his life of worship. Likewise the Spirit gives of himself to the Father and the Son.
- (d) **All Three Persons receive from one another.**¹⁷ Love that gives and does not receive is not love. Hence the Father receives all that the Son renders to him, all that the Spirit gives in service of the Father, and both receive the gifts of the Father.

These four elements constitute communion, and so, worship, *all of it in love*. So, then, *there*

¹⁴ The exercise of honouring when the word is examined by means of a concordance is an interesting one. If we do not honour, i.e. ‘give appropriate worth’, to all that God has created, then we do not truly worship. Inappropriate worth may result in either dishonouring the creation, or in idolatry.

¹⁵ (i) For the Father glorifying the Son see John 5:22ff.; 13:31–32; 17:1–5, 22. All things are given into the hands of the Son by the Father (John 3:36; Matt. 11:27; John 13:3; II Pet. 1:16–19). (ii) For the Son glorifying the Father see Matthew 9:8; cf. 15:31; John 14:13; 13:31–32. (iii) For the Holy Spirit glorifying the Father and the Son see John 16:12–15. (iv) For the Son and the Father glorifying the Holy Spirit see Matthew 12:31–32, where words can be spoken against the Son of Man but not against the Holy Spirit, for such blasphemy will be counted as unforgivable. This rates the Holy Spirit highly.

¹⁶ For giving of the Father to the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Spirit giving to both, see ‘glorification’ (above). In John’s Gospel the verb ‘to give’ is used seventeen times of the Father’s giving to the Son. Giving in the biblical situation of the Three Persons presupposes receiving also.

¹⁷ I refer readers to the study, ‘The Study of Relationships—Human and Divine’ (NCTM Monday Pastors’ Study Group, 4/6/90) available on request. Also the study ‘The Trinity and Relationships’ of 3/3/91. Our present study is too brief to work out the vast system of the four actions of the Three Persons set out above.

is no true human worship which does not derive from the Triune worship. That is, Man is not left to devise his own worship.

Our Worship Derives from the Godhead

We must remember that in creation Man—as the image of God—is in covenant relationship with God. That is the gift of God’s creating him, and is not ‘of grace’, common or special. Within the Godhead what we might call ‘the covenant relationship of the Three Persons’ is innate. Hence, when Man is created, covenant relationship is innate in him, deriving from the Godhead.

Another way of saying this is that by creation Man is in communion with God because he is made in the image of God, and that communion—that image—is the basis and reality of his worship of God. No other creature is in the image of God or has such relational communion. This means that worship of God is innate in Man.¹⁸ In this sense Man—as created—did not need to learn to worship. It was expected of him. His rebellion at the Fall was a knowing rejection of all elements of worship of God and a transference of them to the idols.

If then our worship derives from the Godhead, we are not left to devise worship and we know it will operate in honouring (glorifying), receiving from, giving to, and serving *both God and Man*. Notice that these elements are all intelligible and so we worship God with reason and not without it (cf. Rom. 12:2; Deut. 10:12).

THE PERICHORESIS–CIRCUMINCESSIO

Before proceeding to speak of the Three Persons aiding us in worship, we need to reiterate that Man was created in union with God, hence his communion, and in that sense, being in the image of God, worship was innate to him. Even so, there is a factor we need to take into consideration, the factor theologians call *perichoresis* or *circuminessio*.¹⁹ Here it is not our intention to dwell upon this. It is simply to say that the Three Persons, being in unity, give to and receive from one another the gifts they have. Coinhering in one another they give of their differentiations, which makes for the complementarity of the Three.

The importance of this doctrine for us is that Divine–human relationships derive from the *perichoresis* which catches Man up into the blessedness of Trinitarian being, a process known as *theosis*. That is, Man is made a partaker of the Divine nature, though he is never (and never will be) divine (I Pet. 2:4–5). Man, then, is incorporated into the Divine mystery of the Godhead, and it is from this that he worships God and honours all things of the creation. At this point we are presupposing the work of God’s grace.

OUR WORSHIP IN, AND BY MEANS OF, THE TRIUNE GOD

Worship Originates and Draws Its Stream of Life from the Triune Godhead

Previously we saw Man was created in the image of God. Because of the relationship between Man and God, Man was in communion with the Creator, and as such worshipped him. We might say that all the resources of God were his and as such were used in worship. There can be no better word for worship than ‘communion’. We saw ‘to know God is to worship him’,

¹⁸ This may help us, later, to see why sacrifice—true worship of God—seemed to be understood by Abel in clarity, and Cain in confusion. God expected Cain to offer ‘by faith’ and so, acceptably.

¹⁹ Or *circuminessio*, the meanings of the two being slightly different.

and the saying (regarding God), ‘I give to you that you may give to me’.²⁰ In other words, created Man knew what it was to worship God. He just worshipped him.

As people of the New Testament we can say, ‘We know God to be the Triune One, and we know we are *in* him, so where is the difficulty in worship?’ The answer should be, ‘None’, until we ponder the fact that worship is both personal—by one, and corporate—by many. True worship is not something confined to a church service. Giving true worth to God and honour to all is something which proceeds every day. There can only be true (full) worship in a corporate worship service when all come having lived out the life of worship as service and communion during the other days of the week. As we can see in the Study ‘The Battle for Worship’²¹ there are forces within us and around us which seek to destroy the worship we would, or should, give. So, then, we are *in* the Godhead and God is *in* us, so that we know our worship is assured when aided by the faithfulness of God, and we evince a responding faithfulness, also.

The Father and Our Worship

I John 4:7–19 makes it clear that the Father is love. When Paul quotes a Greek poet saying, ‘In him we live and move and have our being’, he is telling us that all human beings have this thrust to know and worship God all their lives, and it is painful to deny it. We have seen that the surrogate gods are called in to somehow deaden this pain and guilt and give us some security, which, however, they fail to do. God as Father ever seeks us to worship him, and in seeking he provides the means and incentive and power for us to worship him, thus giving us the fullness of life. Among the many means he provides are the following:

- (a) The provision of propitiation in sacrifice, through faith, shows God took the initiative even before the Fall to provide true worship for us. From Abel onwards such sacrificial worship has been provided and so is acceptable to God as Father.
- (b) In Israel the covenant provided and prescribed the effective sacrifices whereby the gift of worship was used personally and corporately to serve God and live life. God was present in the Holy of Holies and, as such, present to all his community. This gift in this form was exclusive to Israel. God is jealous of his people ever departing from the worship of himself. Idolatry is always punished. God covets the worship of his people, and so he gives them a heart to love him (Deut. 30:6).
- (c) In the New Covenant, Christ being the true Priest, true Worshipper and true Oblation, has provided a way into the inner sanctuary, the Holy Place where we now meet him who is Father. This opening up of worship is made universal. Now we may worship him in spirit and in truth. *Such worshippers the Father ever seeks to worship him.*
- (d) The idea of God as Father seeking us is shown in the revelation of himself as Father by the incarnation, life, ministry, death and resurrection of his Son. In John 4:21–24 Jesus taught that worship of the Father was God’s intention. So the Father took the initiative to bring us to himself as his sons, for as we put on Christ the Son, so we are in the Son and share his Sonship.²² Jesus expounds this matter of the Fatherhood and Sonship in John’s Gospel, and Paul expounds it in Romans 8:14–17 and Galatians 3:26 – 4:7.

²⁰ This is not from the Scriptures but used by R. Martin-Achard in his article ‘Worship’ in *Vocabulary of the Bible* by J-J. von Allmen (Lutterworth, 1958), pp. 471–474.

²¹ See WAPSN/95, Study 9.

²² See my books, *I Love the Father*; *The God and Father of Us All*; *Oh, Father, Our Father!* (NCPI) and *The Forgotten Father* by Thomas Smail (Hodder & Stoughton, Kent, 1980), plus the chapter on Fatherhood and Sonship in James Packer’s book, *Knowing God* (Hodder & Stoughton, Kent, 1975), pp. 223–257.

- (e) The Spirit makes us aware of our sonship in Christ by crying ‘Abba! Father!’ within us and so causing us to do the same. This is pure worship by sons of the Father. In Hebrews we are also called sons, and to enter into the Holy of Holies is surely to come fully to the Father.

Thus, we conclude, our worship is by the initiative of the Father—‘the Father ever seeks such to worship him’—and so we worship God. What we must not forget is that we have come by the Way, Jesus; we know God by the Spirit; and the Father dwells within us (cf. John 14:23; I John 4:15–16). Because the Father dwells within us we have that communion with him and from him which is true worship.

The Son and Our Worship

Jesus has been described as ‘the true Worshipper’.²³ Born into this world, he was the only one who ever worshipped the Father in perfection. This is seen in his childhood, in his love of the temple—‘my Father’s house’—and in his demand for true worship. He also attended the festivals of Jewish worship. It is seen in his prayer life in which he is intimate with the Father, sometimes spending the whole night in prayer.

In his ministry he taught his place in the worship of believers. He told his disciples he was the way to the Father, that firstly the Father drew men and women to him, Christ, and then through him, the Son, to the Father (John 6:44, 65; 14:1–10; Matt. 11:27). His people were to offer up prayer and make petitions through his name (John 14:13–14; 15:7; 16:23, 24).

The Epistle to the Hebrews is the Letter which brings out the ministry of Jesus as the true Worshipper. As we have already stated, he is the ‘minister in the sanctuary’ (8:2), he is the true High Priest (this principle is developed through many chapters) and he is the true Sacrifice, the true Oblation, the true Victim by whose death (i) we have our consciences ‘purified from dead works to worship [serve] the living God’ (9:14; 10:22), and (ii) we have obtained access into the Holy of Holies. Christ’s constant intercession for us (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34) keeps us at one with the Father, and the way is ever open to us. In this sense, Christ being the minister in the true sanctuary, all our worship is led by him. We need to keep this in mind all the time, for there is ever ‘only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus’.

It is clear, from I Peter 2:5 and Hebrews 13:15f. that we have to offer up spiritual sacrifices, that such are offered up *through* Christ, and that only then are they *acceptable*. We need to ponder this truth. We may fall into the error of thinking we approach God *on our own*, and make offerings *from ourselves*. Christ is ever our High Priest, and it is ever his humanity which encourages us to see him as Mediator and Minister in the sanctuary.

The Holy Spirit and Our Worship²⁴

We have seen that to worship God ‘in spirit’ must mean, primarily, ‘in our own spirits’,²⁵ yet they, unaided by the Holy Spirit, could not be filled with God, nor be aware of the truth of the Father and worship truly. In this respect Ephesians 5:18–20 is a good example of true worship which springs from being filled in spirit by the Holy Spirit.

The order of worship in Israel was related to the Holy Spirit as Hebrews 9:8 shows. Jesus’

²³ See ‘The Place of Jesus Christ in Worship’ by James B. Torrance in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, ed. by Ray S. Anderson (T. & T. Clark, 1979), pp. 348–369.

²⁴ See the article ‘Come Creator Spirit. For the Renewal of Worship and Witness’ by James B. Torrance in *Theological Foundations for Ministry* (op. cit.), pp. 370–389, and my *The Way and Wonder of Worship* (NCPI, 1990), pp. 211f.

²⁵ See Ephesians 5:18 where ‘be filled in spirit’ does not have a dative other than that innate in the verb, so that it could mean ‘be filled in your spirit’.

prophecy of the new worship being of the Father, and by the Spirit who was to glorify the Father and the Son by revelation (John 4:21–24; 16:12–15), indicates that worship is by the Spirit. In Acts 2, when those gathered were filled with the Holy Spirit, they had this predicted revelation and worship. Pentecost was the beginning of a new era of worship, so profoundly different from what went before, that Ezekiel chapters 36 and 37 must be interpreted by it. Not only was ‘dead’ Israel brought to life, but the purification from sins and the receiving into the heart of ‘a new spirit’, comports with our paragraph immediately above, and with passages referring to regeneration (e.g. Titus 3:4–7).

Paul recognised the work of the Spirit in love, unity, fellowship, sonship and family, all of which are components of true worship. In Philippians 3:3 he made the statement, ‘For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit [or, ‘who worship by the Spirit of God’]’. Thus the term ‘spiritual sacrifices’ (I Pet. 2:5; cf. Heb. 13:15, 16) are sacrifices offered through the Spirit. As through the mediatorial work of Christ we worship and offer intercessions, so through the Spirit we do the same (Rom. 8:26f.).

There are many more elements related to the Spirit which have to do with worship, these being set out in I Corinthians chapters 12 and 14, and perhaps amplified by Ephesians 5:18–21. They have to do with gifts of Christ (Eph. 4:7–11) being distributed by the Spirit who also has to do with ‘workings’ and ‘ministries’. This is especially clear when we realise that worship is something that is continually operative in persons and in the whole community.

CONCLUSION: ALL WORSHIP ISSUES FROM THE TRIUNE GOD AND ASSISTS THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH TO WORSHIP

If we recognise the reality of our heading, then we see that the initiative and guidance of the Members of the Godhead does not place the burden of worshipping God and honouring others upon us. The Triune action of the Persons enables us, leads us and encourages us to fulfil the exhortation of Hebrews 12:28, ‘Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe’.

Whilst this Study does not take up the full biblical rationale of worship, and neglects to include elements such as praise, adoration, music and singing, yet it covers the principle of worship as being that response to the given communion of God so that we can be one with Him in his image in the relationships of creatures, sons, and servants in his Kingdom and Family. We have also omitted to describe the eschatological and celestial worship when Man is inducted into the ultimate Eden, and the full Presence of God. His destiny to be ‘kings and priests unto God’ ensures perfection in that coming worship.

For those who are pastors and elders and lead in the worship of congregations, it can be seen how responsible and holy a thing it is to worship the Lord in holy array, and not to admit elements of secularity (profane elements) and human entertainment. Worship is God meeting with Man, and so Man meeting with God; not otherwise.