

Practical Christian Living

INTRODUCTION

Greetings to all who will be undertaking this Course of Practical Christian Living. We believe it will be a useful one for all who are Christians and all who are not. In our First Term we have 10 Monday Night Studies, and they are intended to set us up for the Second Series, namely the Third Term when we will have 9 Night Studies.

The first thing to be noted is that Practical Christian Living is not a course in Ethics or just the way of good moral living. Firstly we must know in what context or situation we are living. We need to know what it is to be one of God's people in today's world, which is a flow on from yesterday's world to tomorrow's world and to the end of time's history. We need to know what it is to enter Christianity and become a Christian. We need to know why this is necessary and how it happens. Then we will know where we stand, what we are about and where we are going. That will be helpful for most folk do not know who they are, why they are in this world, what they are to do, and what will become of them. The living of the Christian life, whilst often not easy, is not hard moral slogging to be good and to be righteous. It is not trying to do good from our own resources because not much comes of that exercise. It is in all our humanity, weakness and strange ways, living a useful and purposive life by the grace of God Who loves us. It is also a life which has a goal so that we do not have to be aimless. The following Program tries to give us a background to the past, present and future. It may seem a lot of introduction but it is necessary and will give us a perspective on the plan of God in which we live. It will also help us to make sense of history.

Study One: What Christianity is All About: Survey of the Story—I.
Study Two: What Christianity is All About: Survey of the Story—II.
Study Three: The Apostolic Truth—I: The Main Factors—The Cross.
Study Four: The Apostolic Truth—II: The Main Factors—The Resurrection.
Study Five: The Apostolic Truth—III: The Main Factors—The Ascension and Pentecost.
Study Six: Becoming a Christian—I: Hearing the Gospel; New Birth, Forgiveness and Justification.
Study Seven: Becoming a Christian—II: Sanctification, Perfection.
Study Eight: The Basis of It All: Hearing is Telling.
Study Nine: The Law of Grace and the Grace of Law.
Study Ten: The Spirit-Filled Life.

Practical Christian Living: Study One:

What Christianity is All About: Survey of the Story—I

INTRODUCTION

In these days of multicultural society we are brought into contact with many of the world religions. There is a close connection between culture and religion. Generally religions or moral philosophies arose from religious leaders or great philosophical thinkers such as Buddha, Moses, Mahomet, Confucius and Christ. The question is asked, 'Why should Christianity be believed and held above other religions? In what way is it better than other faiths?' We need to answer this question but we cannot do that until we really know what it is, as also until we know the other faiths. This we are going to try to do by means of all our Studies.

THE NATURE OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity arose from the man Jesus of Nazareth who was a Jew born in Palestine. If he had claimed to be a man and yet more than a man in that he was the Son of Yahweh, the God of Israel, then he would be claiming to be what no man had ever been. If the New Testament is true then he was the only person in history who has risen from the dead, and so the only one to help us in regard to the most difficult question which faces humanity—death. Also it raises him above all other religious leaders—indeed all human leaders—for they have died and remain dead. Christianity claims to give eternal life to all its believers. It also claims that God will triumph in history over all evil and opposition and will establish a new world, indeed a new heaven and a new earth and an eternal Paradise. If all of this were to be authentic then it is a matter of wonder that millions do not hurry to become believers, but there are reasons why they do not.

THE MODE OF OUR STUDIES

We are going to work on the principle that Christianity cannot be understood unless we read and understand the Bible, and see it as a unity, a whole in which all things hang together, that is, relate to one another. We will also see the Bible as a Story in which there are many stories but yet which all add up to one Story. Some have called this 'Salvation History'. Ian Pennicook has a book titled *The Story of the Acts of God*.¹ Some 25 years ago a theology came into vogue called 'narrative theology'.² This sort of theology had been in existence for a long time, as also has narrative as a way of teaching. This is not exactly what we are about in our Studies. We will simply be speaking of 'The Story', knowing that the Bible rightly understood is 'The Story of God'. It is also true that all needed theology will be caught up in

¹ Ian Pennicook's *The Story of the Acts of God*, and Geoffrey Bingham's *Salvation History* are available from NCPI. Gabriel Fackre has written a book on 'A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrines' titled *The Christian Story* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1978). This is a most valuable book, not only for its contents but also for its most comprehensive Bibliography, at least up to 1978.

² Narrative theology is a technique which uses stories or narratives of the Bible and beyond. 'Narrative theology, in particular, seeks to draw upon modern insights into the way in which narrative has meaning, and to appropriate these insights for theology' (*New Dictionary of Theology*, IVP Press, Leicester, 1988, p. 451). This is not what we are talking about above. We are talking about what we will call 'The Story'.

the Story.³ We will simply pursue the Story and see it as a unitary whole. This will reveal much of God, Man and Creation to us. What we must keep in mind is that (i) God is the Story–Creator–Teller; (ii) that God, Man and Creation are what are told; and (iii) that God, Man and Creation are all *in* the Story. It has been shown, time and again, that a story has no great power and reality unless the hearer is *in* the story. Only thus is the Story known.

SURVEY OF THE STORY—I: CREATION TO ABRAHAM

The Story from Creation to the Flood

The account of creation in the first two chapters of Genesis needs to be looked at closely. Each day's action is significant and all leads up to the sixth day when animals and Man⁴ were created. Before Man is created God speaks of making him in His own image. Man is thus the male and the female *together as one*. Man as the image of God represents God to all the creation, being its Leader and Ruler. Genesis 2 tells first of the seventh day of rest which is for all creation and is open-ended, that is, not completed as a day as are the other days. This day is the only thing of all creation *said* to be hallowed. Secondly it tells of Man created of the earth, *then* put into Eden ('the place of delights'), instructed as to how to live in the garden, where the special creation of woman takes place, as also that of the first (protological) marriage. The commission of Genesis 1:28f. must have happened in the garden. It is in that garden that Eve listens to the word of the Serpent, then Adam does and they fall. The prediction of the destruction of the serpent by a woman's seed is made—the proto-evangel of Genesis 3:16. Told of the curse, the primal couple are expelled from the garden. The eldest son Cain, kills his younger brother Abel. Seth replaces Abel and in his son's time men 'begin to call on the name of the Lord', as against Cain who was expelled from the presence of God. It seems the two lines of Cain and Seth meet and marry, and from that time violence and corruption become total in the earth, Noah and his family only excepted. God brings the Flood upon the earth, but makes (or confirms) a covenant with Noah and his family. From the time of Noah to the time of Abraham, idolatry spreads across the earth. God meets Abraham, showing him His glory, and this releases him from idolatry and brings him into a universal covenant. Abraham is a man, now, who looks for a city to come, in fact a 'holy city', and he is promised he will inherit the earth (Gen. 12:1–3; 22:15–18; Gal. 3:15–18; Heb. 11:8–10). Abraham has a sense of history, as indeed all do who are mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11.

A COMMENTARY ON THE FIRST PART OF THE STORY

We have noted that Man was created outside of Eden and then placed in it. As the first couple, Man—being in the image of God—was given a mandate (commission) to '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'. Being in the image of God must mean that Man was in union and communion with God. Eden was Paradise in that God and Man fellowshiped there. God was worshipped and Eden was the holy sanctuary. Until the Fall, death had not been part of Man's lot. Everlasting life was available to him in the tree of life. The marriage of the primal couple was protological of the marriage of Christ and the Church (cf. Gen. 2:23–24; Eph. 5:31–32). We have reason to think that the first Eden was protological of the ultimate Eden—Paradise. We will see that the Last Adam was Prophet, Priest and King. This was what the First Adam was meant to be. The Story has begun. It is a Story with a glorious last chapter, and all in between is amazing.

³ This does not mean that we should not pursue theology in both a biblical and systematic way, as is customary to theologians.

⁴ Throughout all our Studies we use the generic term 'Man' for all humanity, yet humanity headed up in one man, Adam. Otherwise we use the gender terms man and woman, or male and female.

Christies Beach Monday Night Series, Term 1, 1998. G. Bingham.

Practical Christian Living: Study Two:

What Christianity is All About: Survey of the Story—II

SURVEY OF THE STORY FROM ABRAHAM TO THE APOSTLES

The Old Testament Story Completed

We are continuing the Survey of God's Story. Now we proceed from Abraham to Christ and the Apostles.⁵ The covenant⁶ promises—the promises for all the future—which God gave to Abraham, were also given to Isaac and Jacob. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob we call 'the Patriarchs', that is, 'the Fathers'. They were the fathers leading to the children of Israel. We observe that Isaac was born of a special work of God, his parents both being old. Esau was the firstborn of Isaac and should have inherited the covenant blessing and promise, but God designed otherwise (cf. Gen. 25:19–26; cf. ch. 27), and Jacob (Israel) obtained the blessing. The land of Canaan was promised to Abraham and his descendants, but 400 years must pass before the inhabitants would be judged and Abraham's descendants possess the land. Jacob and his sons moved into Egypt when Joseph—the son whom Jacob had thought dead—was made virtual prime minister of that country. Though at first blessed in the land of Goshen in Egypt, after Joseph's death another Pharaoh—king of Egypt—came to the throne and oppressed the Israelites. Exodus 2:23–24 shows that God 'remembered' His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and told Israel (Exod. 3:14–16) that He named Himself by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: that was His name, forever. Israel was eventually liberated from Egypt through the acts of God in the leadership of Moses. Israel for 40 years wandered in the wilderness. At a certain point in its wanderings Israel was halted at Mount Sinai and given the covenant of law, often called 'the Sinaitic covenant'. At the heart of it were 'the ten words' spoken by God to the nation, sometimes called 'the Ten Commandments'. It was also given the set of laws and regulations which we call 'Mosaic' or 'of Moses'. It was given the plan of the Tabernacle and its furniture, all of which had been shown to Moses on Mount Zion. It is said that he looked into heaven, and that was the plan. If so, then the Jewish scholars' claim that the tabernacle was on the pattern of Eden could be true. Israel understood Canaan as virtual Eden, since it was 'a land flowing with milk and honey'.⁷ Some Jewish scholars looked to Abraham and Sarah as the new Adam and Eve. We need to read the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers to understand the law/s of Moses. Deuteronomy⁸ needs to

⁵ At this point I would like to recommend in addition to Gabriel Fackre's *The Christian Story* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids), Ian Pennicook's *The Story of the Acts of God* (NCPI) and my *Salvation History* (NCPI), two books by N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Fortress, Minneapolis, 1993) and *The New Testament and the People of God* (Fortress, Minneapolis, 1992). These two books deal with some of the Rabbinic teaching on Abraham and Sarah as the Adam and Eve for Israel, and Israel as an Eden, besides other useful ideas in Judaism contemporary with the New Testament, including what the author calls 'Adam theology'.

⁶ A very helpful study on God's covenant with the whole creation is my *Love's Most Glorious Covenant* (Redeemer, Castle Hill, 1997). It is essential that we study covenant, for it is the very basis of both the Old and New Testaments.

⁷ See Isaiah 35:1–2; 41:17–20; 51:1–3; 52:9; Ezekiel 36:33–38 (cf. Ezek. ch. 31); Joel 2:3. It is clear that Eden was the icon in Israel for the state or standard of its land. The high regard for their land meant that it was *the* land of God.

⁸ Not to read Deuteronomy is not to understand the principles by which Israel was to live in the new land, and the law as Israel knew it, and the basis of both the right and wrong thinking of the Jews of Christ's time, as also the mind of Christ as he taught, and particularly so in the Sermon on the Mount.

be read to understand how Israel was to live within the new land. The story of Israel in its land, its law, worship and sacrificial *cultus*, along with the judgments of God, particularly the exiles, are the subject of the Former Prophets—Joshua to Nehemiah—whilst the Major Prophets—Isaiah to Ezekiel—and the Minor Prophets—Daniel to Malachi—help us to understand the function of the prophets in communicating God’s mind to the nation in regard to His will, His law, and His plan for the world’s future. The Wisdom books—Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes—with the Book of the Psalms and the Song of Solomon, complete the literature of Israel. The books of the Apocrypha are helpful in regard to Judaism’s wisdom and history. For some 300 years before the birth of Jesus Israel had no canonical prophet. It was said only to have the *bath qol*—‘the echo of the Voice’. Inter-Testamental materials are available plentifully which tell us how Judaism’s scholars and commentators set forth the world view and hope of Israel.⁹

The Story of Jesus and His Apostles

The build-up in Judaism to the time of the birth of Christ is a complex question, but scholars had in sight the ‘seed’ concept of Genesis 3:15, 49:10, II Samuel 7:12–13, and Micah 5:2; ‘the Messiah’ concept of Psalm 2 which was linked with ‘the King’ concept of Psalms 2:6–7; 132:12; 110; 89; II Samuel 7:12–14; Zechariah 9 (etc.); ‘the Son of David’; and ‘the Lord’ as in Psalm 11; along with ‘the suffering Servant’ of Isaiah 40 – 66; with also the concept of ‘the Prophet’ of Deuteronomy 18—one greater even than Moses.¹⁰ Pretenders had already claimed to be figures of these prophecies. John the Baptist was authentically a prophet and the one ordained to be Christ’s precursor. The Synoptic Gospels claim that Jesus’ life and ministry was by the person and work of the Holy Spirit, even to Jesus’ death upon the Cross, his resurrection and ascension. The ministry, person, words and works of Christ were not really comprehended by the apostles before his death on the Cross, and even after his resurrection they could not grasp all he said. On the night of his betrayal Jesus told them that when they received the gift of the Holy Spirit—the gift to be sent by both the Father and the Son—then the Spirit would (i) bring into their remembrance all Jesus had said to them; (ii) he would teach them all (these) things; (iii) he would lead them *into* all *the* truth; (iv) he would show them ‘things to come’, that is, eschatological things; and (v) he would not glorify himself but he would glorify Jesus by taking what was Jesus’ ‘things’, because all that Jesus had, had been given to him by the Father. In other words the coming of the Holy Spirit would be a full revelation to the apostles of the Son, all he had done and was, that is, the whole of *the* truth, involving the Person and work of the Father and the plan He has always had for the creation. In Acts 1:8—a verse in the context of the Kingdom of God and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit—virtually said the apostles could not but witness to Christ in ‘Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth’. In our next two Studies we will see how the apostolic truth came into being and the Story was told of Christ as Messiah, Saviour and Lord. We will also see how the Old and New Testaments constitute one whole Story of which we now are part.

⁹ N. T. Wright’s *The New Testament and the People of God* is very helpful here. The section, part III, ‘First Century Judaism within the Greco-Roman World’ helps us to understand Jewish thought contemporary with Apostolic Christianity.

¹⁰ A simple study help could be my *The Person and Work of Christ* (NCPI 1983). Most comprehensive is N. T. Wright’s *Jesus and the Victory of God* (SPCK, England, 1996). Its bibliography is exhaustive.

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Practical Christian Living: Study Three:

The Apostolic Truth—I: The Main Factors—The Cross

WHAT IS THE APOSTOLIC TRUTH?

The apostolic truth is the truth the apostles taught. In Acts 2:42 we read about ‘the apostles’ doctrine’, or ‘the apostles’ teaching’. We know that the priests and prophets of Israel taught the truth of God as it had come to them in ‘the Story’, that is, from creation to the situation in Palestine following the exile. For some 300 years no prophecy was recorded. Deep study of the Scriptures and especially of the law was undertaken by commentators, scribes and lawyers. As we saw, it was called the time of the *bath qol*, that is, the time of the ‘echo of the Voice’. Even so, there was high expectation of the coming of the person—or persons—in the Old Testament, namely the one spoke of as ‘the Seed’, ‘Messiah’, ‘Son of God’, ‘Son of man’, ‘the Righteous Branch’, ‘the Suffering Servant’—and so on. John the Baptist preached three things: (i) the universal Kingdom; (ii) the universal forgiveness of sins; and (iii) the universal outpouring of the Spirit. He pointed to Christ as ‘the Coming One’. He was the precursor to Messiah and said Jesus was that One.

Jesus, in his three years of ministry, proclaimed the Kingdom of God both by teaching regarding it, and by the very action of it in healing, exorcisms and signs and wonders. He came primarily to ‘the lost of the tribes of Israel’. He said he had not come to abolish ‘the law and the prophets’ but to fulfil, that is, confirm and establish them. He constantly brought out the truth of the Scriptures, foretold what would happen to Israel if it did not repent and receive its Messiah, foretold his own death as being prophesied and indispensable, spoke of Jerusalem’s rejection of him and the future of the nation. He talked about his own resurrection, his ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit from the Father and himself. We saw in our last study the five points of the ministry of the Spirit:

the Spirit would (i) bring into their remembrance all Jesus had said to them; (ii) he would teach them all (these) things; (iii) he would lead them *into* all *the* truth; (iv) he would show them ‘things to come’, that is, eschatological things; and (v) he would not glorify himself but he would glorify Jesus by taking what was Jesus’ ‘things’, because all that Jesus had, had been given to him by the Father.

It is clear that up to the night of his betrayal the disciples did not really understand what Jesus was about, although they believed he, alone, had the words of eternal life, and that he was ‘the Holy One of God’ (John 6:68–69). On the day of Jesus’ resurrection his teaching began (Luke 24:25–49). Perhaps his breathing upon them the Holy Spirit (John 20:22–23) was an affusion to aid them receive his teaching. Acts 1:2 says he had ‘given commandment through the Holy Spirit’. Acts 1:3–5 says that he taught them the things of the Kingdom and the coming Spirit over a period of forty days. With a certain research we can gather much of what Jesus taught from the Scriptures which we call ‘the Old Testament’, and of which Paul spoke when he said, ‘All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work’.

It had to be the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which brought together into one full understanding the whole of the Old Testament and the ministry, acts and teaching of Christ. We say, then, that the ‘apostolic truth’ was the fulfilment in and by Christ of the Old Testament, and the revelation of the Christ ‘event’ by these Scriptures so that

(i) the truth of the Scriptures, and (ii) the truth of Christ brought together and revealed by the Holy Spirit, resulted in (iii) the apostolic truth, that is, the gospel, the gospel itself being ‘the whole counsel of God’. This the Holy Spirit brought into being with clarity on the day of Pentecost. In one sense this outmoded the thinking of Israel, in that the fulfilment of the Old Testament would have been their highest expectation, but to reject Christ as the Messiah would be to fail to read the Scriptures Israel had. The Scriptures they had were not outmoded, but fulfilled. It is interesting to read the first two chapters of Luke and see faithful Israelites such as Zechariah, Mary, Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna who saw Jesus as ‘set for the fall and rising of many in Israel’, and who were ‘looking for the redemption of Israel’. On the day of Pentecost this apostolic truth burst upon the faithful in Israel, as well as bringing into faith many who had crucified Christ. From Pentecost onwards, then, there was the ‘apostolic truth’. The apostles had been taught and commissioned by Christ and led into all the truth by the Holy Spirit. They held the truth that, once taught properly, has become the full, and the only, truth Christians can have and know.

ONE MAIN FACTOR OF THE APOSTOLIC TRUTH—THE CROSS

What we have to understand clearly is the truth or ‘the word’ of the Cross. In our next Study on the Resurrection we will see that the first thing Peter—and others—preached was not the Cross but the Resurrection, and we will see why that was. For the moment we will simply say that the Resurrection vindicated the Cross. Christ was not defeated for he was raised from the dead. This made him Lord over all humanity and death, and indeed over the Creation. The Cross had not harmed him: the Resurrection gave special meaning to the Cross.

Here we will be seeking to see that the Cross was central to the apostolic truth, and that it is not a truth that can be grasped easily by the mind. How could a human being, purporting to be the Son of God, be nailed in a criminal’s gallows and still be said to be the Son of God? How could such a man be the Saviour of all humanity from its sins, and be above all others who claim to be saviours and lords? Yet it was the message of the Cross which won—and goes on winning—innumerable people to Christ and God.

Paul’s Theology of the Cross

Paul’s theology of the Cross may not seem to differ from John’s or Peter’s view of it in the final analysis. Here we cannot undertake a full apostolic analysis of the Cross so we will content ourselves with seeing Paul’s view of it. He says in I Corinthians 2:1–2:

When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony [mystery] of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

The gospel of Christ’s Cross is a mystery. A ‘mystery’ in the New Testament is an unveiling by God of truth which cannot be known simply by human analysis. The Holy Spirit reveals this truth. The mystery of the Cross is not a puzzle to be solved but a truth to be lived in. In I Corinthians 1:17 – 2:16 Paul makes this fact clear. In Galatians 6:14 he says, ‘But be it far from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world’. If we add to this I Corinthians 1:18, then we see the centrality of the Cross in Paul’s preaching, ‘For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God’.

If we look at the era or time of the apostles objectively, then we ask how a criminal’s cross could be that which captured the hearts of those who came to follow Christ. We have agreed that the Resurrection was what first confronted that age, but that the Resurrection made the Cross to be a victory and not a failure. A man who is raised from the dead is unique in history and his person and claims have to be seen, considered, understood and faced. Whilst the Jews

of that day understood the principle of sacrifice, they would have been horrified to consider the man Jesus as a human sacrifice. Human sacrifices were no part of the Jewish sacrificial system, yet Peter on the day of Pentecost said clearly that through this man's death and resurrection—by repenting, believing on him and being baptised into him—the forgiveness of sins was obtained. In his first recorded sermon¹¹ Paul says:

Through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone that believes is freed [justified] from everything that you could not be freed [justified] by the law of Moses (Acts 13:38–39).

His principle or gospel is worked out in Romans chapters 1 to 8, in the Letter to the Galatians, and others of his letters.

In I Corinthians 1:17 – 2:16 he shows that 'word of the cross' is the power of God, in that it is God's way of redeeming Man, of bringing justification to him, as also God's wisdom and sanctification (cf. I Cor. 1:31; 6:11). In various of his letters he shows that Christ is God's propitiatory sacrifice, set forth by God Himself (Rom 3:24–26). He shows that God made him to be sin for us (II Cor. 5:21) so that we might become the righteousness of God in him, in Christ.

All this made sense to those who heard with willing hearts, and made appalling nonsense to those who refused to hear Paul as God's acceptable messenger. We realise that the 'word of the cross' must always be a mystery which the Holy Spirit must unveil. We cannot deny that it is a core part of the apostolic truth, and that it requires the power of the Holy Spirit to reveal this mystery to the human heart.

CLOSING NOTE FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF THE CROSS

If we want to further consider the matter of the Cross then five NCPI Books will be helpful since they spell out a great deal of the text of the Scriptures regarding the matter of the Cross. They are *The Cruciality of the Cross* by P. T. Forsyth; and Geoffrey Bingham's *Christ's Cross Over Man's Abyss*; *Beyond the Cross*; *Come, Let Us Go to Calvary*; and *Great and Glorious Grace*. Articles in Bible and Theological Dictionaries are also helpful.

¹¹ Paul had preached many sermons before this one in Acts 13 as a chronology of Paul's life and ministry will show.

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Practical Christian Living: Study Four:

The Apostolic Truth—II: The Main Factors—The Resurrection

THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION

The reality of the Resurrection can be considered along two lines: (i) the revelation of that happening as revealed to us as part of ‘the mystery of Christ’, and (ii) the statements of Scripture which show us its historical facticity, and its significance for us as sinners and saints. Whilst the accounts of Christ’s resurrection in the Gospels are not easy to harmonise, the *fact* of his resurrection is clearly stated. Paul declares in I Corinthians 15:3–8:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

It is easy enough to follow the Gospels’ accounts, and the mentions of him in Acts as having risen. There are also many references to his resurrection in the Epistles and the Revelation. If all of these statements could be shown to be untrue then the gospel would also have to be discredited as having no viable foundation. It has been pointed out that the Resurrection cannot be proved beyond doubt to be an historical fact, but then neither can it be disproved beyond doubt. Many factors combine to show that the Resurrection must have happened. The claim that the followers of Jesus had hallucinations, triggered by psychological pressures of a strong kind, can be dealt with. Far from expecting his resurrection, there is plenty of evidence to show that in every case his followers were sceptical even of the resurrection news they had heard from their own company. They were bewildered. The accounts point out that often he was unrecognisable to those to whom he appeared until he did something characteristic of his pre-resurrection manner. The matter, because of its importance, will ever be debated. Without doubt it was a basic and central element of the apostolic truth.

THE IMPORTANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS’ RESURRECTION

- (a) *Jesus was ‘designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead’* (Rom. 1:4). See Matthew 26:63–65, Mark 14:61–64, and Luke 22:70–71 in regard to the claim to be the Son of God. Thus Jesus is vindicated and the Sanhedrin are convicted of an unsubstantiated charge.
- (b) *Jesus was shown to be both Lord and Christ because of his resurrection from the dead.* See Acts 2:24–36; 3:14–15; 4:10–11; 5:30–31; 10:39–42; 13:32–39. The Scripture shows that the power of Jesus Christ was present to heal the lame man at the temple gate. The Sanhedrin are told he is ever present to do such works. Generally the New Testament speaks of Jesus being raised from the dead by God, rather than of him rising, and thus the God of Israel vindicates him and his claims as being true. *Romans 10:9 makes it clear that without confessing faith in Christ’s resurrection and his consequent Lordship, no one can be saved.* Of course the death and the resurrection had to do with both the forgiveness of sins and justification.

- (c) *Jesus was made to be the judge of the world by his resurrection from the dead.* Peter was the first to announce this fact in Acts 10:39–43:

And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

This was what Paul told the Athenians in Acts 17:29–31:

representation by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead.

In the first quote Jesus is declared to be judge and in this capacity can forgive sins. This fits well with what Jesus told his disciples in John 5:25–29.

- (d) *Acts 2:22–24 (cf. 4:27–28) shows that it was God’s plan that Jesus be crucified in the manner that happened, and by those who did it, and so the resurrection was equally the intention and act of God* to (i) vindicate Jesus as the one sent by God, and (ii) to ensure that he would be Lord and Christ, with all that those two designations indicate, that is, Lord over all things. For this see Acts 2:33–36, Matthew 28:18, Philippians 2:9–11, and Ephesians 1:19–22 (amongst other references), to show that Jesus was exalted to the place of power at God’s right hand, to be God’s true Prophet, Priest and King. When we ask, ‘What was the purpose of the Cross?’ then we have answered that in our previous Study. Without defeating evil at the Cross he could not be Lord and Christ, and without effecting the Atonement none could be given the forgiveness of sins, cleansing from their guilt, and the justification from the law which would have come to them in his judgment of human beings (cf. Rom. 5:10, 17–19). In I Corinthians 15:17–19 Paul says, ‘*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied*’. We can see that in every way, for the Christian, the resurrection of Christ is essential for the forgiveness of sins.
- (e) *The resurrection was part of the Atonement of Christ.* Romans 4:23–25 says, ‘Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification’. Colossians 2:11–15 connects the Resurrection with the Atonement, including the defeat the evil powers:

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses . . . He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.

- (f) *In Romans 8:33–34 Paul shows that without the Resurrection God’s people would have no intercessor for them.* They would be defeated by Satan:

Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?

Hebrews 4:14–16 and 7:23–25 link with this idea, in that it is the victorious Christ, raised to God’s right hand, who is our intercessor. Whilst it is by him as intercessor that

we come to God, it is also by him that we are continually preserved from the Evil One and his powers every moment of our lives.

- (g) *The fact of the Resurrection is the basis for the believer's union with Christ, as also his communion with him and the Father.* This is a vast subject and needs to be opened thoroughly. First we have the fact that all believers died with him on the Cross when he died. This can be seen in Galatians 2:20 (cf. 6:14), 'I have been crucified with Christ; It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'; II Corinthians 5:14, 'We are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died'; Colossians 3:1, 'If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God . . . For you had died and your life is hid with Christ in God'. The passage of Romans 5:12–21 assures us that we were one with Christ in the obedience Christ gave to God in his death. Romans 6:1–10 is really an enlargement of the principle of Galatians 2:19–20. In other words, when Christ died we died, and when he was buried so we were buried with him, and when he rose so we rose. On the one hand this was a death and resurrection in identification with Christ, but its language also assures us our death for sin is finished and we will rise to the life eternal. This wonderful truth comes most powerfully in Ephesians 2:1–10, of which verses 4–7 we look at here:

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Here it is clear that in this life we are truly alive, and are seated with Christ in the heavenly places, ruling with him, *now*. Thus the doctrine of what we might call 'our present, spiritual resurrection' is most powerful, for it embraces the people of God as the Body of Christ, as the Bride of Christ, with whom Christ the Head and Lord is present, having her work as his 'helpmeet' in all that he is doing now and will do in eternity.

THE RESURRECTION ONE OF THE POWERFUL FACTORS OF THE APOSTOLIC TRUTH

On the day of Christ's resurrection all the elect rose with him in principle. Proleptically they were raised for ever. On that day the news came to the human race that a man had risen from the dead, nevermore to die. All history changed when human beings could now be assured of their resurrection. This most potent factor has to be understood by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Christ, our new true and last Adam, is the life-giving spirit who, through the Cross and his own resurrection can now—and does—give eternal life to his elect. Two statements by Jesus give us great encouragement: 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.' 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades' (John 11:25–26; Revelation 1:17, 18).

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Practical Christian Living: Study Five:

The Apostolic Truth—III: The Main Factors—The Ascension & Pentecost

THE REALITY OF THE ASCENSION

The fact of Christ's ascension into heaven has long ago been an Article of the Christian faith. It is interesting, then, to see that of the Synoptic Gospels and the Acts it is Luke only who describes the Ascension. In Luke 24:50–53 we read, 'Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, *he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven*'. This is the total description, sufficient though it is. In Acts 1:8–11 we read:

'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.' And when he had said this, as they were looking on, *he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight*. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

In Mark's Gospel, which ends at 16:8, there are the shorter and longer added endings not written by Mark himself, the first of which says in verse 19, 'So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God'. Those are the direct statements given in the Gospels and the Acts. Matthew comes close to it when in 28:18 he speaks of Jesus as saying, 'All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me'. Both Matthew and Mark have Jesus' apocalyptic sayings about the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven (Matt. 16:27; 24:30; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 13:26). To speak of a return presupposes a going.

John's Gospel has three sayings which relate to the ascension: (i) 'No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven even the Son of man' (3:13); (ii) Jesus' question to his disciples, 'What if you were to see the Son of man ascend into heaven?' (6:62); and (iii) 'Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God"' (20:17). In John's Gospel also, there are references to his going away to the Father and coming to them again—John 14:2, 12, 28; 7:33; 8:14, 21; 13:33; 14:4; 16:5, 10, 17. In John's Gospel is the theme of Christ's glorification. If we read the following references pertaining to the glorification then the full picture will emerge—7:39; 12:16, 23; 13:31, 32; 17:5. Jesus' prayer in chapter 17 is that he may be back again with the Father, so that there can be no final glorification apart from the Ascension.

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND FRUITS OF THE ASCENSION

Whilst we confined ourselves to direct and indirect references to the Ascension, yet in the Acts, Epistles and the Revelation there are numerous indications of it, namely those connected with Christ being seated at the right hand of God, and these in their turn are linked with Psalms 2, 89 and 110. In Psalm 2 God says, 'I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill', and Zion comes to mean God's sanctuary in heaven. In Psalm 110:1 we read, 'The LORD says to my lord:

“Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool”, and the one at the right hand is ‘a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek’, and not only priest, but prophet and king. Psalm 89 is a brilliant exposition of God’s appointed king.

The term ‘right hand’ is used a number of times in the New Testament and eighteen of these refer to Christ’s enthronement at God’s right hand, including the prophecies of his return where he is ‘seated at the right hand of the Power’, ‘the Power’ being a term for God. Peter, Paul and the writer of Hebrews all use the term to signify Christ’s enthronement and his session—his reigning—at the right hand of the Father.

Acts 1:21–22 describes Jesus’ ministry as being ‘during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us’. That ministry was in two parts as we saw in a previous Study, namely (i) up to the point of his death, and (ii) that which followed his resurrection to his ascension. All of this Luke describes in Acts 1:1–2 that ‘Jesus *began* both to *do* and to *teach*, until the day he was taken up’. It is clear then that Jesus’ ministry was from the baptism of John until the Ascension and that this ministry was to continue *after* his ascension, that is, to continue to *do* and to *teach*. This, of course, would be his ministry from the throne. This is powerfully described in I Corinthians 15:24–28, meaning that Christ who had won his victory on the Cross, would now work it out in history until the Kingdom would be final in its triumph.

In our last Study we saw what Paul calls ‘the power of his resurrection’ (Phil. 3:10), that is, Christ being risen is Lord and rules over all creation and gives eternal life to his elect so that those living on earth will work in that power. We saw the amazing matter of our present enthronement with Christ, in Ephesians 2:4–7:

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

That is, Christ’s ascension and enthronement mean, in some sense, our present resurrection and enthronement with him—however we may explain it. One way is to say we are ‘in Christ’—that powerful principle of present union with him—and so we share in his reigning. We will now try to draw our threads together and see the importance and significance of his ascension and session at God’s right hand. We will nominate them briefly:

- (a) Christ, on being enthroned, poured forth the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and other occasions (Acts 2:33).
- (b) Christ being enthroned is the Son of God, and His Messiah–King and so Son of Man (Heb. 1:3–13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; Ps. 5; 110:1, 3; Acts 2:34; 5:31; Eph. 1:19–20; Col. 3:1; I Pet. 3:22). As the one enthroned he has all authority in heaven and earth to do as the Father wills.
- (c) Being exalted at God’s right hand he is Leader and Saviour ‘to give repentance to Israel and for forgiveness of sins’.
- (d) At God’s right hand he is the Intercessor for all humanity (Rom. 8:33–34; Heb. 4:14–16; 7:25).

THE REALITY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF PENTECOST

We saw in Acts 2:33, ‘Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear’.

One thing we need to say concerning the Ascension is that it finished for ever, a sight-viewing and a sight-relationship with Jesus Christ. Hereafter, as Paul later put it, ‘We walk by faith and not by sight’. So the Ascension finished the visible person-to-person relationship. That meant that nothing could be known except by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, who, as we saw was (i) to bring into their remembrance all things he—Jesus—had said and done;

(ii) to teach them all things; (iii) to lead them *into* all the truth; (iv) to glorify Christ and the Father; (v) to tell them ‘things to come’, that is, eschatological things; and (vi) to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.

Pentecost¹² is a vast subject, but what we have seen is that the apostolic truth is really a revelation of ‘the mystery of God’, ‘the mystery of Christ,’ and ‘the mystery of our religion [godliness]’. That is, it is the Story which stretches from Genesis to the Revelation, the story of creation, the law and the prophets, Christ, the Church—all of which are included in ‘the mystery of God’. There is nothing ‘mystical’ about biblical mysteries, nothing esoteric, but everything is plain, provided one is shown all by the Holy Spirit. The six elements of the ministry as stated in our paragraph immediately above, are the work of the Spirit. What we are saying—and need to reiterate time and again—is that the whole being of a person is brought to wonderment, astonishment, and wholesome gratitude as ‘the truth in Jesus’ is revealed. The Holy Spirit keeps truth fresh, bedewed, and thus gives us power to proclaim the apostolic truth in the apostolic way. Notice that Christ had to be glorified before the Spirit could be poured out (Acts 2:33; cf. John 7:37–39). In other words, the gospel had to be completed before it could be told, and before the Spirit could empower God’s human servants to proclaim it.

CONCLUSION: THE FULLNESS OF THE APOSTOLIC TRUTH— THE ‘WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD’

In our series of Studies, then, we have been brought to see what the apostolic truth is composed of, having surveyed the whole of the Story, and the significance of the acts and teaching of Christ which formed the gospel, that is, his prophesied incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension and reigning. This is the gospel. This is ‘the whole counsel of God’ which will be completed at the *telos*, the goal and completion of history.¹³

¹² When we say ‘Pentecost’ we mean the outpouring of the Holy Spirit promised by many of the prophets, and without which God’s ‘salvation history’ and ‘the plan of the mystery’ could not be fulfilled. It is the same as the promise that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit. This material can be seen in my books which are published by NCPI, namely, *The Day of the Spirit* and *Spirit Baptism: Spirit Living*, or in any other plain speaking publication. What we do need to see is that the Pentecost which happened on the day of the Festival of the First Fruits in Israel was the primary and, then, the all-embracing outpouring of the Holy Spirit for this age. The outpouring of the Spirit in Samaria (Acts 8) could be called ‘a Samaritan Pentecost’. In one sense it was the entering of the Samaritans into the Kingdom of God. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit described in Acts 10 – 11 was the ‘Gentile Pentecost’, and yet both Samaritan and Gentile outpourings were related to Pentecost. Their ‘rivers’, so to speak, flowed from the main river of Pentecost.

¹³ One point which really needs to be dealt with is the seeming contradiction of some of Christ’s words to his disciples. On the one hand Jesus in John’s Gospel talks about leaving them, going to his Father’s house to prepare places for them, so that when they come they may be with him. Yet in Matthew 28:18–20, he tells them to preach, and he closes by saying, ‘Behold, I am with you always, even to the completion of the age!’ How can he be away from them and yet be with them? The answer is, ‘By the Holy Spirit’. We also have to remember that we are seated with him in the heavenlies. ‘The heavenlies’ need an explanation, and such does not have to do with space, as such.

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Practical Christian Living: Study Six:

Becoming a Christian—I: Hearing the Gospel, New Birth, Forgiveness and Justification

BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

Up to this point in our Studies we have taken it for granted that everyone of us is a Christian. A Christian is really someone who has been brought to realise that he or she is a sinner before God,¹⁴ and sin not only separates us from God, thus putting us into a certain amount of misery, but that as a sinner one is doomed to perish—whatever *perishing* may mean—‘For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus’. A Christian has repented before God, believed in Christ the Son of God as the Saviour of the world and has received eternal life. I trust that all of us have done that and each person has become a Christian. Even so, we may become a Christian without realising that we have repented and believed. Some cannot put a time and date to their conversion, but they know they belong to God and He has received them. Putting a time and date to the matter is not necessary. Knowing we belong to Him does matter. What we want to do in this Study is a sort of analysis of what happened and what it all means. It will help us to know we heard, we have been born again, we have been forgiven all sins and we have been justified. It is a lot to fit all these elements into one Study but we will try.

HEARING THE GOSPEL

Physically, there are probably few people in Australia who have not heard the gospel. It is often said that many folk do not know much about God and Christ. We can believe this of folk of other religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and the like, but the media give much attention to Christianity and its doctrines and festivals. Christmas and Easter times tell ‘the old, old story’, and one way and another the message is preached. Bibles are in most homes, and these and other Christian books are available in plenty. Many have heard the gospel message at Sunday School, in church and on other occasions and shut themselves off from it. We have reasons for saying the gospel message is not worthy of receiving, but at heart the reason often is that the gospel is a disturbing message, especially when it makes out that we are sinners, and that we need Christ to come into the world to deal with our guilt and moral failure. Jesus sometimes cried, ‘He that has an ear to hear, let him hear!’ The parable of the sower sowing seed everywhere tells us there were four kinds of ‘hearers’ but only one of them really heard, took it to heart, responded and so bore fruit. The message was lost to the other three. Many people know they are deliberately not hearing. We will now proceed to those things which happen and by which we are converted, becoming Christians.

¹⁴ In one sense all persons know they are sinners, but then many are not disturbed by that fact. When a person is convicted by the Holy Spirit of the terrible nature of sin, and of being a sinner so that one is deserving of death, then that is another matter. Only God can bring that kind of conviction which will make one repent before God and believe on Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

BEING BORN AGAIN, OR 'FROM ABOVE'

It is good to read the story in John 3:1–16. In fact it is best to begin at 2:23 and read through to chapter 3. Many people had believed in Jesus when they saw what he did. They regarded what he did to be miracles, and although they were miracles, yet they were primarily signs, and signs are intended to lead us to where they point. In this case they pointed to the Kingdom of God. The man who came to Jesus was a leading Jew and he had been impressed by what he saw. He began attesting to Jesus but Jesus said clearly, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God'.

The man—Nicodemus by name—was puzzled and said re-entrance into one's mother's womb in order to be reborn was difficult. Jesus brushed that aside and said that to be born the first time was to come from one's mother's womb and be as other humans, but one had to be born a second time by the Spirit of God, had to have the new birth which was from 'above'—from God. John 1:12–13 tells us:

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

This passage is telling us we cannot become children of God by natural birth. We need to be born of God.

If we put both passages together they tell us that only the Spirit of God can bring us to spiritual new birth. We need to believe on Christ. In fact we need first to repent—which was the message of John the Baptist who called all Jews to the baptism of repentance—and then, in believing, we will be 'born anew'. We should note that with this teaching Nicodemus was told about the Cross in words which he could understand from Israel's history. We will not go into all that story which is found in Numbers chapter 21, but it means we have faith in the Son of God who was crucified for us. So we are born again. God's Holy Spirit brings this to happen. We cannot 'born' ourselves! Later on in the New Testament we hear about the 'gift' of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) and the 'anointing' of the Holy Spirit (I John 2:20ff.). The Spirit now helps us in our new life.¹⁵

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

A person cannot be born again without at the same time receiving the forgiveness of all his or her sins. Forgiveness means a number of things such as 'having one's sins taken away', for that is what the Greek verb means. It also means that the *guilt* of one's sins is removed. It is also said that God 'remembers our sins no more', that is, that they are not chalked up against us, and God will never call them up even on the Judgment Day. The outcome of the forgiveness of sins is that we are free from their power, for often we are slaves to them. Jesus once said, 'He who commits sin is the slave of sin'. He also promised, 'if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed'. In fact before his birth Joseph his foster-father was told, 'you shall call his name Jesus ['God is Saviour'] for he will save his people from their sins'. John the Baptist said Jesus would bring the forgiveness of sins. Jesus would say, 'Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven'. Many times he forgave sinful people their sins, and the results were remarkable. Finally he went to the Cross, telling his disciples the night before, 'This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'. Other New Testament writings refer to this forgiveness through the death of Christ and his blood-shedding, such as Acts 2:38; 5:31; 13:38; 26:18; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; and Hebrews 10:10–18. Other words like 'redemption' and 'justification' include the idea of

¹⁵ For further mentions of the new birth see I Peter 1:3, 23; I John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18. Other references speak of being a 'new creation', e.g. II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15.

forgiveness. ‘The forgiveness of sins’ covers all the sins we have ever done and will yet do. They are all laid on Christ on the Cross and he bore them—along with all the guilt of them—to extinction. So, then, God will remember them no more (Jer. 31:31–34; Heb. 8:8–12; 10:16–18). Wherever forgiveness is known by a person, in that moment the person knows the love of God. He, or she, will then forgive all others who have sinned against them. One cannot forgive until one is forgiven and then one cannot *not* forgive. It is clear from Acts 2:38–41 that 3,000 people all received forgiveness at once.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

This is word we use every day and should present no problems. When people accuse us of failure then we try to justify ourselves, that is, to show we didn’t fail. If we did wrong then we are only excusing ourselves. In the first part of this Study we spoke about the nature of sin. Sin has guilt, and guilty people try to show themselves as righteous. That is the way the accused conscience works. The law punishes the sinner with death (Rom. 6:23), for God’s wrath is upon the sinner (Rom. 1:18–32; cf. 5:20; Gal. 2:19–20; 3:10, 19). To be justified means (i) a person has never sinned and broken the law, and (ii) that he has ever remained sinless before God. By seeking to obey the law, Man is not justified, ‘because by works of the law shall no one be justified’ (Gal. 2:16; cf. Ps. 143:2). No one has ever been righteous before the law. Some in Israel had thought by keeping the law they were justified (see Phil. 3:9; Rom. 10:1–4). In Romans 3:18–29 Paul argues (i) all humanity has sinned and come under the wrath of God; (ii) the Gentiles (idolaters) are all sinners under that Divine wrath;

(iii) the Jews are no less sinners who do the same things as the Gentiles; and (iv) all have sinned—that is, both Jews and Gentiles. So all must know the punishments of the law, *but* God has a righteousness of grace which makes His Son to be the propitiation of all our sins (Rom. 3:21–26; cf. I John 4:9–10), so that those who believe are justified. In Christ the law kills the sinner (Gal. 2:19), but it is Christ who takes the punishment of sin—death—and dies in the stead of the sinner, who is then declared righteous before God and His law.

In practice it means ‘there is therefore now no condemnation [judgement] for those who are in Christ Jesus’. Such persons are acquitted and counted as righteous. This is the same as the forgiveness of sins. The guilt has been borne by Christ in our stead. He suffered because he loved us. We are now accounted as righteous before all. This teaching is called ‘justification by faith alone’, that is, ‘not by works’, but by believing in Christ and his death as the basis for declaring us righteous.

CONCLUSION TO ‘BECOMING A CHRISTIAN—I’

We have very briefly covered four aspects of becoming a Christian. For the rest of our lives we will be thinking about these things, pondering them, learning more regarding them. They will ever be both wonderful and powerful for us. We need to go over them, time and again, for we will often be tempted to think they are not true. What we must remember is not that we made a commitment to God, but that He has revealed Himself to us, and drawn us to Himself. His grace—His love in action—has set us free from our pasts and we are accepted by Him, forgiven all our sins, and justified before the law. We have been born a second time and are His true children. In fact we are all His sons and daughters, and in eternity will be known as ‘sons’—and be just like His Son. Here, on earth, we are His Family, often called ‘the Church’.

Christies Beach Monday Night Series, Term 1, 1998. G. Bingham.

Practical Christian Living: Study Seven:

Becoming a Christian—II: Sanctification, Perfection

BECOMING A CHRISTIAN—SANCTIFICATION AS A DESIGNATION

The word ‘sanctification’ is one used in regard to a person becoming and/or being holy. I Corinthians 6:9–11 states:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, *you were sanctified*, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

This passage says that those who are Christians have been washed, sanctified and justified. Notice that sanctification here precedes justification. This is similar to what I Peter 1:1–2 says:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen and destined by God the Father and *sanctified by the Spirit* for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.

Peter, like Paul, is saying that we were sanctified as we were also moved to believe in Jesus Christ and to become his servants.

Most of us would say clearly that we cannot think of ourselves as holy, and in one way this seems to be the case. By ‘holy’ we understand one who is pure and who fully obeys God’s law, and seeks to main continual purity of life. If we understand the use of sanctification in the two references above, then we see that it has to do with what God is doing with us: He is consecrating us to Himself as His holy people, and so we receive the status as ‘holy ones’ or ‘saints’. In I Corinthians 1:2 we read:

To the church which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.

If we ponder this, we see firstly ‘the church which is at Corinth’. So there is a group of people at Corinth who belong to Christ. Secondly, we see that they are ‘called to be saints’. Saints means ‘holy ones’ in the sense that they are God’s people. We see they are called by God. Paul told the church at Thessalonica, ‘God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through *sanctification by the Spirit*, and belief in the truth. To this he *called* you through our gospel’

(II Thess. 2:13–14; cf. I Pet. 1:2). The word ‘call’ means God has actually made them to be His saints: they did not attempt to make themselves holy. We see that they at Corinth are saints along ‘with all others who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ’. Those who *call* on the name of Christ are those who have been *called* and baptised into him and belong to him and are under his Lordship.

Understanding what some people call ‘positional sanctification’ is made easy if we read Exodus 19:5–6, where God spoke to Israel His people:

Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

So, then, Israel was a holy people. When we look at I Peter 2:9–10 we read:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a *holy nation*, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

Here we see that the holy people of God who were the Jews in Exodus 19:5–6 are now those who belong to the Church of God. So, then, all who are truly Christ's people are *designated* as holy.

Notice we use the word 'designated'. We are in the category of being counted holy. In the Old Testament people (e.g. kings, priests and Levites, etc.), animals and things (e.g. sacrificial animals, temple furniture, vessels, etc.) were consecrated to God's service and so were regarded as 'holy to the LORD'. In another way we can say that all these people, animals and things were used in the service of the Lord. By 'service' we mean worship and doing God's will within His plan and purpose.

When we are converted, born again, forgiven our sins, cleansed and made the children of God, we are also sanctified. Hebrews 10:10, referring to Christ's sacrifice says, 'And by that will we *have been sanctified* through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all'. In Acts 20:32 Paul speaks about 'the inheritance among all who are sanctified'. In Acts 26:17–18 Paul tells of the command Jesus gave him at his own conversion, to go to the Gentiles:

to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

In this sense people who believe in Christ for salvation are called 'sanctified'.

Perhaps someone might say, 'It is all very well being designated by God as a saint—a consecrated one—but ought we not to expect that person to be holy in his or her living?' The answer is, 'Yes, we should expect that'. Let us now look at this idea of acting in a holy way.

BEING A CHRISTIAN AS A PERSON LIVING A HOLY LIFE

There is a responsibility put on us to be finished with sin and to live a holy life. First we must define what we mean by 'living a holy life'. To live a holy life is to be used by God to worship Him and to do His will. Some people think a holy life is a matter of 'Do this', and 'Don't do that' or you will not be holy. The answer to this kind of thinking is to say, 'I am a holy person because God has consecrated me to Himself and calls me to live that kind of life. I do not have the power to resist sin and to accomplish what is good, but He enables me. Whilst I depend upon Him I can live a holy life. I will often fail but this will not alter my "designation" as a "saint", for God's grace of forgiveness and His continual cleansing of me means I can get up every time I fail and can go on His service, doing His will. I do not have to do these actions in order to be justified for He justified me for ever. I can seek to do these things because he has made me one of His holy people.'

That is a healthy way of looking at it. To be forgiven all sins, to be washed, sanctified and justified put each saint in the very best position possible. In Hebrews 10:12–14 the writer tells us something the same, 'But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet. For by a single offering he has *perfected* for all time those who are *sanctified*.' We will look at these verses in our next Section but here we can see that all who have been forgiven have also been sanctified.

The same writer says in 12:14, 'Strive for peace (reconciliation) with all men, and for the holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.' Here he points to our wills. We should will to do holiness, strive to do it. Likewise Peter says in his First Letter 1:13–17, 'Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, *be holy yourselves in all your conduct*; since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.'

These passages may seem to say being holy is a difficult matter, but this is not so. Paul once said, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,' and another time he said, 'I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.' Twice in the New Testament we are told we have been 'sanctified by the Spirit' meaning 'consecrated to God by the Spirit', but the Holy Spirit is also present to help us live holy lives. Just one example will show this: in Galatians 5:16, 25 we are told to walk in the Spirit and live by the Spirit. In 5:22–23 we are told what are the works of the Spirit, 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.' In fact Christ, the Father and the Spirit are present with us to live the life of holiness. The driving force for holiness is the love of God, firstly His love for us and in us, and secondly our love for Him, inspired by His love for us. I Thessalonians 3:12–13 is a good example of this, 'and may the Lord make you increase and *abound in love to one another and to all men*, as we do to you, 3:13 so that he may establish your hearts *unblamable in holiness* before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.'

BECOMING A CHRISTIAN: PERFECTION

We saw that it is God who sanctifies us, for innately we are not holy. We are holy only by the grace of God which gives us this designation and motivates us to seek to live holy lives. In Hebrews 10:10–14 we read,

'And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.'

The last sentence tells us that Christ has perfected us for all time by his sacrifice. Does that mean we are never imperfect, and that we never sin? The answer is 'No. It means that Christ has done everything in his sacrifice for us, so that we can stand before God without fault.' F. F. Bruce in his commentary on Hebrews (New London Commentary, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1964, p. 241) writes,

'Three outstanding effects are thus ascribed to the sacrifice of Christ; by it His people have their conscience cleansed from guilt; by it they have been fitted to approach God as accepted worshippers; by it they have experienced the fulfilment of what was promised in earlier days, being brought into that perfect relation to God which is involved in the new covenant.'

This means then that we are so perfected in the sight of God that nothing is missing for us to be in full relationship with him. Thus being forgiven, cleansed, sanctified and justified, as also being adopted as sons of God means we can now be at ease with God. The Greek word for 'perfect' is

often translated as ‘mature’ or ‘complete’, hence the writer of Hebrews says in 6:1, ‘Let us go on to maturity’. On the cross Jesus cried, ‘It is finished!’ meaning, ‘It—the work of my sacrifice—is complete!’ Paul talks about Christians who are mature (I Cor. 2:6), but by this he means those who have go on learning and living more in Christ, not that they have reached perfection. In Philippians 3:12–15 Paul says,

‘Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you’.

Paul makes it clear that he is not completely mature, but seems to mean that we can attain a maturity as we go which is not the ultimate maturity, yet if we keep maturing—‘pressing forward to what lies ahead’—then we will obtain ‘the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus’, that then, we will be perfect.

We conclude that so far as our salvation and standing before God are concerned, those are perfect and in that sense we are perfect. So far as completing the will of God for and in our lives we are not yet perfect, but in the stages in which we live the Christian life we can be counted as mature—for that stage—and not as those who deny the forward movement of our life in God.

CONCLUSION: SANCTIFICATION AND PERFECTION ARE OURS AS REALITIES, YET REALITIES TO BE EXPERIENCED

To know we are designated holy brings home to us the freedom and responsibility to be holy. To know that we have been perfected in our standing before God encourages and directs us to go on in the Christian life knowing His grace will bring us to fully maturity.

Note: We could have added a third category in this Study, namely Glorification. Just as we have been sanctified and perfected, and are living in holiness and maturity, so, too, we have been glorified (Rom. 8:30) and are also being glorified (Rom. 6:17–25; II Cor. 3:18; cf. II Cor. 4:16–17). One day we will be wholly glorified. Glorification is very much linked with sanctification and perfection.

Christies Beach Monday Night Series, Term 1, 1998. G. Bingham.

Practical Christian Living: Study Eight:

The Basis of It All: Hearing Is Telling

THE FACT AND POWER OF HEARING

In Ephesians 1:13 Paul says, 'In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit'. The Apostle was saying that the Ephesians, having heard the gospel, were at that time sealed by God with the Holy Spirit. To hear, in the New Testament, is to receive what is spoken and to obey it. This is brought out in Luke 8:4–21. Jesus told a number of stories regarding hearing. The first story was about the sower sowing his seed on four kinds of ground. Only the sown seed of one soil was truly fruitful. Jesus taught that all four 'soils' listened but three of them were ultimately unfruitful. At the end of the story he cried, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear'. This direction is also found seven times in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. These seven letters of Christ are really what the Spirit was/is saying to the churches, and readers are exhorted, 'Hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches'.

In Luke 8:16–20 Jesus talks of a person lighting a lamp but hiding the light. This is like having the truth but hiding it. We may think we have the truth, but what we think we have shall be taken away from us if we hide its light which is intended to light the way of people who seek to come into the house (of God). Hearing is obeying the truth, that is, acting on what one is told. This may take many forms. Paul asked the question, 'how are they to hear without a preacher?', meaning that we must tell what we have heard or folk will be without the message of the gospel.

When God speaks none of His words fall to the ground and are then lost. Isaiah 55:10–11 says:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it spring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

God's word is powerful and effective, and if it is not so in our lives when we have heard it, it will mean that we have not listened, have not accepted and obeyed it. A good exercise is to take down a concordance and open it up at 'hear', 'hearing', 'hearken' and such words. We will be surprised how much the terms are used. On the one hand someone is saying, 'Thus says the Lord . . .' and on the other, 'Hearken to the word of the Lord'. To hearken is to listen, hear the words and then put them into action.

TO HEAR IS TO TELL

In Galatians 1:11–16 Paul talks of what he had been told to him:

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for

the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles . . .

The gospel was opened to Paul by his meeting with Christ on the road to Damascus. He claims that Christ taught him the gospel personally. He had doubtless heard the gospel many times, since he tried to get Christians to recant of their belief, but the time with Christ was significant. Verses 15–16 say:

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, *in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles* . . .

In other words, Paul was given the gospel which converted him, and the purpose of that was *that he might preach Christ among the Gentiles*.

This is what we must see. We hear in order to tell. The apostles told the Sanhedrin (the Jewish parliament), ‘we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard’. The Apostle John says simply:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (I John 1:1–3).

The New Testament, abounds in Acts and the Epistles, in indications that the Christians of the early church were bound to tell what they had heard. Of course they were commanded to do so, but the command was not a hard one to them. No sooner had Stephen been killed for the word he spoke, than Philip was off to Samaria to tell the word. Peter was called to Caesarea to speak to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius the Roman centurion. The Christians who fled Jerusalem went down to Antioch in Syria and on the way spoke not only to their fellow Jews, but also to Greeks and others, and those who were converted formed a church which in its turn sent out Paul and Barnabas to other lands. Soon there were movements of preaching and teaching Christians throughout Asia and Europe. History tells us that many were going to the ends of the earth. Today, too, this is still the case. We can say that many who have been converted go out to convert. Whilst this may be the case with any religion, philosophy or ideology, the difference is that the Christian gospel offers the forgiveness of sins, the gift of eternal life, and power to live in this world with a view to inheriting the world beyond. These gifts, as such, are not offered by other faiths. Our main point here is, ‘*To hear is to tell. That is, when we have heard and tell, our faith is alive to us. When we hear but do not tell, we lose vitality; we lose the thrust of the power of love*’. When we examine this principle that hearing is telling, we can see a number of things: (i) In II Kings 7:9 we find four lepers who on discovering good food and drink and much wealth which the Syrians had abandoned through fear, said to one another, ‘We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news; if we are silent and wait till the morning light, punishment will overtake us; now therefore come, let us tell the king’s household’. The very fact that it is good news should compel us to share it with others who are needy. At the same time it is good to have that fear of the Lord (II Cor. 5:11) that He will require the blood of men at our hands if we do not obey His command to tell them (cf. Ezek. 3:16–21; Acts 20:26–27). In I Corinthians 9:16–17) Paul cries, ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!’; (ii) Paul says, ‘The love of Christ constrains us’, and love should constrain us to tell the good news. Hearing which changes us demands that we should tell others. In this lies our continuing spiritual health. To be saved is to save. To be rescued is to rescue. To be loved is to love; and (iii) the rewards of living and telling according to the Word of God are incentives which keep us telling the good news to the lost and needy. Their conversion is our reward.

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Practical Christian Living: Study Nine:

The Law of Grace & the Grace of Law

THE LAW OF GRACE¹⁶

By the word ‘law’ here we mean ‘principle’. We speak of the principle of grace. In the Old Testament two Hebrew words were used, *chen* meaning ‘favour’, and *chesed* meaning ‘loving-kindness, steadfast love’ (cf. Gen. 6:8; Exod. 34:6–7). In the New Testament the Greek word is *charis*, and seems to catch up the ideas of both favour and loving-kindness. Whilst ‘unmerited favour’¹⁷ partly describes grace yet that is not its full meaning. *Charis* also means ‘gift’. It is best not to think of grace as a something, a power and an influence, but as God Himself in His actions and especially going out to Man to do him good, no matter what his condition. Grace generally carries the idea of restoration, God doing the restoring. Grace is God’s love in action. Without that love and its grace-action Mankind would be wholly doomed.

II Timothy 1:8–10 says:

... God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed to us through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.

In this we see that ‘before the ages began’ God purposed grace for humanity. Then ‘it has now been revealed to us through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus’, and the act of that grace was that Christ ‘abolished death and brought life and immortality to light’.

So then, grace can be shown to have three tenses: (i) ‘before the ages began’ (II Tim. 1:9); (ii) ‘through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus’ (II Tim. 1:10). John 1:14 adds, ‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth’, while verses 16 and 17 adds, ‘From his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’. Titus 2:11 (cf. 3:4–7), says, ‘The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation’; and (iii) *There is a grace which will come at the end time*, the *telos* (goal) of God for all history. I Peter 1:13 says, ‘Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ’.

The grace planned before time can be read of in Ephesians 1:3–7, where we see what God had in mind to happen in time. In particular, verse 7 says, ‘In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace’. Ephesians 2:4–10 further opens up this grace happening in time, the heart of which is, ‘by grace you have been saved’, and verse 7 talks of ‘the immeasurable riches of his grace’. Most important is the passage of Romans 3:19–24 where we see we are ‘justified by his grace’. Romans 5:12–21 supports this wonderful truth.

The Book of Acts, if followed by the aid of a concordance, will show the many references to grace. In particular see how the early church lived under ever-present grace (4:33; 6:8), how it operated by grace (11:23; 13:43), and how members commended one another to the grace of God or to ‘the word of his grace’ (14:26; 15:40; 20:32). We can sum up the law or principle of grace by saying that God in His love has restored lost and sinful Man and saved him through the gospel of grace, and continues to sustain, enrich, and complete him, *all by grace*.

¹⁶ For a fuller treatment of all aspects of grace, see my book *Great and Glorious Grace* (NCPI, 1988).

¹⁷ Is there such a thing as ‘merited favour’?

Ultimately the new heavens and the new earth, the Holy City, the Holy Marriage, and Paradise will be shown to be the complete grace of God in successful action. What we should not miss is the painful cost this was to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to work their grace for the salvation of the world.

THE GRACE OF LAW¹⁸

Here we are speaking directly of God's law. In some theologies God's law and God's grace are opposed one to another. Some even see law as fulfilled in Christ and abolished by grace, so that there is now no defined law.¹⁹ It is then claimed that we live by grace without a defined law. It is said that at the best we have the Holy Spirit to guide us in what we should do. In this theology it is seen to be dangerous to do 'works of the law' because they may deceive us into going back into 'works-righteousness'. In answer to this theology we should explain that when Ephesians 2:8–9 says, 'For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of *works*, lest any man should boast', it means no *works* we have done have saved us. In fact the Book of Hebrews calls sins 'dead works' and would include all 'self-help works' to also be dead ones.

In the light of the view of grace explained above, much has been written about 'cheap grace', and sometimes a kind of 'costly grace' is recommended. Grace may be costly to God but not to us. Grace is never *cheap* for it is *free*! Verse 10 of Ephesians 2 says, 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*'. 'Good works' are not stated as being 'works of the law', though they could be that. They are works God has planned for His people to do.

What is God's Law?

The law of God is often seen as a law given to Man from God, which Man must obey under promise of prosperity and peace, and that a penalty will be exacted where there is law-breaking. The law is first of all 'the law of God', meaning that it is the law of His being: it is the way of God's own actions. The Hebrew word *torah* primarily meant 'instruction' and the (so-called) Ten Commandments are really 'the ten words' spoken personally and directly to Israel at Sinai. They are God's word and His words to His covenant people. They are the true way of life which is lived in the covenant God. Man as the image of God corresponds in his actions to the actions of God. 'Man is the living, personal image of God; the law is the written, preceptual image of God'.²⁰ Because the law is God's it has always been in existence for operation. Romans 5:13 says, 'sin indeed was in the world before the law was given', and some have taken this to mean there was no law of God given until Sinai, but law must be innate in creation. It is clear (i) that 'Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws', and (ii) that moral values and judgments were known, for example, the cases of Pharaoh (Gen. 12:10–20) and Abimelech (Gen. ch. 20) in relation to taking Sarah into their households.

¹⁸ For a fuller treatment of Law see my book *Sweeter Than Honey, More Precious Than Gold* (NCPI, 1995).

¹⁹ To be fair to those who say the law has been fulfilled by Christ and thus abolished, we should point out that they see the law as lethal, which it is shown to be in Romans 4:15; 5:20; Galatians 3:10, 19, 22. If the law kills, then this would, it is supposed, happen again when a justified person seeks again to obey the law. The fallacy of this argument is that a justified person does not seek to justify himself/herself by law. It should be noted that the law is the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24) and having completed both the damning of the sinner and the bringing to Christ, the law now has its character as the law of love, the covenant law written in our hearts and inward parts by the Spirit of God (Jer. 31:31–34).

²⁰ J. A. Motyer, article 'Law, Biblical Concept of' in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker, 1984, p. 624). We should note here that Man, as the image of God, does what God does; he follows the innate law of God. This is borne out by Deuteronomy 4:13 where the law is equated with the covenant. Law is not only the 'marker' of the covenant, but its very essence and action.

In Israel the law covered the whole of covenantal life, fitting everything that was in ‘the ten words’. Deuteronomy 4:13 said, ‘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’ (cf. Exod. 31:18; 34:28; Deut. 10:4; Lev. 26:14–15). Psalms 1, 19, 119 (amongst others) show the beauty of the law and love of it by the godly covenant worshippers.

The New Testament and Law

We now have to decide in the light of what is written above whether the law of God is still necessary for the people of the New Covenant. Jeremiah 31:31–34 shows that God will write this law in the hearts of the New Covenant people and ‘put it in their inward parts’. Certainly God’s law is here observed. The question is, ‘What is the nature of this law God writes in the hearts of the people of the New Covenant, and is it the same as “the ten words”?’ Others would ask, ‘Is not the law of Christ, which is the law of love, the law which the covenant puts in our hearts?’ The answer to such questions is that the law of Christ was first the law which Christ obeyed, that is, the law of God as known in the Old Testament. When we come to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:17–20 Jesus never rescinded ‘the law and the prophets’. Note it is both the law and the prophets which are quoted. When Romans 10:1–4 talks of Israel’s failure to properly observe the law²¹ it says that Christ is the *telos* of the law, that is, its *goal* and not its *end* in the sense that it is finished with or abrogated for ever, hence the law still stands. Romans 13:8–10 and Galatians 5:13–14 (cf. Matt. 22:34–40) show that the law is expressed in loving and that this is still the way of love in the New Covenant. Undoubtedly ‘the law of Christ’ (I Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2) is the law of love and at the same time the law of God (cf. Rom. 8:1–8).

To sum up: because the law has to be obeyed by faith, and is not otherwise obeyed, and because Man cannot, of himself, obey the law (cf. Rom. ch. 7), then Man needs grace to obey the law. The member of the New Covenant has been brought by grace to justification, and so, by continuing grace he/she now obeys the law. The law, being the way of love and covenant obedience, brings the experience of God’s grace into every aspect of the believer’s life (cf. Ps. 19:7–10). As it is by God’s grace the law is obeyed, so the experience of the law is the experience of grace, that is, God’s love in action.

²¹ In the Old Testament Israel had to observe the law with faith, and not with anything else. The law is not there to be fulfilled so that salvation (justification) may come to the one who observes it. Israel’s failure regarding the law was that it did not see Christ as its goal. The law was there as the covenant law, the very law of God Himself.