



New Creation Teaching Ministry

1997 PASTOR'S MONDAY STUDY GROUP NOTES

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The Several Gifts of Israel—V, The Worship

Introduction: The Gifts are All One

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

THE MEANING OF THE WORD 'WORSHIP'

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

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

The Greek verb *latreuo* ('to serve') and the noun *latreia* ('service') in the LXX are used ninety and nine times respectively, but in the NT, twenty-one and five times respectively. The other Greek word *leitourgeo* (verb), 'to serve', 'to minister' and *leitourgia* (noun) 'service', 'ministry' are used in the LXX generally with the priestly ministry in mind, but in the NT both

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

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

verbs and nouns are fairly interchangeable, and the sum of the matter is that ‘to worship’ and ‘to serve’ are virtually synonymous. The equivalent of *hishtachawah* is, roughly speaking, *proskuneo*, ‘to bend the knee’, ‘to pay homage’. On the whole we can sum up the words as adding up to service and worship being the one.

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

A SHORT HISTORY OF HUMAN WORSHIP IN THE LIGHT OF COVENANT

The Beginning of Worship

A little further on in our Study we will see that worship begins with, and proceeds from, the nature of God as the Triune God. This knowledge of God as Triune is a later revelation than that given to Israel. Israel always thought of itself as Adam and so saw its beginnings in him, and so flowing from him would be worship. Where and when, then, does worship begin but in Eden? The principle of it is seen in Jesus’ great statement, ‘God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth’, is clear enough. God is not seen, for he is unseeable. He is not known, because he is ineffable. He is only known when he makes himself known. Human worship of God, then, originates with the creation of Man. Primary worship is Edenic worship where Man had fellowship with God. Man is one in communion with God because he is the image of God, and so worship is communion. It is that response to God of the human heart, as

(i) a response to the glory of God, (ii) a giving of worth to God commensurate with his *revealed* glory, and (iii) praise and thanksgiving for his creation of Man and his giving of

- (a) the creational mandate of vocation (Gen. 1:28f.), and
- (b) of gifts to him.⁴

All of this is intelligent worship, that is, of the mind as well as of the affections (Rom. 12:2; cf. Deut. 10:12).

Worship Following the Fall

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

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

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

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

WORSHIP AND COVENANT

Introduction: The Nature and Place of Covenant

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

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

The Covenant Which Embraces All Covenants— the Covenant of God

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

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

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

The Practical Significance of the Covenant of God

We cannot here argue the full case, but simply state that all men everywhere have an idea (image) of God, of covenant, of the law and of worship. They have images we would call theological, cosmological and anthropological. All these images are wrong, but Man must

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

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

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

All the Covenants of God

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

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

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

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

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

Patriarchal Worship—The Abrahamic Covenant

It is a fact of history that peoples worshipped gods. Thus Micah 4:5, ‘For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD [YAHWEH] our God for ever and ever’. Each people had its own sanctuaries, and generally fought other peoples in the name of their gods. Abraham was an idolater (Josh. 24:2–3) but ‘the God of glory appeared to [him]’ (Acts 7:1–2). When God appeared to each of the patriarchs they built altars or memorials and offered sacrifices, refusing to worship the surrounding deities. This brings us to the matter of worship and culture. We have said, in other Studies, that culture comes from cultus. Cultus is the system of worship a clan or a nation espouses, and cultural elements are consonant with it; indeed derive from it. Thus—at Babel—the scattering of the peoples by means of languages created ‘the nations’ in their strong forms of culture and worship, since they chose ‘gods’ rather than God (cf. Acts 17:26; Deut 32:8–9).

Israel and Worship—The Sinaitic Covenant

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

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

Worship in and of the New Covenant¹¹

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

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

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

From this we can proceed to see that Christ as the True Worshipper not only lived in true worship but set up what we might call the structure of New Covenant worship. His was a High Priestly work from the inception of his ministry at his baptism through to his Cross, Resurrection and Ascension. He was, and is, ‘the minister in the sanctuary’. It is to the heart of that sanctuary that we now penetrate through Christ (Heb. 10:19–22). He has obviated the old sacrifices, since his death has once for all finished the matter of sin’s penalty, pollution and power.

⁸ See Deuteronomy 4:6–8.

⁹ Romans 9:4–5.

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

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

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

He is ‘the New Man’; he is the true temple, and has constituted his people as that new temple. He is the glory of God, the true Image, and the Holy Spirit has been given that we might now have what we call ‘Triune worship’, the very worship within the Godhead, and aided by the members of that Godhead.

As we have said,¹³ the Father initiates the worship, the Son is the great High Priest, the minister in the sanctuary, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of worship, so that we whose dead works have been purified, have the new consciousness of God and so offer him spiritual worship. As to modes of worship in the New Testament we are unable here to expand. These will be apparent, overall, through all the Studies. Even so, a quotation from Hebrews 12:18–24, and the exhortation of 12:28–29, makes rich and stimulating reading:

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

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

WORSHIP OF AND IN THE TRIUNE GOD

Worship of the Triune God *within* the Three Persons

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

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

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

The Heart of All Worship within the Godhead

A statement such as our heading cannot be understood unless we know something of the Triune God, and understand the Three Persons to constitute the Divine Family, or Community of love. John’s statement, ‘God is love’ (I John 4:8, 16) has to be fully understood. In the context he is saying, ‘The Father is love’. Nowhere is it said that the Son (Jesus) is love. The Father is the *fons divinitatis*, ‘the fountain of love’. The Son is called ‘the Son of his love’ (Col. 1:13), and we gather that the Holy Spirit is ‘the Spirit of love’ (Rom. 5:5; 15:30; Gal. 5:22–23; cf. Col. 1:9). We must not understand love to be a factor which binds the Three together, but rather that the Son is eternally generated by the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This means there is a hierarchical relationship, and yet as such, the Son is in the Father, the Father in the Son, the Spirit in both and both in the Spirit (cf. John 10:38; 17:20ff.).

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

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

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

(a) **All Three Persons honour one another**—inter-honouring. In John’s Gospel it is clear that Jesus seeks to glorify the Father, the Father glorifies the Son, and the Holy Spirit glorifies both. In the Synoptic Gospels, as also in John, the Father and the Son glorify the Spirit.¹⁵

(b) **All Three Persons serve one another**—inter-serving. There can be no question about the Father serving the Son in sending him into this world and aiding him in his ministry, for the Son continually applies to the Father. Likewise the Son serves the Spirit in that he is subject to him, and the Spirit serves the Son in that he aids him. Likewise the Spirit is served by the Father and the Son in that he is one with them and draws his ministry from them.¹⁶

(c) **All Three Persons give to one another**—inter-giving. The Father constantly gives to the Son all that he needs. Indeed he says he has nothing but what the Father has given him. John 17 speaks so many times of ‘the Father has given me’. At the same time the Son renders service and glorification to the Father amidst his life of worship. Likewise the Spirit gives of himself to the Father and the Son.

(d) **All Three Persons receive from one another**.¹⁷ Love that gives and does not receive is not love. Hence the Father receives all that the Son renders to him, all that the Spirit gives in service of the Father, and both receive the gifts of the Father.

These four elements constitute communion, and so, worship, *all of it in love*. So, then, *there is no true human worship which does not derive from the Triune worship*. That is, Man is not left to devise his own worship.

Our Worship Derives from the Godhead

We must remember that in creation Man—as the image of God—is in covenant relationship with God. That is the gift of God’s creating him, and is not ‘of grace’, common or special.

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

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

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

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

Within the Godhead what we might call ‘the covenant relationship of the Three Persons’ is innate. Hence, when Man is created, covenant relationship is innate in him, deriving from the Godhead.

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

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

The Perichoresis–Circumincessio

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

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

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

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

Previously we saw Man was created in the image of God. Because of the relationship between Man and God, Man was in communion with the Creator, and as such worshipped him. We might say that all the resources of God were his and as such were used in worship. There can be no better word for worship than ‘communion’. We saw ‘to know God is to worship him’, and the saying (regarding God), ‘I give to you that you may give to me’.²⁰ In other words, created Man knew what it was to worship God. He just worshipped him.

As people of the New Testament we can say, ‘We know God to be the Triune One, and we know we are *in* him, so where is the difficulty in worship?’ The answer should be, ‘None’, until we ponder the fact that worship is both personal—by one—and corporate—by many. True worship is not something confined to a church service. Giving true worth to God and honour to all is something which proceeds every day. There can only be true (full) worship in a corporate worship service when all come having lived out the life of worship as service and communion during the other days of the week. As we can see in the Study ‘The Battle for

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

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

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

Worship'²¹ there are forces within us and around us which seek to destroy the worship we would, or should, give. So, then, we are *in* the Godhead and God is *in* us, so that we know our worship is assured when aided by the faithfulness of God, and we evince a responding faithfulness, also.

The Father and Our Worship

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

(a) The provision of propitiation in sacrifice, through faith, shows God took the initiative even before the Fall to provide true worship for us. From Abel onwards such sacrificial worship has been provided and so is acceptable to God as Father.

(b) In Israel the covenant provided and prescribed the effective sacrifices whereby the gift of worship was used personally and corporately to serve God and live life. God was present in the Holy of Holies and, as such, present to all his community. This gift in this form was exclusive to Israel. God is jealous of his people ever departing from the worship of himself. Idolatry is always punished. God covets the worship of his people, and so he gives them a heart to love him (Deut. 30:6).

(c) In the New Covenant, Christ being the true Priest, true Worshipper and true Oblation, has provided a way into the inner sanctuary, the Holy Place where we now meet him who is Father. This opening up of worship is made universal. Now we may worship him in spirit and in truth. *Such worshippers the Father ever seeks to worship him.*

(d) The idea of God as Father seeking us is shown in the revelation of himself as Father by the incarnation, life, ministry, death and resurrection of his Son. In John 4:21–24 Jesus taught that worship of the Father was God’s intention. So the Father took the initiative to bring us to himself as his sons, for as we put on Christ the Son, so we are in the Son and share his Sonship.²² Jesus expounds this matter of the Fatherhood and Sonship in John’s Gospel, and Paul expounds it in Romans 8:14–17 and Galatians 3:26 – 4:7.

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

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

²¹ See WAPSN/95, Study 9.

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

The Son and Our Worship

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

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

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

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

The Holy Spirit and Our Worship²⁴

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

The order of worship in Israel was related to the Holy Spirit as Hebrews 9:8 shows. Jesus’ prophecy of the new worship being of the Father, and by the Spirit who was to glorify the Father and the Son by revelation (John 4:21–24; 16:12–15), indicates that worship is by the Spirit. In Acts 2, when those gathered were filled with the Holy Spirit, they had this predicted revelation and worship. Pentecost was the beginning of a new era of worship, so profoundly different from what went before, that Ezekiel chapters 36 and 37 must be interpreted by it. Not only was ‘dead’ Israel brought to life, but the purification from sins and the receiving into the heart of ‘a new spirit’, comports with our paragraph immediately above, and with passages referring to regeneration (e.g. Titus 3:4–7).

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

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

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

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

through the Spirit. As through the mediatorial work of Christ we worship and offer intercessions, so through the Spirit we do the same (Rom. 8:26f.).

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

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

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

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

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

The Several Gifts of Israel—VI, The Promises

INTRODUCTION: THE GIFTS ARE ALL ONE

As in our past five Studies we emphasise that the gifts are all of one piece. Even so, in the matter of 'promise' there is a slight difference. These other five gifts are possessions in Israel and factors by which their covenantal calling works, namely 'the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship'. The promises, in one sense, cannot be said to be a gift in the same manner, but then the giving of the promises was what Israel built its hope upon, and without them it would have been aimless. Likewise in the NT the church, and, indeed humanity as a whole, would be also without an assured goal, so that promises are as the objects promised. For example, in Hebrews 6:15, 'And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise', meaning the birth of his son, Isaac. Yet not all promises were fulfilled in the lifetime of the believing community or person, for Hebrews 11:13 says, 'These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth'.

Promises and Prophecy

We immediately link promises with prophecy, and this is correct, especially where prophecy relates to prediction. However not all prophecy is promise, since much of it relates to judgment and disaster which can scarcely be looked upon as 'promise'. Even so, such judgment works out as promise where it is the vindication of God as he releases his people from sin and oppression, and this kind of action aids the fulfilment of promise. In this Study we can by no means cover all the promises of God, so that we need to see prophecy as perhaps the greatest source of God's promises: that is, we need to explore prophecy. Whilst promises are of grace, yet—as we shall see—they are to be held in high regard, never taken for granted, and are often subject to the grace-obligation to obedience.

THE IDEA OF 'PROMISE' IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Whilst in some of our English versions the word 'promise' appears, there is technically no special verb for the word. *Dabar* is a verb used some 800 times as 'to speak' and about 100 times as 'to say', but because what God says stands, the idea of 'promise' as a reality is certainly present, and some translators have translated *dabar* as 'to promise'. God's Word does not equivocate in the matter of promises. Thus in Joshua 23 we have the idea of promise repeated in verses 5, 14, and 15, in such words as 'not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God promised you'. *Amar*, 'to say', is much less used as another word for promise as in Numbers 14:40 'the place which the Lord has promised', and as in Psalm 77:8 the noun *omer* is used, 'Are his promises at an end for all time?' Even so, the idea of promise is very strong, particularly in God's plans for Israel and his covenant.¹ As we now see, his promises begin even before the formation of Israel.

Because the New Testament does throw light back on the Old Testament in relation to the doctrine of promise, we need to understand the use of the word 'promise'. There is virtually no word-link from the Old Testament via the LXX. The main word in the NT is *epangelia* which is translated into the English as 'promises' in its nounal (*epangelia*) and verbal forms (*epangellomai*),

¹ Deuteronomy 1:11; 6:3; 9:28; 15:6; 19:8.

the latter meaning ‘to announce, proclaim, promise, profess’.

The Beginning of Promise in the Old Testament

In Romans 1:1–6, Paul speaks of ‘the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son . . .’. Again, in Galatians 3:8 he writes, ‘And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed”’. Paul means this gospel was in existence, that it was uttered by God to Abraham and was written as a promise that would be before all readers as a statement and promise of God.

In another way of speaking, the gospel existed before time in the intention and creation of God, which ‘God who never lies, promised ages ago and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I [Paul] have been entrusted . . .’ (Titus 1:2–3). It is not improper then to see the first promise of God within the first pronouncement in Genesis 3:15, concerning the defeat of the serpent; the second in Genesis 9:8–17, concerning God’s covenant with all the creation; and the third in Genesis 12:1–3, the great covenant promise to Abraham. The promise to Abraham was that he would give him a son, give him a vast posterity,² and that in him all the nations would be blessed.³ This latter promise is the good news—the gospel—to the world.

The Promise of History Being Salvific

If we go back to Genesis 3:15 we see that God is promising he will destroy the destroyer of the Edenic situation—the serpent.⁴ The destruction of this one will enable Man more easily to fulfil the vocation God has made with him. The good news is that Eden is not blocked off forever, nor Man unable to come to that fellowship and worship God had given to him but which he had forfeited. Whilst the promise to Noah guaranteed the creation that it would not be cursed or destroyed by water, yet it is the promise to Abraham that the nations will be blessed which Paul sees in Galatians 3 as ‘the gospel’. Thus the promises being passed on to Isaac and Jacob mean the gospel is being preached to them and their posterity. Jacob’s utterance of Genesis 49:10 also introduces an important factor:

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples [nations].

Through Jacob this is also a *dabar* of God, a promise. In the immediate situation, Abraham—and thus Israel—is promised a country—‘the promised land’—an inheritance and blessing which means *shalom* and prosperity, and all wealth needed for *shalom*’s intrinsic security. The continuity of a dynasty was highly prized, for it too was the assurance of longevity and the perpetuation of a great family.

Israel and Its Salvation from Egypt to Canaan

With Isaac and especially with Jacob, there are promises of the continuity of the ‘gospel’. Paul thus speaks of the Gentiles as being ‘outside’ or ‘strangers to the covenants of promise’ (Eph. 2:12). The great promises related to Israel’s liberation from Egypt and—under the leadership of Moses—its going into the promised land, especially the well-defined Deuteronomic promises, all foresee a great future for Israel,⁵ especially when grace has

² Also Genesis 13:14–17; 15:1–7; 17:4–8; 22:17ff.; cf. 26:3–5; 28:13–15.

³ Genesis 18:19; 21:1; 22:15–18; 26:1–5; Deuteronomy 1:11; I Chronicles 16:16.

⁴ Note that the serpent virtually made a promise—that by the directed act of their eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they—the primal couple—would be as God, knowing good and evil. Evil seems to promise much but can bring nothing to pass that is *good*.

⁵ Genesis 50:22–25; Exodus 3:17; 12:26ff.; 32:13; Numbers 10:29; 14:16f.; Deuteronomy 6:3–23; 9:3–5, 28; 15:6; 19:8; 26:3–18; 29:13.

followed their apostasy regarding the making and worshipping of the golden calf. The events of Israel's history are often depressing, but with the judgment of the land, the exiles and the returns, the prophets keep talking about God's plans for Israel: 'For I know the plans that I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope' (Jer. 29:11).

The Davidic Covenant-Kingdom Promise

It is here the prophets, for all their exhortations and castigations and their pronouncements of judgment upon evil, have great and wonderful pronouncements for God which fit the quoted principle of Jeremiah. The promises for the land and the people continue, and they take the form of the Davidic covenant which is to be the continuance, and even the expansion of the Sinaitic covenant. The classic passages of II Samuel 7:12ff. and 23:5 (cf. Ps. 132:11) set the hope of the promise, 'Yea, does not my house stand so with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure'. Likewise Psalm 89 is a great disquisition on the great King:

I will sing of thy steadfast love, O LORD, for ever;
with my mouth I will proclaim thy faithfulness to all generations.
For thy steadfast love was established for ever,
thy faithfulness is firm as the heavens.
Thou hast said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to David my servant:
'I will establish your descendants for ever,
and build your throne for all generations.''

The whole Psalm speaks of the surety of the covenant, all in accordance with the other prophecies and statements as in I Kings 2:24; 5:12; 8:15–25; 9:5; II Chronicles 1:9; 6:4–20; and Ezekiel 34:23–24. The continuity of the Abrahamic and Davidic promises can be seen in Jeremiah 23:5–8 and Ezekiel 37:24–28.

The Promise of the New Covenant

It would seem that in spite of all that God has done and provided as Israel's Covenant Father they have sinned beyond redemption, yet the revelation of God as Promiser is innate in the revelation of his glory in Exodus 34:6–7:

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

There emerges, therefore, the promises of a new covenant. This is seen in Jeremiah 32:37–41:

Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation; I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for their own good and the good of their children after them, I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

This passage shapes with Ezekiel 36:24–27 in configuration. Strongest and plainest, however, is Jeremiah 31:31–34, which is quoted in the New Testament in the Book of Hebrews, is spoken of by Christ at the Last Supper, and utilised to some degree by Paul in Galatians chapter 3.

Israel, then, is not left to pine in the midst of God's judgments and its misfortunes. In Haggai 2:4f. God says, 'I am with you . . . according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt'. The nation knows that God is the God of promise and that what he has promised, though fulfilled in part, is yet to be fulfilled in its major portion. Certainly all promises are of God's grace and favour—his *chesed* and his *chen*—for he is the God of promise. There are many who are looking to the rise of Israel. We can sum up the promises up to this point as follows: of salvation; of the covenant-principle in which are the land and the people; the people and their longevity and their inheritance; the universality of blessing and eschatological climax of the universal blessing of the nations gathering to Israel; and the provision of the new heavens and the new earth.

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE PROMISES OF GOD

Romans 9:4–5, the passage we have been using regarding the gifts, is basic and foundational for the church because of the *promises* of the Old Testament.⁶ The fulfilment of many of these—indeed all that need be fulfilled—in the New Testament is the basis of living hope for its members. Past promises are just as significant in the history of salvation and glorification as are their present fulfilment, and as other promises added in to the process of that salvation history. By this we mean the promises Christ gave of the building of the church, the equipping it with the power of the Spirit, and the richer presentation than in the Old Testament of the eschatological 'things to come'. So then we may say in passing, that searching out the promises, facing them, and believing and acting upon them is of great pastoral significance.

SOME OF THE FULFILMENT OF PAST PROMISES

The Promise of the Abrahamic Covenant

If we reiterate Haggai 2:4, 'I am with you . . . according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt', then we may expect a new liberation by a new Moses into a new land, all transcending that of the former time and covenant. There were those in Jewry who anticipated a renewal, a restoration, a reviving of the now-oppressed nation, but the anticipated coming of Christ and the actual advent meant that such ideas had to be changed.

Paul summed it up when he said, 'For all the promises of God find their Yes in him [Christ]' (II Cor. 1:20). It is fascinating then to see the events which take place around the birth of Christ. Mary in her song concludes, 'He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his posterity for ever'. Zechariah speaks of God visiting and redeeming his people at this point in time; '[He] has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David'. This was according to 'the oath which he swore to our father Abraham'. It is to be not only for Israel but the nations; 'To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace'.

Likewise Simeon sees the coming of the Babe as the fulfilment of promise. In Luke 2:29–32 he says, with the same universal vision before his eyes:

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
 according to thy word;
 for mine eyes have seen thy salvation
 which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,
 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
 and for glory to thy people Israel.

⁶ There are, of course, other passages in the New Testament which speak of gifts, and these are mentioned in the text of this present paper.

It is not as though all the promises given to Israel had been exhausted in Abraham's time or even by the time of Israel in the OT. In Hebrews 6:13ff., the power and certainty of the promise made to Abraham—and to his heirs also—is made by means of an oath. Abraham is shown as 'having patiently endured, obtained the promise'. This of course is so, but in Hebrews 11:8–10 with 17–19, it is shown that Abraham, by faith in God's promises—that is, faith in God—went out, but then knew not where he was to go. He looked for a city which would have foundations, whose builder and maker would be God. He had not yet received the fulfilment of the promise, even though his descendants inhabited Canaan. Abraham looked to a far-extended promise in which the nations would also find their blessing. In the same Hebrews passage many others are mentioned: 'not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar'.

Paul takes up the Abrahamic promise in Galatians chapter 3, saying as we previously saw that 'the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed"' (3:8). Paul then goes on to say that that blessing was to come through one of Abraham's offspring, that is, Christ. Paul is wholly concerned here with promise, and this as against obtaining anything by law. Romans 4 makes it clear that it is by faith in the promises that men and women are forgiven and justified. So too in Galatians 3, all human beings who have faith in God must prove to be the children of Abraham. What is more, they come into the blessing of Abraham, which in this chapter is freedom from the curse, and the blessing of justification, both of which lead to a special blessing, namely that of the gift of the Spirit.⁷

The Promise of the Davidic Covenant

The theme of the Davidic kingdom and covenant in its elements of fulfilment is also strongly shown in the NT. In Acts 13:32–39:

And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm,

'Thou art my Son,
today I have begotten thee.'

And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he spoke in this way,

'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.'

Therefore he says also in another psalm,

'Thou wilt not let thy Holy One see corruption.'

For David, after he had served the counsel of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption; but he whom God raised up saw no corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

Notice first of all that Paul says, 'And we bring you the good news that *what God promised to the fathers*, this he has *fulfilled* to us their children by raising Jesus'. So his message is one with the promise of God: in fact this whole gospel has been *promised*. Then with the skilled use of Isaiah 55:3, Psalms 2 and 16, Paul shows that the promised blessings of David have come through this 'great David's greater son', so that Christ is the promised Davidic King, the one who in Psalm 89 is called 'the King' and 'my Son'. We cannot but conclude that the promise of the Davidic Kingdom and the Davidic Covenant are fulfilled in Christ as the King of the Kingdom, and the 'Mediator of a better covenant'.

So much for the showing of the Abrahamic covenant now being worked out in the New Covenant, and at the same time the promised Davidic Covenant. In the atmosphere of the gospel—the announced *kerygma*—we are in the atmosphere and environment of *promise* which has been fulfilled. For this reason we do not come upon a new, novel thing which is out of phase with the old, but are in the continuum of the ancient promises.

⁷ Shortly we will need to look at the matter of the promise of the Spirit which we find here in 3:13–14.

THE CONTINUING AND NEW PROMISES

The Gentiles and the Inheritance

It is obvious that the results of the promises constitute the new life of the church. That is, the stream of covenant and Kingdom which flows through from Israel by the presence and work of Christ, which can be described as ‘promise and fulfilment’, is the very life of the new people. Those who were ‘strangers to the covenants of promise’ (Eph. 2:12), have now become participants in the promise through the gospel. Ephesians 3:6 states it plainly, ‘. . . the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus *through the gospel*’. With this we have Hebrews 9:15, ‘the promised eternal inheritance’—that inheritance of which Paul makes so much in Ephesians 1:17–21, and Galatians 4:4–7, with Romans 8:14–17. This then is a complete fulfilment. In Revelation 21:7, God says that those who overcome shall inherit all things, according to his gift. These ‘all things’ are understood by the New Testament writers to mean ‘the Kingdom of God’. This is Jesus’ thought in the Sermon on the Mount. Paul sees us as inheriting the Kingdom of God, but warns against abusing this promise, and so failing to inherit it. James speaks of those ‘rich in faith’ and ‘who love God’ as being worthy to inherit the Kingdom—not otherwise.

The Promise to All of Eternal Life

As we have seen ‘All the *promises* of God find their Yes in him [Christ]’, and so ‘the *promise* of the life which is in Christ Jesus’, ‘in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago’ (II Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:2), as also the statement in I John 2:29, ‘and this is what he has promised us, eternal life’. Active godliness is also linked with present life and future (eternal) life, as in I Timothy 4:8 Paul wrote, ‘. . . godliness is of value in every way, as it holds *promise* for the present life and also for the life to come’. James says, ‘Blessed is the man who endures trials, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him’. Alongside these rewarding sayings are frequent references of promises given to Abraham regarding an heir.⁸ We have already seen how they are part of the continuing promises within the New Covenant. We have also seen how the Davidic Covenant was prophesied and is now part of the ongoing New Covenant (cf. Acts 13:32ff.). As we have said, these are not new in the sense of innovative promises, but the outcome of the ancient promises, now set freshly before us.

The Promise of Resurrection

One more interesting promise may be gained from Acts 26:4–8, where Paul virtually says he is in the court of Tertullus for ‘having a hope in God which these themselves [the Jews] accept, that there will be a resurrection both of the just and the unjust’ (Acts 24:15), and later before Agrippa, ‘And now I stand here on trial for hope in the *promise* made by God . . . Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?’ From this we can say that the promise of the resurrection is ongoing from the Old Testament.

NEW PROMISES FROM THE OLD

The Promise of the Spirit

The primary promise is that of the Holy Spirit. In Luke 24:49 Jesus said to his disciples, ‘behold, I send the *promise* of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed

⁸ Romans 4:14–16, 20; 9:8–9; 15:8; Galatians 3:16–22; Hebrews 6:13–17; 7:6; 11:9, 11, 17.

with power from on high'. In Acts 1:4–5 Luke repeats the same thought from the lips of Jesus:

And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the *promise* of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me, for John baptised with water, but before many days you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'

Ephesians 1:13 speaks of believers being sealed with 'the *promised* Holy Spirit'.⁹

We can take the word 'promised' to mean that somewhere the Father had promised the gift of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ Certainly John the Baptist linked it with Jesus—'He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire'. Whilst this promise may be rightly said to be within the compass of the Gospels, yet the outpouring of the Spirit was promised in many passages, such as in Isaiah, Ezekiel 37, and, particularly in Joel 2:28ff., for it is this prophetic promise to which Peter refers on the day of Pentecost. In John 7:37–39 Jesus points to the promise which, however, cannot be realised until Jesus is ascended (cf. Acts 2:33; Eph. 1:13). In John chapters 14 – 16 he speaks much of the sending of the Spirit by his Father—hence 'the promise of the Father'—and also by himself together with the Father.

This promise can be seen to be unique, as it was never given in the Old Testament after this manner. Yet, when we read Galatians 3:1–14 we see two interesting things. The first is that the Spirit came giftwise 'by hearing with faith' to the Galatians when they heard and responded to the preaching of the Cross. The second is seen in the intriguing words of 3:14 'that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the *promise* of the Spirit through faith'. Firstly we see that 'the curse' of verse 13 is replaced by 'the blessing'. 'The blessing' is that promised to Abraham, that is, the universal covenant of Genesis 12:1–3. Secondly we see the gift of the Spirit (as in v. 5 above) is received by faith. The two clauses are co-ordinate, that is, equal in value. The gift of the Spirit does not depend upon the blessing of the covenant, yet both are, in another sense, interdependent—no blessings without the Spirit; no Spirit without the blessings. It could also be seen as the Spirit coming with justification if Genesis 15:6 (cf. Hab. 2:4) is linked together with the Galatians passage. In any case this whole matter of the Spirit is one of the promises which comes alive in the NT, and is enormously significant for the believer and the life of the church as a whole.

The Promise of the Rest

This promise of rest is dealt with to some degree in Psalm 95:7b–11. Israel had rarely known the true rest of God. Even when it was said in the latter days of David's reign and also during Solomon's reign that God had given Israel rest, the 'rest' was mainly that of the cessation of warring. Israel's enemies had been subdued, but the breaking of *shalom* was as near as Rehoboam and Jeroboam's rivalry after Solomon's death. Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:25–28 was the promise of immediate rest. The writer of Hebrews takes up the theme of rest in 3:7 – 4:13, and sees it possible now to enter into a certain kind of rest which will be complete in the eschaton. In 4:1 he says, 'Therefore, while the *promise* of entering his rest remains, let us fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach it'.

⁹ Some commentators see 'the promised Spirit' as better expressed 'the Spirit of promise', and meaning that the Spirit is the one through whom the promises come. According to Semitism it probably means 'the Spirit who is promised' as we seek, here, to show. Nevertheless it is also true that the Spirit, being the Spirit of prophecy and of revelation (cf. I Cor. 2:10–14) is also the Spirit through whom the promises come to a hearer, both by prophecy and immediate revelation of the canonical Word.

¹⁰ Note that Acts 2:33 speaks of the ascended Jesus as receiving from the Father 'the promise of the Holy Spirit' and that he thus pours forth 'this which you now see and hear' on that day of Pentecost, and this included the baptising of the waiting apostolic band, which John the Baptist had predicted.

The Promise of the Telos

From 3:8ff., Peter in his Second Letter speaks of the future and the climax of history. He says, ‘But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells’. Here we can properly take up again the theme we commenced in the heading above—‘The Promise of History Being Salvific’. We saw that the idea of salvation does not begin with Israel, but with Genesis 3:15, and that salvation is linked with the ultimate new creation—the things of the end time, such as the restoration of Eden and all its concomitants, such as worship, the Presence of God, the bliss of guiltless living, the richness of the vocation as in the mandate of Genesis 1:28, the richness of marriage of the bride and the man. Whilst we use the term ‘restoration’ it is more than this. It is transformation—that bringing all things into action such as the ultimate sanctification, glorification, and perfection of the new heavens and the new earth, the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, the Holy inheritance, Paradise with its river of life,¹¹ the New Temple, all of which may be termed ‘the Holy City’ into which come the nations, and in which no darkness remains. Holy humanity married as the Bride, is taken by the Bridegroom into the Triune Godhead. Although II Peter 1:3–4 has its present application in meaning and action, it is a fitting way of speaking of Peter’s ‘according to his promise’, and indeed is a good summing up of all God’s promises:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us *his precious and very great promises*, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.

We are aware, of course, that the promise of the new heavens and new earth is found in a number of Old Testament references, such as Isaiah 25:6–9, 65:17–25, and 66:22–23. Indeed some would see all the prophecies referring to the restoration of Jerusalem, and as Mt Zion becoming the hub of the earth, the nations all moving towards it and pouring into it, as wholly to do with the new heaven and the new earth.

The Promise Attached to the Commandment

In Ephesians 6:1 Jesus enjoins the children:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honour your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth’.

In one sense all commandments have a promise attached to them. The command is really an assurance that the one who desires to do so can obey it, but more to the point is that promises are not given willy-nilly. When Canaan is called ‘the land of promise’ it is evident that God promises much will come from this country. At the same time the prophecies concerned with the promise—or, promises—always carry the obligation of obedience. Obligation for obedience is not contractual; it is that so much being promised—and much of it already being received—the obligation to act consonant with the promise is quite evident. So the ‘commandment with promise’ is a great incentive to value the promise. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5–7, Jesus shows that whilst God will bless even the deliberately sinful persons, those who obey receive the fullness of the blessing. Hence the states of attitude we should have if we would receive the blessings.

These observations should help us not to take God’s promises for granted. Thus when we read II Peter 1:4–5, as we did above under the heading of ‘The Promise of the Telos’, we saw that promise of *theosis*—sharing in the nature of God—is followed by exhortations to add

¹¹ Someone has said that there are no reservoirs in heaven, only a river flowing through it. Psalm 46 says also ‘the streams whereof’, so that the river must affect the entire Paradise.

certain things to what we already possess. That is, that we work out the fullness of those gifts in shaping our own lives.

CONCLUSION: THE PERSONAL AND PASTORAL POWER OF THE GIFT OF THE PROMISES

We have already said that II Peter 1:4 sums up the whole matter of God's promises:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us *his precious and very great promises*, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.

'From corruption to divinisation' is a tremendous change. In this sense the promise is an assurance we will reach the proper goal. Personally and pastorally we should meditate on all promises, pondering these heartening assurances. In one sense they are the very basis of hope, and hope enlivens every day into rich purposefulness. Without hope there will come the dread accidie by which life becomes empty, nihilistic, and drives us to either suicide or narcissism or anarchy as the only ways of escape.

We have already seen that 'the promises' are in the midst of and operating along with 'the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship' and 'the patriarchs' and 'the Christ'. In this context we can live in dynamic hope. We do not live in hope unless we live in faith, since 'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen'. For this reason the writer of Hebrews has given us a powerful exhortation in 6:13–20. He first of all shows that God—so to speak—put everything in his promise to Abraham:

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, you who have fled for refuge might have a strong encouragement to seize the hope that was set before us.

In this passage the 'two unchangeable things' are the very nature of God himself, and his oath which he swore by himself.

In the light of these irreversible things, the promises are ensured. The gifts and the calling of God are without repentance, without change, and so hope is fixed by the promises. This was the message Paul was presenting in Galatians chapter 3. The promise preceded the Sinaitic law in Israel's history, although law in general was present in history even before Israel. So in Hebrews 6:18–20, the writer says we must '*seize the hope set before us*'. We are encouraged to do this by the promises, or rather the God of the promises. Seizing is a strong act. Likewise in Hebrews 10:23 the author says, 'Let us *hold fast the confession of our faith without wavering, for he who promised is faithful*'. Personally and pastorally we are not simply viewing the promises, but we are intent on the hope that assures us these promises will come to fulfilment.

No less important in the matter of promises and hope is the 11th chapter of Hebrews. Of the fourteen mentions of 'promise' or 'the promises' in the Epistle, six are in the 11th chapter. This chapter will reward close study but the principle is clear: all who had faith in God had faith in his promises and therefore lived in hope. Those living in hope died without receiving the promise.¹² What we are shown and what we must act upon, is the fact that the great promises are yet to be fulfilled. Of such a host of witnesses to faith it was said:

¹² In Hebrews 6:15 it is said that 'Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise'. This does not contradict 11:13, because it was the promise of a son which Abraham waited for, most patiently, and that son was born to him. The more distant promise of the 'city to come' was what Abraham waited for, without at that time receiving it.

And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (Heb. 11:39–40).

This brings us to what we might call ‘the mutuality of the gifts’. We see that ‘the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises’ are all interdependent. That is, they are all necessary for an eschatological climax. We are yet to view all of these, and experience them in that climax. For this reason our minds and this awareness, is what fortifies hope, and hope fortifies us.

We need to alert ourselves continually to the promises of God for they further alert us to the nature of all the gifts. In I Corinthians 4:7, Paul teaches us that we have nothing of ourselves and nothing from ourselves, so that we must not boast of anything in the orbit of our living and practice which is of us—‘why do you boast as if it were not a gift?’ We learn that to seek to ‘get’ by our efforts is to mean that when we give, we give from ourselves and not from what we *received*. This means we do not see gifts as things given, but as obtained by us and not received from God. In that case promises may seem to be something good, but perhaps we have the basic thought that, promise or not promise, *we* will make it, and that *we* will devise whatever may be lacking so that *we* lack nothing.

Such a view isolates us from the God from whom all blessings, gifts and promises flow. Personally and pastorally it is desirable, and a matter of safety, to look to the promises as they are in the marvellous setting of all the gifts.

The Several Gifts of Israel—VII, The Patriarchs

INTRODUCTION: THE GOD OF ISRAEL IS THE GOD OF THE PATRIARCHS

'To them belong the patriarchs [fathers]' of Romans 9:5, is a statement which parallels verse 4 with its six gifts. Some see 'They are Israelites' to be the first gift, followed by six more making the perfect seven, and this may well be right. The eighth gift would then start a new series in which the gift of 'the fathers' would bring the gift of Christ; otherwise there are eight gifts and not nine. It does not much matter. What we see is that because God came to Israel—as against being in any other nation after this special fashion—and was present with them, so the gifts, too, came to Israel. Yes, to be an Israelite was a gift because of the presence of God. He could not be present and they not be his sons; present and so the glory was present, and the covenants were ever dynamic and necessary; present and the necessity of the law, the law and so the necessity of the worship; the worship and so the promises which meant that Israel was not just proceeding aimlessly in its being and action. All of these gifts began with the fathers, and because of the promises to the fathers and God's intentional presence with the fathers, inevitably and needfully led to the emergence of the Christ, the Messiah. This is what the text of Romans 9:5 is inferring. When we see this deliberate use and linking of the gifts we see why Paul is so sorrowful in Romans 9:1–3 that Israel was accursed because of its rejection of its Messiah. He would willingly be accursed in their place if that were possible, which it was not. Israel was going against all history in refusing Jesus to be its Messiah. As John has said, 'He came unto his own, and his own received him not', after which the sadness follows, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God' (John 1:12, 13).

This understanding of Israel's rejection makes the gifts to witness against Israel. It also means the continuity of Israel as 'the Israel of God'—which happened on the Day of Pentecost and the times following—to mean the continuity of the gifts without which the church could not operate, nor move towards the completion of God's plan for the nations in the *telos*.

God's Name is Inseparably Linked with the Fathers

In Exodus 3:15 God says to Moses:

Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, *the God of your fathers*, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: *this is my name forever*, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

That God should say 'this is my name forever', tells us the deep significance of 'the fathers'. We say 'significant' because Yahweh was not to dissociate himself from Israel, no matter how deep its sin and rebellion. As Yahweh he was always the God of Exodus 34:6–7.

That he is still 'the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob', and as such 'is not God of the dead but of the living' can be seen in Matthew 22:32, Mark 12:26f., and Luke 20:37f.. This is another sign that 'this is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations'. It is a strong imperative that we should never see him dissociated from the patriarchal era and the people of Israel. He is God in this manner in the church, as he was in Israel, and is in 'the Israel of God'.

An Examination of the Terms ‘the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob’, ‘the God of our Fathers’, and ‘the Fathers’

In Exodus 3:6 God had appeared to Moses at the time of Israel’s misery in slavery to Egypt, and announced himself in the words, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’.¹ Here God is referring himself first to Moses’ father as a promisee or legatee of the covenant, then, back beyond him, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In Deuteronomy 6:2f. the prolonging of days for Israel in Canaan ‘is dependent upon what ‘the LORD, *the God of your fathers*, has promised you’. In I Kings 8:57–58 part of the prayer of Solomon was:

The LORD our God be with us, as he was *with our fathers*; may he not leave us or forsake us; that he may incline our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his ordinances, which he commanded *to our fathers*.

Here ‘our fathers’ may refer to Israel’s ancestors who were visited at Sinai and became ‘the people of his presence’, but Genesis 26:4–5 refers to Abraham in such terms. ‘Our fathers’ probably refers inclusively to the three patriarchs and the succeeding fathers. In Luke 1:54–55 Mary says, ‘He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke *to our fathers*, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever’. Often the mention of ‘the fathers’ seats itself primarily and strongly back to Abraham. In John 6:31 the term ‘your fathers’ is limited to the ancestors who travelled in the wilderness, ‘*Your fathers* ate manna in the wilderness’, but the reference is also to God’s mercy to Israel. Likewise in I Corinthians 10:1, ‘I want you to know, brethren, that *our fathers* were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea’, the fathers are those who were in the wilderness. In passing we might note that blood descendancy from Abraham did not automatically save the first generation which was in the wilderness: the faith Abraham exercised was also required of them, and they failed, for the most part.²

In Acts 3:13 Peter speaks of ‘The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob’, and says that in the time of his listeners this God ‘glorified his servant [or, child] Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him’. Here we see Peter is claiming that being descended from Abraham meant they ought to have received Jesus as the Son of God. In the same message Peter says:

You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave *to your fathers*, saying *to Abraham*, ‘And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed’ (Acts 3:25).

Here Abraham is the primary promisee, and the other fathers and descendants of Abraham will bring blessing to the whole earth.

In Romans 11:28 Paul, speaking of the present members of Israel ‘after the flesh’—the dispossessed domestic olive branch—says, ‘As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for *the sake of their forefathers*’. Here we see what Paul goes on to say, ‘For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable’. We have a window here into the gifts of which we are presently speaking, namely, that these gifts are essential to the continuity of the life of Israel and are irrevocable. Were they dispensable then so would be the calling of Israel by God, and no less—for our present consideration—‘the Israel of God’.

¹ See also Matthew 22:32; Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37–38; Acts 3:13; 7:32; Psalm 30:3; 97:12; 102:12; 135:13; Revelation 1:8; 4:8; Hosea 12:5. These references show (i) that God is presently the God of the living and not the dead, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and (ii) that his name is holy, and, as such, powerful. They also show he is the God of the *qahal* of Israel and the *ecclesia* of his Son. Nowhere is there a hiatus between the two. His holy name embraces all his people.

² Note that the perishing of many in the wilderness does not necessarily mean other than they were punished for unbelief and so lost forever. Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 seem to indicate this could have been the case but we must not minimise ‘the wideness of God’s mercy’. They may have died without perishing forever.

Romans 15:8–9 is extremely important, defining the irrevocable nature of the gifts, and the need of Christ as a servant to ‘the circumcised’ in order to bring the mercy of God to the Gentiles. These verses require application in consideration:

For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, ‘Therefore I will praise thee amongst the Gentiles [nations], and sing to thy name . . .’

Our conclusion for this traverse of the terms ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’, ‘the fathers’ and ‘our fathers’ is that there was never a fissure in the continuity of the people of Israel and the giving of the gifts of God to his people. We cannot understand their corporate being as the *qahal* (congregation) of God without recognising the unbroken line of the people of the fathers, and the gifts which flowed down through their history. Seeing this we take the lesson that for ‘the Israel of God’—the church—there is a warning to value and use the gifts with thanksgiving.

THE NATURE OF ‘THE FATHERS’ AND THEIR INDISPENSABILITY TO SALVATION HISTORY

If, for example, we were to minimise the importance of the patriarchs, then the substance of Romans 9:5 would fragment. Galatians 3 would prove insubstantial, and indeed much of the New Testament would be fragmented. For a second example, we would see that there would be no continuity with the past of Israel as God’s people—the *qahal*—and God’s present people—the *ecclesia*. The *kerugma*—the formulated gospel or *euangellion*—would have no rational beginning because of no uninterrupted flow from the past, and so there would be a great fissure in history which would altogether invalidate salvation history. For this reason we must see where ‘the fathers’ begin and where history leads up to the present ‘Israel of God’ with its eschatological significance and historical action.

THE FATHERS BEFORE ‘THE FATHERS’

We refer, of course, to the period of history before Abraham. Genesis chapters 1–11 are often called ‘pre-history’ because it is thought that myth and historical reality become mixed together. Leaving aside that complex question we run with the seemingly historically presented Abel to Abraham era. This we cannot fully understand unless we grasp the thrust that is behind the account of Genesis chapters 1–12—those writings which Israel inscribed for its own understanding. However much we may analyse them by documentary theories or literary structure principles does not greatly matter. Creation is the primary theme and how humanity has acted within it is its important exposition. The making of Man from the dust outside of the Eden God prepared for Man; for placing Man within that paradise; for his relationship with the animals; his extraordinary receiving of a wife from his own flesh and bones; and their union in the face of the mandate to be fruitful, multiply and fill up the earth; and having dominion over all things, is most important. The sin of the Fall, the ejection from Eden are all seen as part of Man’s history, but Israel—who documented these themes—saw them as part of its own special and exclusive history. Adam was *their* father, Eve *their* mother. It was not that they did not see the origins of the nations from ‘one blood’, but their calling as a people was still that of fulfilling the mandate of Genesis 1:28f.

For them the possibility of fulfilling God’s plan for the world came not even from Noah their blood ancestor³—although it was linked with him—but from Abraham, the one called out

³ Noah is seen by some to be a second sort of Adam. The future generations lay within his loins, and the table of the nations as given in Genesis chapters 10 and 11 categorises mankind according to his sons Shem, Ham (with Canaan) and Japheth.

from Mesopotamia and the surrounding idolatrous people, to the land of Canaan. Joshua later spoke of the fathers of Israel as idolaters. He gave those now settled in the Promised Land a short saga of their history in which God's election and his preserving grace play such a part that Israel cannot boast in its nationhood, and although covenant is not specifically mentioned in his story yet the whole passage is redolent with it:

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "Your fathers lived of old beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac; and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. And I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it; and afterwards I brought you out. Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. And when they cried to the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did to Egypt; and you lived in the wilderness a long time. Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan; they fought with you, and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel; and he sent and invited Balaam the son of Beor to curse you, but I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he blessed you; so I delivered you out of his hand. And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the men of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I gave them into your hand. And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you dwell therein; you eat the fruit of vineyards and oliveyards which you did not plant."

'Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if you be unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD' (Josh. 24:1–15).

In Joshua's address we have in brief the mention of Israel's idolatrous beginning in their father Abraham, and so we may now intelligibly begin to look at the nature and significance of the patriarchs, especially Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Even so we need a brief scan of culture and religion from the time of the ejection of Man from Eden, and the time of God's revelation of himself to Abraham and his call to him to begin the great movement among the nations.

Religion and Culture in Times Prior to and Contemporary With Abraham

Doubtless a documented investigation of these elements requires an examination beyond the scope of this Study. What we can see, however, is the pictures the Scriptures sketch for us. With the union of 'the sons of God' and 'the daughters of men'—whatever this may mean—brings a state in mankind which causes God to cry out against its unfettered violence and corruption. His Spirit will not always strive with men for true obedience, will dwell with mankind in that it has 'become flesh', and so the Flood is sent as a judgment. If we use Paul's passage of Romans 1:18–32 as a window on to the accumulating depravity of Man, then we see the evil which comes with rejection of God and anger at his depriving Man of his paradise—Eden.⁴ We have said that 'culture' comes from 'cultus'. Idolatry is immensely powerful because it is used to fulfil the ontological desire of Man to worship and to be cared for by a creator. Idols are devised. They cannot make themselves. If we take Paul at face value,

⁴ Man is always trying to restore or devise his own Eden whether by trying to reproduce its beauty, glory and tranquillity, or by trying to unhand the cherubim who guards the way to the original Eden. This latter attempt is by the use of ideology, since every ideology is supposed to produce a paradisaical state.

idols are inhabited by demons; that is, all idolatry—no matter what the form the idols take—is demonic. Modern cultures outside the Judaic–Christian ethos control man in devilish ways, and the more syncretistic, the more powerful.⁵

When we survey the scene at the time of Abraham it is indeed a dreary one. Idolatry seems to have been endemic to mankind. It is true, nevertheless, that we have the brilliant and beautiful occasion of Abraham’s meeting with Melchizedek, King of Salem, and the High Priest to God, as also, though much later, of Moses with Jethro, priest of Midian. These two men are windows into cultures which seemed to relate to the Most High God. Even so, the whole world—to use a New Testament view—lay in the power of the Evil One (I John 5:19; cf. Eph. 2:1–3). This brings into clear perspective the power, importance and significance of God’s call to Abraham, his command to him and his descendants. It is here we see the importance of ‘the fathers’. Nothing could be more important for the history of mankind. Abraham was the morning star of the reformation and transformation of mankind, as also for the eschatological intention of God to restore Man to the true and eternal Eden.

THE FATHERS WHO BELONG TO ISRAEL AS GOD’S QAHAL AND ECCLESIA

Abraham

No matter how much we come to Abraham from our constant studying of the Old Testament, we often have seen him and his life and significance primarily as they are treated in the New Testament. Perhaps most prominent in importance is Stephen’s account of Abraham in Acts 7:2–8:

And Stephen said: ‘Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, “Depart from your land and from your kindred and go into the land which I will show you.” Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living; yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him in possession and to his posterity after him, though he had no child. And God spoke to this effect, that his posterity would be aliens in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and ill-treat them four hundred years. “But I will judge the nation which they serve,” said God, “and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.” And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.’

Whilst this passage goes beyond Abraham to the birth of Jacob, it gives us the key to Abraham’s conversion from being an idolater to his becoming a man whose faith was in God, and whose creed was ‘I [believe in] the LORD God Most High, maker of heaven and earth’ (Gen. 14:22). This key is, ‘The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia’, and the term ‘the God of glory’ tells us how powerful was the revelation which came to the patriarch. Later Moses asked to see all God’s glory and was told that to see God thus would be to perish.⁶ We can only understand ‘The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham’ as meaning that Abraham knew all of God that he needed to know to be

⁵ I mean by this that where Judaic Christian values are syncretised with ancient idolatrous cultuses, the threat to Judaic Christian structures and systems is more powerful. At the Nuremburg trials the need to agree in what were crimes against humanity ran into difficulties. Even so, universal values were found by which to judge. It has now become even more difficult to nominate a universal morality because of the fundamentalistic values of religions which have more solidly entrenched themselves.

⁶ At this point we must bear in mind the story of Exodus chapters 33 and 34. Moses needed to know God’s glory—his character and nature—in order to take Israel up to Canaan. To reveal all was to go beyond Moses’ capacity to comprehend. Yet God showed all the glory Moses needed to know and to have, in the famous utterance of 34:6–7. This is a revelation of glory for all Man’s time before the ultimate *telos*.

converted to a worshipper of ‘LORD God Most High, maker of heaven and earth’. When we have said this we have said so much. Doubtless this primary experience in Mesopotamia was further enriched by God’s other appearances to Abraham. God’s showing of his glory was not limited to Mesopotamia. Indeed it is the saga of numerous experiences and revelations that alerts Abraham—as also us—to the nature and purpose of God. Such knowledge and wisdom was essential to the new movement in history which was to bring the nations out of idolatry into the blessing of God.

We cannot attend to all the actions of God with Abraham, and through him. Primary is the establishment of the universal covenant of grace with the patriarch. It was first to Abraham’s family, and through this family to the whole world. The covenant has to do with faith—‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness’. It was to do with the possession of the holy land of Canaan, the new Eden given to this progenitor of a new people. It was to do with inheritance of the same land, and yet the whole earth, since all the nations were to be blessed—or cursed—by their acceptance or rejection of Abraham. New Testament insights and commentaries on Abraham are incipient in the Old Testament, but the promises of God to Abraham are most objective, particularly the statement of Genesis 15:1, ‘After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”’ Thus the vision of an innumerable posterity and he as Abram being ‘exalted father’, but as Abraham being ‘the father of a multitude’, as also Sarai, ‘princess’, becoming Sarah ‘the mother nations’; a veritable Adam and Eve were these two to be, not in the innocent paradise of Eden but in the world of idolatry and confusion—regarding the true God—the battle for the Eden of Canaan.

Abraham saw God⁷ as eternal (Gen 17:1); the Most High God (14:22); possessor (Lord) of heaven and earth (14:22; 24:3); the righteous judge of nations (15:14) and of all mankind (18:25). God was just (18:25), wise (20:6), righteous (18:19), good (19:19), and merciful (20:6). Abraham knew God because God had revealed himself to him on a number of occasions, so that Abraham had constantly worshipped him—the one great way of coming to know God. He is three times called ‘the friend of God’ (Isa 41:8; II Chron. 20:7; James 2:23), a title of high order. Of Moses, it was said, God spoke to him as a man speaks to his friend, and these two ‘fathers’ seem to be the only ones known as the friends of God.

From the point of view of Isaac, Jacob and the children of Israel, Abraham was—and is—the great father figure, the head of a mighty dynasty, the possessor of God’s everlasting blessing, the determiner of the destiny of nations. Without him not only would Israel be as an orphan, but also the nations of the world who are destined to have their identity and glory through him.

Isaac

Although Isaac⁸ does not appear as the great son of a great father, yet he carried blessing which was unique. He was born when Abraham was 100 years old, and went on to preserve the promise of God of fathering a great nation. At least twice his mother had been in danger of being used as a concubine by Pharaoh and Abimelech because of Abraham’s fear of these two kings. Isaac’s most intense experience of life was his being offered up to God as a human sacrifice at an age when it seems he could have escaped this test were he to will it and oppose his father. His choice of a wife, Rebekah, was a matter of deep love, so that she came to love him. He repeated his father’s weak action towards Abimelech king of the Philistines by saying that his wife was his sister. Twice God appeared to Isaac to reiterate the Abrahamic covenant promises (Gen. 26:2f.; 26:23f.). Isaac’s two sons Esau and Jacob came after twenty years of

⁷ For much of this paragraph I am indebted to D. J. Wiseman’s article ‘Abraham’ in *The New Bible Dictionary* (IVP, Leicester, 1982, p. 6).

⁸ Isaac’s name denotes ‘laughter’. At the announcement that Abraham would have a son by Sarah (Gen. 17:17) Abraham laughed, and so later, did Sarah (Gen. 18:12–15).

Rebekah's barrenness, but God revealed to Rebekah the fact that the younger of the twins would rule over the elder and that there would be conflict between the two boys. Isaac sought to give the inheritance birthright and the covenantal blessing to Esau but was foiled. Again the election of Jacob was to be of grace, for Jacob as a person did not qualify for Isaac's primary blessing. There are elements of greatness in Isaac, but also evidences of weakness and favouritism to his elder son.

Jacob—Israel

The story of Jacob is a fascinating one. His name means 'supplanter' and as we have seen above, he seems to have had an ambition from birth to have the birthright and inheritance since it would seem his mother had imparted to him God's word concerning his ruling over Esau. In the act of the two brothers being birthed Jacob clutched at his brother's heel as though to overtake him. His life is an interesting one but what concerns us is that the birthright and blessing did come to him in spite of Isaac's intention. His brother's murderous rage caused him to flee, probably about 100 kilometres in a day, from Beer-sheba to Bethel. He certainly feared for his life.

His dream at Bethel is filled with significance, as the Jewish traditions take it that the angels which ascended and descended were showing the rise and fall of the nations under their tutelage.⁹ Jacob is given God's message that what was promised to Abraham and Isaac is now promised to him. It is right: he is the successor to these two patriarchs and the promises of God. Jacob's response must not be seen as merely rhetorical:

Surely the LORD is in this place and I did not know it. And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven' (Gen. 28:16–17).

Nothing could be closer to Paradise, to Eden, than this. Naturally Jacob sanctified it for himself by pouring an oil libation over the pillar. We do not know whether he knew his grandfather, Abraham, had also known this as a holy place (Gen. 12:8), since it was there God had reaffirmed his covenant with the patriarch. The story of Jacob continues with his marriages to his uncle Laban's daughters, Leah and Rachel, for whom he had to work fourteen years. After twenty years he desired to leave Laban and did so, though opposed by that old man. The rest of Jacob's life is told in his meeting with Esau and the reconciliation which was at least outward. Then come the stories of his sons and his daughter Dinah, and the troublesome things which happened, including the abducting and sale of Joseph, and the seeming loss of Jacob's beloved Benjamin. We hear of angels meeting Jacob (Gen. 32:1–2; cf. 22ff.) but God also appears to him on a number of occasions, especially in Genesis 35:9–12, where God reiterates Jacob's name as 'Israel'—'God strives'—and thus destroys the concept of 'supplanter'. At this time the Abrahamic covenant is virtually affirmed afresh for Jacob's sake. Thus God is 'the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'.

The 48th and 49th chapters of Genesis are important as they show Jacob's understanding of God's leading of him. Genesis 48:15–16 are especially in the metier of God's promised Abrahamic blessings:

And he blessed Joseph, and said,
 'The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
 the God who has led me all my life long to this day,
 the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads;
 and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;
 and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.'

⁹ According to Deuteronomy 32:8–9 God set out the nations (cf. Acts 17:26) according to the angels, i.e. the sons of God, so that each nation would be under an angel or angels. Jacob's disappointment was at not seeing the angel of his people, and in Genesis 28, God promises he personally will be with Jacob and his descendants.

From this point onwards the story is of the twelve tribes of Israel, Jacob having died, and the family living in Goshen in Egypt. The story of their prosperity there for a long time, and then the tyranny of a new Pharaoh who brings them into slavery until God delivers them by a strong hand and mighty signs and wonders, is also the story of Jacob, but it is now of a people who suffered the bondage and were convinced that God was the God of covenant. Exodus 2:23–25 states the matter:

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

The covenant is about to be proven in the mercy of God by bringing his covenant children into Canaan, their veritable Eden.

CONCLUSION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT SAGA OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB

At this point we can see why Paul included ‘the patriarchs’ in God’s gifts to Israel. It is impossible for us who know the saga to understand history otherwise than it happened. That is natural enough, but we are driven to see that the so-called ‘pre-history’ of Genesis chapters 1 to 11 is a necessary prelude to the everlasting covenant God made with Abraham. Doubtless that covenant was existent even before time, was reaffirmed with Noah, and brought into powerful action with Abraham. With Abraham begins the flow of grace and mercy for Israel which was with a view to all the nations. Man who was once cast out of Eden will again be welcomed into it. Its gates will not be shut, day and night, and the nations shall bring their glory into it. This will be the ultimate triumph of God. Even so it was not within the years of the three patriarchs and even the days of ‘the fathers in Israel’ that this was accomplished. All awaited the day of Christ, and this we shall see in our last Section on the teaching regarding the patriarchs in the New Testament.

If we ask what is the key to this reawakening of mankind, then it must be said that it is first in the ‘church in the wilderness’ (Acts 7:38), the *qahal* of Israel which becomes the *ecclesia* of the new people of God, compounded of true Israel and the wild olive branch of the Gentiles grafted in to the domestic olive tree. How this happens is ‘by the Christ’ who is the true posterity of Abraham who is ‘of their race, according to the flesh’ (Rom. 9:5).

THE FATHERS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Fathers and the Gospels

The Gospels refer significantly to Abraham; Matthew seven times, Mark once, Luke fifteen times and John eleven times. Matthew and Luke refer to Jesus being of Abraham in their genealogies. In Matthew 3:9 and Luke 3:8, John the Baptist chides the Pharisees and Sadducees for saying they are children of Abraham and resting on that blood descendancy. In John 8:33–58, Jesus likewise chides the Jews who oppose him for calling themselves the descendants of Abraham. If they were the children of Abraham, they would do the works of Abraham and not seek to kill him. He says, in fact, that they are children of their father the Devil and not of Abraham. In this way he points to the high calling of Israel in Abraham. Indeed in Matthew 8:11 (cf Luke 13:27–30), Jesus says—speaking of the faith of the Gentile centurion:

‘I tell you, many shall come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.’

It is Luke who links the birth of Christ with the covenant given to Abraham. Zechariah's song at the birth of his son John, places Abraham's covenant firmly as the basis for Messiah's coming as he—Zechariah—tells John what his ministry will be: 'thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways'. It will all be 'To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace'—somewhat a parallel to Simeon's 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles [nations], and for glory to thy people Israel'.

We have previously seen in the absurd hypothetical question by the Sadducees regarding the Levirate marriage of seven brothers, that God is the God of the living, that is, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.¹⁰ There being living makes their history and significance also to be living and effective in the 'now' and the 'then'. They are the true fathers of God's entire people of faith. In the Synoptic Gospels, to be a daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:16) and a son of Abraham (Luke 19:9) means the grace of the covenant which Jesus brings is for them the right to be healed and restored, since being a son of Abraham is a right to be in the kingdom and to receive covenant mercy.

The whole passage of John 8:31–59 deserves a treatment we are unable to give to it here. The two statements of Jesus, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad', and 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am', both assert that Jesus is greater than Abraham, but that all his life, action and ministry is to do with the covenant that God made with Abraham, and so with the people and goal of that covenant.

The Acts, the Epistles, and the Fathers

In Acts, Abraham—sometimes with mention of 'the fathers'—is mentioned eight times, in the Pauline Epistles nineteen times, in Hebrews ten times, in James twice and I Peter once. In Acts the linking of the ministry of Christ and the church with Abraham is put forward to show audiences that the coming of the Gospel of Christ is not a novel and a bizarre matter. Likewise in the Pauline Epistles it is shown that the gospel was preached beforehand to Abraham saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'. Whilst Acts shows Christ to be the fulfilment of the Scriptures, thus validating the Gospel, yet it is Paul who shows it is the entire basis and foundation of the Gospel of covenant grace. His thesis deserves a separate and more extended coverage, as also does the thesis of the writer of the Hebrews, but we have not the time and space here to do so.

What we must do is to go back to Romans 9:4–5 and show that 'the patriarchs' as the possession of Israel are just as much required now for the church as they were for 'the church in the wilderness'. Indeed it is the patriarchs who were the bearers of the great universal covenant. As Paul points out, Abraham is to inherit the whole world (Rom. 4:13) and since—as he also points out—that all who are persons of faith are sons of Abraham, so we too will participate in the glorious ingathering of all the nations into the eternal kingdom and covenantal blessing of 'the Israel of God'.¹¹

CONCLUSION: WE MUST CONSTANTLY STUDY THE LIVES AND IMPORTANCE OF THE FATHERS

We reiterate a point made more than once is our Study, namely that without the fathers there would have been no story of mankind such as we may call 'covenant history', 'salvation history', 'family history', 'sanctification history', or 'perfection history'; in short, the history of the world as we know it, and as we are told it will climax through Christ as Messiah. It does seem, then, that we ought to make more of this gift—'the patriarchs'—than we do. They

¹⁰ See Matthew 22:32; Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37–38.

¹¹ In this Study we have not attempted to go over the ground we covered in regard to covenant and kingdom—especially the Messianic kingdom of David—in Study III 'The Gift of the Covenants' (4/11/96). It would be good to read this again to complement the lack of coverage in the present Study.

are not just to be consigned to the past! We are presently ‘children of Abraham’, ‘sons of the prophets and the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, “And in your posterity shall the families of the earth be blessed.”’ Nations still prosper or are under the curse, according to their acceptance or rejection of Abraham. We need to mediate on these matters and teach them to all.

THE CONTINUUM OF THE CONCLUSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FATHERS

We need to see that God is still ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’ and that he is not called ‘the God of Peter, Paul and the other apostles’, although this may well be true. The New Testament prophets and apostles are within the pericope of the Abrahamic covenant, especially as they knew it to be realised as ‘the new covenant’. In Hebrews 3:1–7 it is clear that we are the people of God who are the house of God, whose head is Jesus ‘the apostle and high priest of our confession’. Moses was *shaliach* to Israel, and so in a sense, God’s apostle to bring the people to Canaan, but he was not ‘apostle’ in the unique sense of Christ who was sent from the Father and is the builder of the house. The apostles of the New Testament are not sent by God in that they are sent by Christ, and they are to proclaim what he tells them.

We need to see, then, that those whom we call ‘the church fathers’ are not really the equivalent to, or the order of, ‘the patriarchs’ and ‘the fathers in the wilderness’ (I Cor. 10:1f.). Moses was a *shaliach* to give God’s message and to do God’s work in his day, but in ‘the Israel of God’ we find our identity primarily in Christ as ‘the apostle and high priest of our confession [profession]’. This is shown clearly in Acts 3:17–26.

And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness.

We notice that our identity in Christ¹² means at the same time that we are ‘the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers . . .’ In that sense ‘the fathers’ are ours, but we are not, in turn, ‘the fathers’ of others. The term ‘apostolic fathers’ is accorded to those who followed the apostles, but the apostles were not ‘fathers’ in the sense in which the term is used in Israel and so those who followed them cannot rightly be called ‘apostolic fathers’. We must keep seeing ourselves as being within ‘the fathers’ as Israel knew them lest we lose that historical and functional dynamic. There is no continuing, sequential ‘fathers’ category outside the New Testament. My concern is that we do not give reverence on the basis of antiquity to the leaders who followed the apostles. All theology must be apostolical in the sense that it expresses the apostles’ teaching and conforms with apostolical practice. Whilst we must be grateful to those who battled for the truth in the first few centuries, and further, in the following centuries, yet their validity comes only from the Scriptures. They are not its essential interpreters. All theologians must live in humility within this principle as being subject to the Word and the Spirit.

¹² We will see in our next Study ‘The Several Gifts of Israel—VIII, The Christ’, that the coming of Christ in Acts 3:17–26 sets up a new polity in the Israel of God, namely one under Christ as Prophet, Priest and King’.

The Several Gifts of Israel—VIII, The Christ

INTRODUCTION: THE CHRIST WHO IS OF ISRAEL

We need to see that the text does not say, 'To them belong the Christ', but 'and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ', so that Paul is not leaving Christ with Israel, of whom he has been speaking in verses 1–3 regarding the fact of their being cursed. It is inconceivable that Paul sees Christ as still being *in* the Israel that has rejected him—the Israel for whom Paul sorrows. We have seen that the other 7 (or 8, if being an Israelite is the first gift) blessings have been innate to Israel and that the patriarchs and their covenant/s are for Israel, but the outcome of the patriarchal connection is 'the Christ'. All the gifts and blessings that Israel had should have led to the recognition of 'the Christ'.

The fathers at the beginning, give rise to the people of Israel; the Christ, at the end, comes from the people. Therefore Paul is saying far more than that the Messiah is a Jew. He is stressing that, with the coming of Christ, the privileges of Israel have reached their decisive climax.¹

The point we have been emphasising is that although Romans 9:4–5 speaks of Israel, we have seen that Israel continues its being in the church. That is, the church which came into full being at Pentecost is the continuum of Israel. Whilst there is discontinuity—in that the Sanhedrin officially rejected Christ from being their Messiah—yet at Pentecost it was the Jew only who became that continuity. Only later are Gentiles given entrance into that community of Christ. It is, of course, clear that the battleground of the Christ's action was Israel—as in Palestine under Pontius Pilate and Herod—but that with the Sanhedrin's rejection of Jesus as the Christ there was no place in that part of Israel. This cannot be said of 'the Israel of God'. Not only is the Christ of that Israel come from it 'according to the flesh', but also he is the Christ of all. He is certainly the Christ of Israel, but is—at the same time—the Christ for the Gentiles.

If the translation of verse 5b is 'And from whom is the Christ according to the flesh who is God over all, blessed be for ever', then the matter is clear: he is 'God over all' and also he is to be 'blessed for ever'. If, however, the translation should be 'of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever', then he is not referred to as God, but God is referred to as being over all that we read in verses 4 and 5. Even so, Christ is linked in Paul's mind with this 'God who is over all', with the broad canopy of God's coverage of all things.²

What we gather, then, from verses 4 and 5, is that the Messiah was to arise from the blood lineage of Israel, but that he was not locked into the Israel of his day, since he was *of* that Israel but not bound *to* it because of its rejection of him.

'OF THEIR RACE, ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, IS THE CHRIST'

Since Romans 1:1–7 has opened this Epistle of Paul it is certain that the reader would link Romans 9:1–5 with its statement:

¹ *The Justification of God* by John Piper (Baker, 2nd edn, 1930) pp. 47–48.

² It is notorious that commentators cannot agree regarding the translation of verse 5b and so it is best to agree that both are possibilities, whilst seeing 'the Christ' and 'God' are one in the fact of 'over all things', since elsewhere in the New Testament the latter is objectively stated. See Ephesians 1:19–22; Colossians 1:15ff.

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ; To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints.

From this passage we gain Paul's view that (i) Jesus is the Christ; (ii) he is the Son of God; (iii) he is 'our Lord'; and (iv) the gospel is to be preached to bring about 'the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all nations'. Those in the church at Rome 'belong to Jesus Christ'. This Christ is the one who was 'descended from David according to the flesh'.

From these elements we assume we have something of a Christology. We do not have a 'Jesusology' as such. The word 'Christ' has a strong signification. For Paul this man 'descended from David' is really 'Jesus the Christ'. Peter's confession on the road to Caesarea Philippi has been, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'. As we shall see, he had a clear message on the day of Pentecost and the days which followed of proclamation that Jesus was 'the Christ'.

The two statements 'descended from David according to the flesh' and 'of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ' are certainly linked. The genealogies in Matthew and Luke purport to be historical statements of the origins of Jesus, and Paul's statements likewise affirm that this human Jesus is 'the Christ'. This, then, puts the matter of Christ into the thinking and anticipation of the Israel which existed before the time of Jesus, the time leading up to his birth.

In passing we note that soon the 'the' in 'Jesus *the* Christ' soon drops out, and the term 'Jesus Christ' is used, although it is not really composed of a first name followed by a surname.

Israel's Understanding of 'the Christ'

In order to understand the term 'the Christ' we must come from before the New Testament, seeking the idea of Christ in the Old Testament. Obviously, when Peter exclaimed to Christ on the road to Caesarea Philippi, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God', and later, on the day of Pentecost, when he claimed that God had raised Jesus from the dead, and 'made him both Lord and Christ', the term 'Christ' was known to the apostle and his audiences. We can trace this knowledge in the current Judaism. So, then, to start from the past makes sense. If we can see that figure of Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament, then we can understand the nature of this one who was '*of* Israel', and we can realise the dynamics of the gifts given to Israel, and continuing in the life of 'the Israel of God'.

To begin with we note that term 'Christ' (*christos*) is a Greek one meaning 'the Anointed'. The Hebrew word is 'Messiah' (*mesiah*) and has the same meaning. Who, then, would be 'the Anointed One'? In Israel's system kings, priests and prophets were generally anointed. This has partly led to the idea that Jesus was Prophet, Priest and King—a matter we shall discuss later. The word 'Messiah' is found twice only in the Old Testament; in Daniel 9:25–26, but in Isaiah the Persian Cyrus is addressed as his (Yahweh's) 'anointed.' J. A. Motyer³ suggests there are five features of Cyrus which are typical of Old Testament Messianism: (i) a man of God's choice (41:25); (ii) appointed to accomplish the redemption of God's people (45:11–13); (iii) is a judgment on God's foes (45:4–7); (iv) is given dominion over the nations (45:1–3); and (v) 'in all his activities the real agent is Yahweh Himself' (45:1–7).

When it comes to looking at the Old Testament Motyer sees Messiah as 'the antitype of great historical figures'. These figures are Adam, Moses and David. He traces the Davidic image of Messianic King through the Psalms and Isaiah. The Psalms are rich with Messianic references, and even more so, the Book of Isaiah, especially with the personage of Immanuel.

³ Article 'Messiah' in *The New Bible Dictionary* (IVP, 1986) pp. 763–772.

He takes as other Messianic figures the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the Anointed Conqueror, the Seed of Woman, the Son of man and the ‘anointed Prince’ of the Book of Daniel. For a paper such as this it is impossible to include all this material.⁴

The Need for ‘The Christ’

In Romans 9:5, Paul speaks as though ‘the Christ’ is the summing up of all God’s goodness to Israel, and all she needed. This, of course, was true. Our paragraph above tells us the place Adam, Moses and David played in the history and aspirations of Israel. In the three cases it was the desire of the people of God to have Eden restored to them, and to have sovereignty over creation as was given to them in the original, creational mandate. The ‘Seed of Eve’ was to crush the serpent’s head and thus reverse the curse, bringing back the blessing of Eden. Passages which speak of a Man bringing such restoration, as well as the nature of that restoration are Amos 9:13; Isaiah 4:2; 11:6–9; 32:1–8, 15–19; 55:12ff.; and Psalm 72:16. The references have to do with the prosperity, harmony and relational amity of the world, the closest we get to an Edenic state in a world otherwise in poverty, disharmony and conflict of relationships.

Whilst not much is said of an Adam *redivivus*, yet Israel looked to Adam as the father of its own race,⁵ and certainly what is germinal in the Old Testament is fully developed in the New Testament with the doctrine of the ‘second’ or ‘last’ Adam. Israel needed a new ‘king of Paradise’ in order to be the true people of God. Although Adam is not consciously defined as the prophet and high priest of the human race, these points can reasonably be made. If made, then they almost certainly point to an inner yearning to have the restoration of Eden and its purposeful, as well as idyllic situation restored. We could say that the human race has a nostalgia for such, and that it has never successfully erased the memory of that initial bliss.

Israel never lost its admiration for its great leader, Moses. In the New Testament, also, we have traces of this memory, and some scholars see Jesus as the new Moses, and the Book of Hebrews whilst claiming Jesus is greater than Moses, accords Moses his rich place of leadership of the ancient people. Moses led Israel into the Promised Land which was really her Eden, so many wonderful things are said about her beauty and her *shalom*.

As for the promises to David of a greater kingdom and covenant than the one he knew, they are certainly taken up in the New Testament in regard to Christ. They were constantly reiterated throughout the later prophets and the Psalms. The new David would be one who would give Israel rest. David had given Israel rest from her enemies, but Psalm 95—particularly as used in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4—appears to be a message from David that Israel never entered into God’s true rest, not even when David subdued her enemies. The new Davidic King will lead God’s people to their true Eden.

Wishful Thinking or Prophetic Truth?

Each culture has its folklore and its aspirations to perfection, and Israel no less. The three historic figures of Adam, Moses and David could have inspired wishful thinking from ‘the good old days’ to the projected desire for ‘the good new days’, and these figures would come to hand to compose some great deliverer. When we add to these three the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the anointed Conqueror, the Seed of Woman, the Son of man and the ‘anointed Prince’ of the Book of Daniel, then we can surely make a composite figure of some power and effect.

Fortunately this is not a folk dream or wishful thinking. It is reality woven through the

⁴ Articles on the Messiah are many, in Dictionaries and Encyclopedias and packed with material. From the point of view of the Old Testament, J. A. Motyer’s article has an excellent bibliography.

⁵ They recognised that he was father of the whole human race, but their interest was not in the Gentile nations. Adam was their own father, and so they thought of him, anticipating such an Adam in the messianic sense. To many in Judaism, Adam did not have a fall principal to the whole human race. Paul’s argument in Romans 5:12–21 is something they cannot accept.

Scriptures of the Old Testament. If we think of the need of Israel to have a strong Leader, and one who would strengthen them in God's covenant and His kingdom, then such a person would be indispensable. Even so, it is not the need that constitutes a demand which must be answered by God to supply such a person, but it is the plan of God who made promises including those of Genesis 3:15, of the Seed of Abraham—the promises linked with the covenant made with that father of the faithful, the repeated promises to all the patriarchs, including Jacob's special prophecy concerning Judah's seed, and then the promises to Moses and Joshua. Indeed we see the specific promises to Israel, and the universal promises to the nations, in the Abrahamic covenant. It may well be that there was the *need* for such promises, but *need* never dictates God's actions in history.

At the same time the three great figures who are anti-types of Messiah—Adam, Moses and David—are those who act in history regarding God's ultimate intention for the human race. We have remarked that these three are linked with Eden, that Adam forfeits that wonderful place, Moses seeks to lead to the Promised Land which is Israel's Eden in a world of conflicting powers, whilst the Davidic One spoken of in the prophecies is to bring the promises of both covenant and kingdom to fullness, the outcome of which is Edenic in a world where evil has to be defeated, before the *shalom* and 'seventh day's rest' of God's paradise controls all creation.

Moses was, in a sense, king of his people, had a priestly role for them before God, and is acknowledged as *the* prophet of history. He never attained to being the king of the new Eden of Canaan, nor was he a full priest in the sense that his brother Aaron was—by appointment. He was the prophet *par excellence*, for he knew not only the history of Israel and was involved in the greatest acts of its history, but he knew its future because of what God had told him concerning His plan for that nation. Especially significant was his prophecy of another prophet—like himself—as found in Deuteronomy chapter 18. Without doubt this one would be of greater than Moses.

We have mentioned above that the prosperity, harmony, peace and relational amity of the world—namely the Edenic state—would climax with the Davidic king, who obviously would not be David himself, but a special David such as the hymn writer called 'Great David's greater son'.

THE LIBERATION OF ISRAEL

It is legitimate to see the need created by the sin and rebellion of Man, including that of Israel having to await the coming of a Forgiver and a Justifier. Whilst Israel had an accumulation of judgment awaiting it for its rebellion against God and its failure to obey the mandate God had given it both in Adam and in Moses, Israel, then, needed a Saviour. A liberation from the oppression from many things was necessary. Israel, God saw, had no given Intercessor of sufficient power to represent her before God. Isaiah chapter 59 deals with this omission, commencing with the fact that her sins had separated her from God. God, seeing there was no such Intercessor or Intervener, Himself intervened, putting on His own armour to liberate the nation from her oppressors—whichever they may have been. In Isaiah 52:14 – 53:12 we see a Servant who is not counted much to look upon, but who bears the sins of the people, for on him is laid the 'transgressions of us all', and this one 'made intercession for the transgressors'. His substitutionary ministry before God is what clears Israel of her sin. In the light of Isaiah 40:1–2, the need for a substitutionary atonement might not seem necessary. 'Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins', but there is a whole history—both past, contemporary and to come, in which Israel's sins are heinous and even exile will not cover them. She needs both an Intercessor and a Saviour to come and finish that sin forever. The message of John the Baptist carries that idea when he calls for national repentance—a call which angers the religious

leaders and political leaders of his day. Why should John call for such repentance with a view to the forgiveness of sins when the sacrifices are still being offered in the temple? John is evidently looking to the coming of the Kingdom of God, and the elements of new covenant which are linked with the forgiveness of sins—such as in Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31:31–34. No: the saving Servant of Isaiah is linked with the salvation promised in Ezekiel chapters 36 and 37, and the covenant promises of Jeremiah chapters 31 and 32. Required for the triumph of Israel and the coming of the Kingdom, is the one ‘like the Son of man’ of Daniel 7, who comes to defeat the beasts of that prophecy and bring in the Kingdom. He is ‘the anointed one’ of Daniel 9, ‘the Messiah’, the Prince who will ‘finish the transgression, put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place’.

The principles of atonement, forgiveness and justification are found in this coming One, in the texts of the many prophecies concerning the antitypes and types we have mentioned above. Did Israel see all of these elements gathered together in one Person? Whilst this is doubtful, there can be no question—if the New Testament is taken into consideration—that although the word ‘Messiah’ is not used for any of these figures save one, yet they certainly come together in ‘the coming One’ and fulfil the criteria for such a Messiah. Contemporary Judaism makes much of such a Messiah and it did not take the Christian church long before it began to use the term ‘Jesus the Messiah’—‘Jesus the Christ’—and then devolved it into ‘Jesus Christ’ or ‘Christ Jesus’.

‘THE CHRIST’ AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is clear from Paul’s use of ‘the Christ’ in Romans 9:5 that he thought Jesus of Nazareth to be ‘the Christ’, the figure we have endeavoured to show above, to be ‘the coming One’ to save Israel from oppression and to bring her people to know the forgiveness of sins, and ultimately to lead into eternal life, that is, the new Eden of God, the Paradise of the new heavens and new earth. One look at a concordance will show the common and prolific use of the terms ‘the Christ’, ‘Christ’, ‘Jesus the Christ’ and ‘Christ Jesus’. It is a fact of history that Christology has occupied theologians in the almost 2,000 years of the Church’s being. Our brief study will proceed from the New Testament, leaving aside both Classical and Modern Christological developments.

We know that by the time the first Epistles, the Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles were written, the term ‘Christ’ had become common coinage for the person of Christ. There was not what we might call a ‘Jesusology’. The person of Jesus was the being of the Christ.⁶ For example, Paul’s statements in I Corinthians 15:3–4, ‘that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures’, and ‘that he [Christ] was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures’, shows that the earliest form of the gospel was not that Jesus ‘died for our sins’ (etc.), although it was true enough that he did, but it was Jesus as the Christ who died for our sins. Matthew 1:20–23 makes it clear that the one born of Mary—Jesus—would be supernaturally conceived of the Holy Spirit,⁷ and his name would signify ‘he will save his people from their sins’, and that he would be the fulfilment of the (Messianic) prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, so that he would be Immanuel—‘God with us’. Likewise Luke 2:10f., the message of the angel, ‘for to you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is Christ the Lord’. If we take this as an historical happening properly recorded and not a reading back into the event of something the church later conceived, then it is clear that Jesus was understood—at least from the day of Pentecost—as ‘the Christ’, for Peter’s pronouncement in Acts 2:36 was, ‘Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him

⁶ It is well known that the quest for ‘the historical Jesus’ has occupied certain minds, beginning with the Enlightenment and proceeding to the present, but without, as yet, evident success.

⁷ cf. Luke 1:35.

both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified'. Here Jesus is identified as 'Lord and Christ'.

Insofar as Jesus the son of Mary and Joseph is concerned, he remained as a person who at the age of 30 years could become a teacher if that were so to be. There was no indication other than the birth narratives that he would be the Christ. This becoming the Christ happened in the event of his baptism by John. 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased', was a pronouncement which—the Gospels show—was spoken by a voice from heaven. This has to be linked with Psalm 2:7—'You are my son, today I have begotten you', and with Isaiah 42:1—'Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice [*mishpat*] to the nations'. In Luke 4:18, Jesus reads the lection of Isaiah 61:1–2, claiming that he has been anointed with the Spirit—the action that had taken place at his baptism.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

This is the anointing which made him 'the Christ'. It is this title which Peter confessed on the road to Caesarea Philippi and on the day of Pentecost. Even so, Jesus rarely used the word, and never—it would seem—directly applying it to himself. He tells Peter that his revelation came directly from the Father (Matt. 16:16–17). He commanded the disciples that they should tell no one he was the Christ, the word being so charged with meaning of a political nature that it was dangerous to utter. His question in Matthew 22:42, 'What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?', draws the answer, 'The son of David', a point we note in passing. In Matthew 26:63 the high priest says to him, 'I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God?' Jesus does not answer him directly. Indeed he refers to himself as 'the Son of man', and there can be no doubt this is just about an equivalent to claiming to be Messiah, since it scandalises the high priest.

CONCLUSION AS TO JESUS OF NAZARETH BEING 'THE CHRIST' OF ROMANS 9:4–5

For the rest of the treatment of Jesus as the Messiah, we may say with confidence that his resurrection was the basis on which his followers saw him to be 'both Lord and Christ' and 'the Son of God'.⁸ The whole body of the teaching from Acts to the Revelation—to say nothing of what was inherent in the Gospels—tells us that Jesus was accepted as Messiah, as 'the Christ'. The point that Paul was making in Romans 9:4–5 was that this Christ sprang from Israel and was 'of Israel' in the context of the people of the patriarchs, gifted as they were for the plan and purpose God had for them as the priestly nation to the world. This shows how reprehensible is their treatment of him and their rejection of him as the true Messiah. No wonder they are accursed, as Paul seems to infer in the pericope of Romans 9:1–5. This means that Israel is bereft of all things inherent in Christ's coming to it. Only those who belong to 'the Israel of God' benefit from these.

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE CHRIST

Without going into the matters of historical theology which treat the nature of Christ in the discipline of Christology—Classical Christology and Modern Christology—it will be difficult

⁸ We need not here enlarge on the immediate disappointment of the disciples at the crucifixion of Jesus, which seemed to end hopes for Israel's regeneration. Acts 2:22–23 and 4:27–28 show it was according to God's plan, and of course the death was indispensable to God's redemption of Israel.

for us to cover the scope of Christology in the New Testament by reference to (i) the antitypes, or (ii) the figures of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the anointed Conqueror, the Seed of Woman, the Son of man, the Righteous Branch, the ‘anointed Prince’ of the Book of Daniel, and other related elements. I propose to take the *schema* used by Ted Peters in his *God, The World’s Future*.⁹ In fact it will be the use of the *triplex munus* which covers the offices and works of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King.¹⁰ Christology is generally seen as who Christ was and is, whilst soteriology refers primarily to his work of salvation in all its aspects, but for our purposes we do not see fit to make a division of the two, but recognise that the person and the work are not intelligible one apart from the other. Even the three ‘offices’ as they are sometimes called are not fully intelligible when apart from one another. As we observed before, prophets, priests and kings were anointed, and although actual anointings of prophets are seldom discussed,¹¹ they were certainly anointed with the Spirit as II Peter 1:21 would encourage us to think, ‘because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God’.

Christ the Prophet

Jesus nominated John the Baptist as ‘the greatest among men’ and ‘more than a prophet’. John was these two things because he lived in the time of the coming of Christ and the Kingdom, prophesied concerning him, was the summation of the prophets, and saw the Messiah as a prophet greater than Moses and himself, and saw—further in Jesus—the answer to Israel’s dilemma of being God’s nation, yet needing the taking away of her sins, the consummation of the Kingdom, and the gift of the Holy Spirit by this Messiah as the prophets had foretold. Even so, if John was ‘greater than a prophet’ then Jesus was ‘greater than “greater than a prophet”’.

Undoubtedly the affirmation of Jesus at his baptism and the linking of Psalm 2:6–7 with Isaiah 42:1, points to Jesus’ prophetic ministry. Revelation 19:10’s statement, ‘The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’, needs to be understood in depth, since it says the heart of all prophecy is ‘the testimony [or witness] of Jesus’. In one way this is authenticated by Jesus’ words to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, ‘Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer . . . and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself’.¹²

Jesus certainly referred to himself obliquely as a prophet when he said, ‘A prophet has no honor in his own country’, though it could be argued that he was arguing generally for the fact that Israel had always rejected the one who came with the word of God. His apostrophe to Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37–39 could be interpreted in either of these two ways or especially as meaning he was the unique prophet about to be killed, since he says in the Lukan parallel, ‘I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the following day for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem’. This surely includes him in the prophets. In Luke 7:11–17, the raising of the son of the widow of Nain is reported, and Luke reports, ‘Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen among us!” and “God has visited his people!”’ What was meant by ‘a great prophet’? The woman at the well (John 4:19) said, ‘Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet’, for he had told her all that she had ever done. Even more to the point was the conclusion people came to in John 6:1–14, following the feeding of the 5,000, ‘When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!”’ This was surely a reference to

⁹ Fortress Press, 1992, pp. 173–224. Readers are referred to this work for a fuller treatment.

¹⁰ For a fuller treatment of these three offices and works of Christ, see the Monday Pastors’ Studies of February, March, April and May 1994.

¹¹ But see I Kings 19:16, where Elijah was told to anoint Elisha in his place. Again Psalm 105:15 says, ‘Touch not my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm!’

¹² Luke 24:27; cf. 24:44. The prophets wrote about Christ as the *substance* of the Scriptures, and he was primarily the *raison d’être* of the prophets, the sum of them. How then could he be less than a prophet?

Deuteronomy 18:15–22. In Matthew 21:11 (cf. John 7:52), ‘the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee”’.

Calvin certainly spoke of him as Prophet. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* he said (Book II, ch. xv, 1)¹³, ‘the office enjoined upon Christ by the Father consists of three parts. For he was given to be prophet, king, and priest’. Calvin then goes on to describe the office of prophet. Referring to Isaiah 61:1–2 (cf. Luke 4:18) he says:

We see that he was anointed by the Spirit to be herald and witness of the Father’s grace. And that not in the common way—for he is distinguished from other teachers with a similar office. On the other hand we must note this: he received anointing, not only for himself that he might carry out the office of teaching, but for his whole body that the power of the Spirit might be present in the continuing preaching of the gospel. This, however, remains certain: the perfect doctrine he has brought had made an end to all prophecies.¹⁴

There are many more things to consider and a major one is that Christ is still *the* Prophet. This is set out powerfully in Acts 3:19–26 where Christ is the promised Prophet of Deuteronomy chapter 18. Now his community is the prophetic community. This is seen in Acts 2:14ff. We mean by this that, just as Israel in the Old Testament was the prophetic community of all communities of the human race, so ‘the Israel of God’ is presently the prophetic community of all communities. It is evident that Christ goes on prophesying through his church. It is not true to say that Jesus was a prophet only up until his death on the Cross. The Book of the Revelation is a major proof of his continuing prophetic ministry.

Christ the High Priest

Of this office there can be no doubt. The writer of the Book of Hebrews gives himself wholeheartedly to this thesis, but he is not alone. Not for nothing has John 17 been called ‘Christ’s high-priestly prayer’, and Christ’s ministry has been shown to be high-priestly from the moment of his anointing at his baptism. In fact the writer of Hebrews in 2:11–17 links Jesus’ priestly ministry with his incarnation. He also takes the life and ministry prior to the Cross to be, in some senses, a training for his high-priestly offering for, ‘he had to be made like his brethren in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make expiation [propitiation] for the sins of the people’. ‘He learned obedience by what he suffered.’ He was appointed to the office of high-priest, not taking it upon himself of his own will.

The author of Hebrews quickly disposes of the high-priesthood that is after the order of Aaron, showing that God made Jesus a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. It is interesting that the writer whilst generally referring to Jesus as the high-priest, also speaks of Christ as being this one. We are not trying to show that the writer distinguished between the two—Jesus and Christ—but that as the Christ, Jesus is the High Priest.

It is not our purpose here to deal with the salvific ministry of Christ in offering himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the people¹⁵—all humanity—but to take up again the significance of ‘the Christ’ for Israel. Israel, in Christ’s high-priesthood, is confronted not with a perishable priest, but with one who is eternal and who firstly offers a single sacrifice *for ever* by which his people are purified, sanctified and perfected, *for ever*. That sacrifice is the body of the high-priest since the blood of bulls and goats cannot wash away sins. The earthly sanctuary which Israel had known is not only outmoded by the heavenly sanctuary, but Christ’s offering is acceptable within the heavenly sanctuary, for Christ is a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, and by token of his ‘vicarious humanity’ he ever makes intercession for his people from his place at the right hand of God. Whilst the writer does not develop a doctrine

¹³ The version we are using is the one edited by John T. McNeill and translated and indexed by Ford Lewis Battles (Westminster Pr., 1977) p. 494.

¹⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 496.

¹⁵ As previously suggested Christ’s marvellous high-priesthood is dealt with in one of the Pastors’ Monday Studies, namely that of the 7th March 1994.

of the resurrection, he shows that death could not destroy the Christ whose life was shown to be perpetual, and in the service of his people.

What concerns us here in referring back to Romans 9:4–5 is that the Christ, being high priest after the order of Melchizedek in accordance with Psalm 110—which in turn is linked in Hebrews with Psalm 2—brings us into the holy of holies so we come into the presence of Yahweh, who, in Israel, had always been shrouded in darkness in that inner sanctuary. Another way of saying this is that Christ as high priest took the transgressions of Israel forever, thus liberating her, and caused the purification of the sanctuary so that Israel was released by such intercession, such effective intervention. Through that death and resurrection the Father brought ‘many sons into glory’. The gifts of glory and sonship to Israel, along with new, pure worship were now present for ‘the Israel of God’.

The writer of Hebrews has a great theme to expound, namely the faith of God’s people. Beginning with Abel he proceeds through various men and women in history who are witnesses to faith. All of these are looking to the ultimate outcome of God’s history, namely the city built without human hands, eternal in the heavens. In short, they are all looking for the ultimate Eden, the darling subject of the prophets. In his prophetic and high-priestly ministry Christ is conducting his people to this ultimate sanctuary, and they by faith are obedient to him. All along this line of history Christ’s people are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that they may declare the wonderful deeds of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Christ the King

We have seen in our references to the coming Davidic King that his reign will be one that is wrought of God. Even Solomon in all his wisdom corrupted himself by the end, and brought evil into the kingdom of Israel. The stories of the kings of Israel do not make for edifying or confident reading. The prophecy of Isaiah 7 regarding Immanuel, of Isaiah 9 regarding a remarkable King who will come and of whose reign there will be no end, along with the prophecy of Isaiah 11 where the shoot of the stump of Jesse will bring peace and prosperity to humanity, are prophecies which enhance the expectations of a King who will rule in righteousness over Israel, and, indeed, over the world. Likewise the King of Psalm 2 who is set over the nations by his father, Yahweh; the other references in the Psalms to special Davidic reigning; the Priest–King of Psalm 110 and the Shepherd King of Ezekiel 34 all combine to promise Israel she will know Edenic peace and prosperity, true *shalom* in the days of this everlasting King. The King is to come and Israel is to be liberated from her enemies and subsist in the peace she has with God through her elect Sovereign.

In the New Testament the prophecies come to pass.¹⁶ The Magi seek him who is called ‘King of the Jews’. Herod, alarmed, seeks to destroy this supposed usurper monarch. Even at the end the Jews and Romans are harping on Christ’s Kingship, albeit against it. Pontius Pilate writes over the cross the superscription, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews’, and will not recall what he has written. He has conversed with Jesus who tells him he is indeed a king but not of this world. His Kingdom is the Kingdom of his Father. When he comes into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday they hail him as the Son of David, as the King of Israel. Years before Nathanael had exclaimed, ‘You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’

Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. From our vantage point of history we have the privilege of knowing this. ‘Jesus is Lord!’ was the message of the early church (Acts 2:34–36; 5:31; 10:36; Rom. 10:9; 14:7–9; II Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:11; Rev. 1:5; 11:15; 19:15). ‘Lord’ is the equivalent of ‘King’ as is shown in Revelation 11:14–15 and 19:15.

In 17:14 it is announced, ‘They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings’. Revelation 19:15–16 describes him:

¹⁶ As previously suggested Christ’s Kingship is dealt with in the Monday Pastors’ Group Study of May 1994.

From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.

There is no doubt, either, that the term ‘Christ’ or ‘Messiah’ is the equivalent to ‘Lord’ and ‘King’ (Acts 2:36; 3:15; 4:26; 10:36; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 11:15).

For us, even in this 20th century, his Kingship is a *fait accompli*. We need to live by this reality, for it is no less than the Kingdom of God and in Colossians 1:13 is called ‘the kingdom of the Son of his love’, and in Ephesians 5:5 ‘the kingdom of Christ and of God’. I Corinthians 15:24–28 helps to explicate this and show us that the action of the Kingdom is now proceeding:

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ‘For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘All things are put in subjection under him,’ it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.

Christ, then, by his death and resurrection has conquered all enemies. These are the enemies of the people of God, and of creation. They are ‘the destroyers of the earth’, the creatures who are part of the Satanic Kingdom, but as we see it is the Lamb that has been slain who is King over all in the Kingdom of God and his Christ. He is working now to seal the defeat of all evil as he accomplished it on the Cross and by the empty tomb. We are the people of this King. It is by him—this Priest—King—that the many sons come into glory, into the ultimate Eden as a ‘kingdom of priests’ and ‘a holy nation’. In the New Age they will reign forever.

CONCLUSION TO THE GIFT OF ‘THE CHRIST’ AND TO ALL THE GIFTS OF THE ISRAEL OF GOD

The conclusion is obvious: the exceeding great wealth of the gifts of God to His people ensures they may live in His Presence, to be His Covenant and Kingdom people. That is, they are to be the true Prophetic, Priestly and Royal Community as they live in their beloved Lord and King—Christ himself, the Son of God. In this Last Adam is recovered all that was lost in the First Adam. Whereas Adam should have been the true King of Eden, and have filled up the earth with Edenic living, bliss and purpose, it has, perforce, been left to the Last Adam to accomplish this. This was the plan and purpose of the Triune God, and it has been accomplished. We live in the dynamics of the Divine Prolepsis, living in hope and substantial anticipation of ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God’—the time when we shall be fully conformed to His likeness and inherit the Kingdom and be His covenant people for ever.

Since our Studies on the gifts of Romans 9:4–5 began with the wonder of such blessing, so, as we have proceeded, we find them to be all of one piece, and gifts without which God’s plan would not succeed. Primarily, of course, our eyes are on ‘the Christ’ who is the Completer of this plan by his redemptive, glorifying, sanctifying and perfecting work. It is in this Last Adam that we all subsist and it is this Shepherd who leads us to eternal pastures and beside the Edenic still waters, yet not simply as our being needy sheep, but as being a Kingdom of priests unto our God, reigning in the new Eden, for ever.

NCTM MONDAY PASTORS' STUDY GROUP, 2ND JUNE, 1997. G. C. BINGHAM

The Freedom of God and Man—I

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT: AN OUTLINE OF THE SERIES

It is purposed in this Series of Monday Pastors' Group Studies to cover the theme stated above. Because it is a vast subject we will take a number of Studies to cover it. The Series has been done before in NCPI resources such as the LFS Study no. 9 (*Christian Freedom: Crisis and Process*), *The Things We Firmly Believe*, *The Splendour of Holiness* and *Christ's Cross Over Man's Abyss*. In this Series I hope to open up further some of the elements included in the above literature whilst also adding in new insights. I have also thought it useful not to limit the size of each Monthly Study. This first Study may seem less substantial than usual but it is intended simply to open the subject and provide a footing for the building to come.

The headings below constitute main sections and may require sub-headings. I hope that the Series may provide useful personal and pastoral material, much of which would not be found in non-biblical—and even biblical—treatments.

THE OUTLINE OF THE 'FREEDOM OF GOD AND MAN' SERIES

Introduction: What Are We to Understand by Freedom & Liberty?

God Is Free in Himself

Man's Primordial Freedom

God's Freedom is Immutable

Man Loses His Primordial Freedom

The Promise and Fact of Liberating Love and Grace

The General Nature of Human Bondage

Present Bondage and Future Telos

The Enslaving Elements and Liberation:

(a) Sin

(b) Satan

(c) The World System

(d) Law

(e) The Flesh

(f) The Wrath of God

(g) Death

(h) Conscience

(i) Idolatry

The Liberating God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Liberated From, For and Unto

The Continuing Battle for Freedom in Faith, Hope and Love

The Place of Christ's Community for Continuing Freedom

The Ultimate Freedom—The Freedom of God, Man, and Creation

INTRODUCTION: WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND BY FREEDOM AND LIBERTY?

If we wish to speak about God's freedom in biblical language which is humanly understandable, then we can do no better than quote Psalm 115:3, 'God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases'. It is best that we look at the context of this statement, so we will look at the first eight verses:

Not to us, O LORD, not to us,
 but to thy name give glory,
 for the sake of thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness!
 Why should the nations say,
 ‘Where is their God?’
 Our God is in the heavens;
 he does whatever he pleases.
 Their idols are silver and gold,
 the work of men’s hands.
 They have mouths, but do not speak;
 eyes, but do not see.
 They have ears, but do not hear;
 noses, but do not smell.
 They have hands, but do not feel;
 feet, but do not walk;
 and they do not make a sound in their throat.
 Those who make them are like them;
 so are all who trust in them.

The Psalmist is comparing the idols and God. He refers first to Yahweh’s steadfast love and faithfulness, and the utter absurdity of the idols which are the gods of the nations. God is in the place of supremacy and power, and the idols are on earth—deaf, dumb, blind, without sense, and devised by human beings. Moreover, human beings which make them become like them. On the other hand, God is free: He does what He pleases. In Psalm 135:5–6 the same idea is present:

For I know that the Lord is great,
 and that our Lord is above all gods.
 Whatever the Lord pleases he does,
 in heaven and on earth,
 in the seas and all deeps.

Again, the gods are below the Lord, subject to Him, even though they have no reality ontologically. God alone creates, and He creates as He pleases. That He is free to do as He wills is the same as ‘He does whatever he pleases’. In both quotations we have the ideas of (i) God being unique in His being, and (ii) He alone is Creator. Human beings may *devise* from what God creates, but He alone creates, and therefore does what He pleases with what He creates. Taken from the side of human understanding, the saying, ‘God does what he pleases’, is offensive and unfair, but fallen Man strives to get himself into a position where he can do what he pleases. Authority is really the position where God is free to do what He pleases. The difference between God and Man is that God is Creator; He creates and so is the Author of all things and pure authority is His prerogative. Man cannot author anything *from himself*, so that he cannot create his own authority, and thus *of himself* has no similar freedom. He can have freedom but only from what is delegated to him to do. Another way of saying this is that God is Creator, and Man is creature. God is free and creates the creature. The creature is free when it is content to be creature and thus dependent upon the Creator doing what the Creator thinks is best for it. What pleases God is Man doing what God is pleased for him to do. Indeed in that one sentence we have summed up the freedom of God and Man, provided we do not think that God is not free *until* Man does what He pleases.

We sum up, then, by saying that God is free in Himself, and Man may be a free creature when he does what pleases God, for, as we shall see, God loves Man and desires the best for him. So the Collect says, ‘whose service [slavery] is perfect freedom’.

GOD IS FREE IN HIMSELF

We who are human are not simply limited by what we call our finiteness, so that we think it is impossible to understand the infinite nature of God—as we call it. The fact is that we are

limited by our creatureliness from being God or becoming God, but we can know God as creatures—especially human creatures—can know God, and that is all that is required for a creature to be truly creaturely. It is foolish to say that we are frustrated because we are finite. Qualitatively we can never fill out our creatureliness to its fullness, and seeking to do so remains a lifelong occupation and demand. So then, we should give up absurd ideas of being quantitatively free by somehow becoming infinite. The term ‘infinite’ for God is a quasi-philosophical one, and not a biblical one. In seeking to know God we are obviously limited by our sinfulness, for knowing God is primarily relational knowledge, or knowledge gathered in a relationship. Human sinfulness brings a human reluctance to be faced with the actuality of God, especially what we might call ‘moral actuality’. To be confronted by God is a matter of facing up to His holiness, righteousness, goodness, truth and love.

Paul says of fallen human beings, ‘They did not wish to acknowledge God’, or ‘They did not wish to retain God in their knowledge’. Previously he had said, ‘They exchanged the truth of God for a lie’. This statement is interesting in that the exchange was of God for idols, and so our Old Testament quotations above are very apt. Man could deal with idols because he devised them, they were not creators and so he could control them, and in the beginning he could apportion to them what control he felt was good for his own case. He did not wish to surrender his own control over them, but as we shall see, the tables were turned and Man-under-idols is a slave to them. In Man’s devising mind the factors of finiteness and infiniteness do not really enter into the matter of Man-idols relationships. The problem is that Man is *for* himself, and the idols are *for* themselves.

The facts of Creator and creature do enter into the matter of Divine and human freedom. If Man will really be the creature he is to his fullness, then he will have a correspondence with God, and—being in the image of God—will have a relational affinity with God, and so have knowledge of Him. That knowledge will be *relational*, and so be his freedom, for the image—the *imago dei*—is free.

God is free within Himself. There can be no talk here but what Trinitarian theology teaches us. This theology is gathered from the bulk of the Scriptures and has taught us that God has sociality within Himself. This *ontological* view—or reality—of God teaches at the same time that, as God is free in Himself, so Man, being in the image of God, has by creation, a full freedom. That is, full freedom—to be fully Man. The *economic* nature of the Triune God means that God is ever in action to His creation, firstly in creating it, and secondly in redeeming it, and thirdly in seeking to bring it to its goal. In fact, the ontological and the economic are one. God is free to do what pleases Him, but what pleases Him is in accord and harmony with His own nature.

As we would expect, God’s freedom is what we call sovereignty, but our image of sovereignty is often a hard and detached one. We see it from our guilt-charged perspective, and so we resent His being able to do as He wills. We see ourselves on the painful receiving end of that and think our liberty as human beings is curtailed. As guilty humanity we feel freedom should not just be freedom *from* guilt, but freedom *to do* whatever we will to do. That is an illusion: to do what we will—from ourselves—is bondage. God does not wish to have, for Himself, the kind of freedom to do what does not accord with, nor spring from, His nature as it is. We, obviously, will only find freedom when we concede that His freedom is right, even if that seems to limit our human freedom. This points out to us the thrust within us, in our sinfulness, to transmogrify God’s Being of love, holiness, righteousness, goodness and truth, into the wretched and pathetic idols so that we can deal with them and not with God. We become like the objects we worship: our freedom is further curtailed when we give these images the stature and the dynamics of God.

God is free in Himself to do what is in accordance with His ontological-economic nature. The mystery of the Godhead is that God has willed His very Being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has willed their internal relationships and their coinherence so that they interpenetrate one another and constitute one Being as God, yet as Three Persons, have differentiations which contribute to the uni-consciousness as the one true God. Only in a plurality of

Being can they be One. Only in a plurality of Being do love, holiness, goodness, righteousness and truth have operation, action and intelligibility. The key to this oneness and action is the unity of the Three Persons, but then unity which is pure communion.

This unity of the Persons lies in the fact that they are ‘Other-Persons centred’, that is, they are *for* the Others and not each for Himself. When God creates He is not only *for* Himself, but *for* creation. This ‘for-ness’—‘others-centredness’—constitutes His essential freedom. Thus in Man, ‘for-ness’ for others, ‘other-persons centredness’, constitutes freedom of being. In God this is the communion of the Three, and in Man is the communion of Man with God and with his fellow creatures.

God’s desire to create intelligent creatures which can know His nature and worship, adore and serve Him, brought forth first the angelic creatures, each of whom was given a place and function in the celestial sphere, but who were to serve terrestrials also in the terrestrial sphere where a different operation was to happen. Angels were to be agents of God’s ‘for-ness’. In this terrestrial sphere God brought forth a race of creatures—Man—who were to be in His image, and to do His will which was to fulfil the plan He had made for creation.

MAN’S PRIMORDIAL FREEDOM

Psalm 115:16 says, ‘The heavens are the LORD’s heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of men’. This does not mean the heavens are God’s sphere and the earth Man’s sphere where Man could arbitrarily do what he wished. It means God has given the earth to be under Man’s lordship: He, Himself, is Lord of Heaven and King over the whole earth. That God made Man in His own image, means Man was in union with Him and showed forth God as King whilst Man was God’s regent. He showed forth some other elements of God, such as Creator and Father. Primarily Man was in relationship with God, and in innocency he was also in communion with God. This meant that Man’s affinity with God was dynamic, and out of that affinity he reflected both the ontological and economic nature of God, insofar as an image can reflect the whole reality. This meant that Man was free, because as God did, being God, so Man did, being Man, but did then as a creature showing forth the Creator–creature relationship. Man’s showing forth of God was not only in Man’s being a creature, but also in his being a subject and servant of the King, as he worked out the mandate of Genesis 1:28, for this was his partnership with God. Man is also depicted as a child or son of God, corresponding to God’s Fatherhood.

We need to calculate the utter joy and peace which Man knew in his Edenic situation. It was the place of God’s Presence, the place of delight He had given to Man, the place of active innocence, a situation where guilt as yet had played no part. His union and communion with God must have been of unspeakable bliss, and the union and communion of the man and the woman of the same nature. Talk or thought of Man’s ‘doing his own thing’ was absent. Man was in fellowship with God and creation. He could not be truly Man and not be one with God, not one with himself, one as two spouses being one flesh. Thus his whole spirit was at once Godward and spouseward. Man’s freedom lay in vertical and lateral relationships. Sin is the opposite of this: in it is only inversion, an intuned (so-called) relationship.

Man, then, was free to do God’s will and not simply to revel in a freedom for its own sake, a freedom which many believe cannot be freedom where there is any kind of control. Man probably did not know consciously what this freedom was until he lost it. By nature of that case he would not be of a mind to see it as a freedom which could be lost, since the serpent was teaching him that he would gain freedom he never had had. This new freedom would come by disobeying the injunction not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In his innocency Man was simply one with God, was *for* God, especially so in His intention for the creation. All the attributes of God—love, goodness, righteousness, holiness and truth—were reflected in and by his relationship with God. **Karl Barth** wrote of God and His freedom, including the freedom He gives to Man:

In the light of His revelation, God is free in word and deed; He is the source and measure of all freedom, insofar as He is the Lord, choosing and determining Himself first of all. In His own freedom, as the source of human freedom, God above all willed and determined Himself to be the Father and the Son in the unity of the Spirit. This is not abstract freedom. Nor is it the freedom of aloof isolation. Likewise, man's God-given freedom is not to be sought and found in any solitary detachment from God. In God's own freedom there is encounter and communion; there is order and, consequently, dominion and subordination; there is majesty and humility, absolute authority and absolute obedience; there is offer and response.¹

We saw that the hallmark of God's freedom is that He does whatever pleases Him. What pleases Him is primarily to be *for* the creation, His special object of love. Philippians 2:12–13 speaks of God working in redeemed man 'to will and to work for his [God's] good pleasure', and this is a sign of His love being *for* the redeemed person. Man's freedom is present when he does the good will and pleasure of God, which will of course be his action *for* both God and Man. Thus Abel 'had this testimony, that he pleased God'.² The writer of Hebrews adds, 'And without faith it is impossible to please him'. Faith always involves obedience as it involves trust and relational union. Romans 8:8 says, 'those who are in the flesh cannot please God'. In this context Paul is speaking about 'fulfilling the righteous demand of the law', inferring that those who do this please God. Here, we take it, law is the very *torah* of God Himself. By this we mean that the law God gave at Sinai which became Israel's law—Israel's *torah*—was first the law innate to God in His Trinitarian relationships, and thus the wholesome law for Man—Man's *torah*. The law is summed up for Man in the love he should have for God and love for all mankind. Thus it can be said to be *torah* for God and Man. Of course we do not mean God is under a law, even one He creates, but that is the way His Being is and works. As we shall see, Man's freedom is in seeking to serve others, which is being *for* them. So as Man obeys God's law he is one with God's pleasure, with what God does when and as He likes. Man is thus *for* God and *for* his fellow-creatures.

Romans 15:1–2 sets out the principle that we ought not to please ourselves but to bear with the weaknesses of our neighbours and to please them; that is, we do not live primarily *for* ourselves but *for* others. This thrust is given strongly by Paul in Philippians 2:1–8 and I Corinthians chapter 8. Consonant with this we ought always to please God. Pleasing God is the way of freedom, but not without the proper pleasing of men when that action is the will of God. Thus the key to freedom was—and is—to do the good pleasure of God. This means being at one with Him, sharing in His freedom by doing the things which are according to His will.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer sees Man's freedom as not only being in his union with God, but in his union, also, with others of mankind. Of course this is simply part of the image, the reproducing of the fellowship of the Trinity, of the communion of the Three Persons:

In man God creates his image on earth. This means that man is like the Creator in that he is free. Actually he is free only by God's creation, by means of the Word of God; he is free for the worship of the Creator. In the language of the Bible, freedom is not something man has for himself but something he has for others. No man is free 'as such', that is, in a vacuum, in the way that he may be musical, intelligent or blind as such. Freedom is not a quality of man, nor is it an ability, a capacity, a kind of being that somehow flares up in him. Anyone investigating man to discover freedom finds nothing of it. Why? because freedom is not a quality which can be revealed—it is not a possession, a presence, an object, nor is it a form for existence—but a relationship and nothing else. In truth, freedom is a relationship between two persons. Being free means 'being free for the other', because the other has bound me to him. Only in relationship with the other am I free.³

Man is firstly free in the relationship God has given with Himself. Because God is Trinitarian and free in His fellowship, so Man, secondly, is free in his relationship with others. Freedom is present when all exercise the gift of freedom God has given them from His Trinitarian Being.

¹ *The Humanity of God* by Karl Barth (Collins, 1961), p. 71.

² AV translation. RSV has 'he was attested as having pleased God'.

³ *Creation and Temptation* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (SCM, 1966), p. 36.

GOD'S FREEDOM IS IMMUTABLE

God's Freedom

God is not affected in His Being by Man's refusal to live and act freely in God. Man's refusal of his creational freedom did not in any way bind God. There is a truth which we must consider here. God is not a composite Being, that is, One composed of the five realities we keep mentioning—love, goodness, righteousness, holiness and truth—but he is One. We can speak of these five elements merely as 'attributes'—things attributed to Him. He is what they are; they are not adjectival in regard to him. If we consider Him metaphysically we are likely to arrive at a naked deity and as one having raw power. Instead we find He is love, and this is a discovery seminal to all we would know and be. In other words we do not have a dominating Deity, but One for whom love and grace—with the other qualities—are always present to His being. He created the world in love as Creator, but He had always been Redeemer and Father, and was not compelled to become Redeemer by Man's loss of his freedom. We may speculate whether the primal couple knew of His grace and redemption being innate to Him. This may or may not have been the case. What we do know, now, is that when Man cut the tie of unitary communion with God, He for His part, did not do the same. God has ever 'so loved the world'.

MAN LOSES HIS PRIMORDIAL FREEDOM

Man lost his freedom because he thought that freedom was to become *as* God, knowing good and evil. He listened to the serpent's wisdom, and refused to remember and act upon Divine wisdom. It is here that Jesus' words help us in regard to understanding the affects and effects of sin. 'Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin . . . so if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed'.⁴ Christ promised a liberation which was intended to restore the freedom once lost. The slavery of sin's lordship is seen in many places in the Old Testament such as in Proverbs 5:22–23, 'The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is caught in the toils of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is lost'. Likewise Jeremiah's words of 17:9, 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?'

Man's loss of freedom was loss of true union and fellowship with God, loss of that precious communion and rich worship. He also lost freedom because his relationship in breaking away from God was at the same time breaking off the man from the woman. The bondage and loneliness of not being free *with* and *for* the other is one terrible effect of the Fall. Since Man—the male and female—are one in duality, now each human creature exists on his or her own—not being able to be free *with* and *for* one and all. Any forms of 'fellowship' Man may desire⁵ will have to come from the idols, from a transmogrification of Eden into a devised imitation of the real thing. Of course the most shattering force of his sin was his breaking relationship with the Creator, the God who made him to be human. Humanity was free when it sought to please God by being in communion with Him and all others.

Another powerful effect is the incursion of guilt⁶ into his being, and the heavy effects of a tainted conscience, a sinful conscience. Man, too, is robbed of his reason for living—fulfilling

⁴ Some commentators believe the first part of this text of John 8:34, 36 is a gloss introduced from Pauline teaching, as in Romans 6:12–14, but surely Jesus is talking about being in the house of God, becoming as a slave of sin, but now rehabilitated by the Son of the house, and allowed to live freely in the house.

⁵ Here we are assuming that Man has never been able to expunge from his memory the terrible fact and nature of the Fall. The bliss of knowing God relationally and working in harmony with Him in the holy sanctuary of Eden, cannot easily be obliterated from the Adamic memory. Reams could be written about his endeavours to 'revive' Eden or make it afresh!

⁶ We will deal more fully with the matter of guilt when we come to that (seeming) enemy of Man, the human conscience. At this point we simply note that conscience is utterly ruthless and no device of Man can quieten it.

the plan of God innate to the creational mandate. Without a *telos* in sight, without this powerful lodestar in sight, he has no hope, no goal towards which to move. Life is pointless—a period of existence to be eked out so that doubtless one has to devise one's own manner of seeing it through. Since Man was intended to be both God's covenant-partner and God's fellow-labourer for the Kingdom and the new heaven and earth, so that loss of true vocation must be replaced by self-seeking and self-extending vocations.

An interesting point to note here is that Man—seemingly left to himself in the antediluvian days—came to a state where the whole earth was corrupted and in violence. We might talk on the one hand of moral atrophy, the withering away of moral sensitivity and conscience, whilst on the other hand we might speak of a surging of sin, an evil power to be not *for* but against both God and Man. We can observe that these were not days of freedom but of licence; not of liberty but of the bondage of sin. The judgment had to come and it came in the mode of the Flood. The reiteration of the creational mandate—now given to Noah and his family—meant that the lodestar of perpetual guidance still shone in the heavens. Man was not without a future. Man was to move towards the *telos* of God's intention, and he was clearly to move by grace. God's deliberate and continuing fellowship with Man was made clear by His revealing His glory to Abraham, and bringing the everlasting covenant into dynamic operation through Abraham. A new era seemed to have begun with Noah, but Man reverted to idolatry. Abraham was an idolater. God did not wait for some evolution of thought in the patriarch which would bring him to his moral senses and rejection of idolatry. God came to Abraham, bringing into position His powerful covenant of grace which was to bless the nations. Man was not left to devolve into corruption and violence as had previously been the case.

The history and pattern of Man's rebellion from Eden onwards is well set out by Paul in Romans 1:18–32, and the active elements of Man's evil are shown in Romans 2:9–17. Analysed, what is shown to us is the illusion of Man that to be loosed from God and to be autonomous, planning one's own destiny and doing it unaided, is what constitutes true human freedom. This fallacy has persisted down through all Man's history, much to the selfishness, cruelty and suffering of the human race. It was the fallacy which motivated Cain and which ended in murder. For Man to refuse the will and pleasure of God who is in heaven—where He does what He pleases—is for Man to live on earth and do what he pleases, and for him to believe that this is freedom. This is the fatal, lethal illusion. History is strewn with the death and demise of innumerable multitudes of those who mistook licence for freedom, and autonomy of spirit and self's endeavour for true liberty.

CONCLUSION TO 'THE FREEDOM OF GOD AND MAN—I': GOD AND MAN'S FREEDOM IN CONFLICT

In this Study we have laid the foundation for what is to come. We have grasped the idea that God's Freedom is: (i) that He does all things according to His own will; (ii) that His will primarily purposed His own Being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; (iii) that His freedom lay first in each Person of the Triune Godhead being *for* the Others, that is, the Divine freedom lay in the Divine relationships; (iv) that Man was created from and in that Divine freedom, since God is God in His relationship *with* and *for* Man; (v) that Man's freedom lay in his looking *to* God and living a God–Man relationship, and that as creature to Creator, subject to King, child to Father; and (v) that Man's freedom lay in the relationships that one had towards all others of the race, that same attitude *for* them as on the Divine level the Persons have towards one another; in Man first that duality is in the man–woman unity, and the universal ontological unity which presupposed that everyone is *for* all others.

Without this understanding we cannot go forward to comprehend the essential and inner nature of Man's bondage, and, hence, the bondage of sin and the other enemies of Man noted in our introduction to this Study.

The Freedom of God and Man—II, The Bondage of Sin

INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF TRUE FREEDOM

As good an Introduction as any would be to repeat the Conclusion from our First Study, as it will assist the flow on to the nature and bondage of sin.

In this Study we have laid the foundation for what is to come. We have grasped the idea that God's freedom is: (i) that He does all things according to His own will; (ii) that His will primarily purposed His own Being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; (iii) that His freedom lay first in each Person of the Triune Godhead being *for* the Others, that is, the Divine freedom lay in the Divine relationships; (iv) that Man was created from and in that Divine freedom, since God is God in His relationship *with* and *for* Man; (v) that Man's freedom lay in his looking *to* God and living a God–Man relationship, and that as creature to Creator, subject to King, child to Father [that is, in these correlates]; and (vi) that Man's freedom lay in the relationships that one had towards all others of the [human] race, that same attitude *for* them as on the Divine level the Persons have towards one another; in Man first that duality is in the man–woman unity, and the universal ontological unity which presupposed that everyone is *for* all others. Without this understanding we cannot go forward to comprehend the essential and inner nature of Man's bondage, and, hence, the bondage of sin, and the other enemies of Man noted in our introduction to this Study.

To this above we could add some more material, namely that until Man accepts the purpose for which he was created—the purpose set out in Genesis 1:28—he will not be free. The human race was set down in Eden to begin a great work which would be completed when the world would be glorified, sanctified and perfected. God did not create a world and a human race which was already perfect, which was in its ultimate glory and which was sanctified at the point of its creation. Neither, of course, was created humanity in any sense evil and impure, nor did it lack the glory of being in the image of God. God's plan for it was to bring it to be fitted for the vocation of being 'a kingdom of priests unto God', whatever that may mean. To be free from sin would be to be occupied with God's will and to be with Him in the working out of 'the counsel of his will' or His 'eternal purpose'. Not to be in this is to be in bondage—bondage we will see which is from sin. To be in the outworking of God's will in the history of creation is to be in freedom.

Up to this point we have not taken up the matter of Jesus' saying, 'Every one who commits sin is the bonds slave of sin . . . so if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed'.¹ The point we need to emphasise is that he who commits sin is the bonds slave of sin, and freedom is being made free from sin so that one is no longer under its domination but is free to live life without its despotism. We cannot, then, even begin to talk about freedom unless we recognise sin and what it has done to us.² This we will now attempt to do.

THE MATTER AND NATURE OF SIN, THE BONDMASTER OF SINFUL HUMANITY

The title to this section is courageous and very bold, for who can know what sin is, and what is its origin? As to *origin* we are told nothing in the Scriptures. The most we are told is that sin

¹ John 8:34, 36.

² We need to see that Man was free before he sinned. Sin is the rejection of freedom, the supposed exchange of original freedom for human freedom from God's *seeming* domination of Man. This is Man's freedom to do what he wishes.

entered into the world through Adam, and that death followed it. G. C. Berkouwer says that in seeking to find the origins of sin we have a motive which prevents our discovering its origin:

Yet, throughout the course of history men have tried to construct abstract and causal answers to this question of sin's origin and have failed to realize that in so doing they have violated the very limits of objectivity. A remarkable relation exists between seeking for the origin of sin and an *exculpation or exoneration of one's own person*. . . . As soon as he refers to a definite evil or a particular guilt he is no longer concerned about a purely logical or abstract theory. Factors of an entirely different sort come into play, and these influence his question of origin decisively. Any 'causal' explanation we propose can only be seen, in the practice of living, as a means of fashioning an 'indisputable' excuse.³

The Deceitfulness of Sin

In Hebrews 3:12–13 the writer says:

Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

William Lane in his commentary on Hebrews⁴ translates 'the delusive attractiveness of sin'. Philip Hughes commenting on the same verse says:

Sin, nonetheless, is a constantly present reality which makes its inroads by means of *deceitfulness* . . . sin first deceives and then hardens, leaving its victims in an irretrievably hopeless position . . . The background of this concept is undoubtedly the account of the fall (Gen. 3): Satan, with serpent-like guile, insinuates himself into the consciousness of the woman, whom he completely deceives, and she in turn tempts the man to disobey the word of God, with the result that the blessing of paradise is exchanged for a curse and this, the original apostasy, produces a harvest of incalculable bitterness. 'It is rightly called the deceitfulness of sin,' Luther declares, 'because it deceives under the appearance of good.'⁵

All forms of evil are deceitful. Satan is said to be the devil who deceives the whole world. We read of the 'deceitful lusts [of the flesh]'. This combination of evil forces and elements which are opposed to God present attractions to the flesh of human beings which seem to be for their advancement, only to let them down in the ultimate. Having lost innocence through the Fall, Man is now unable to be objective about sin, even if such an enquiry were possible. What makes such an investigation difficult is the conscience of Man which can only operate properly when (i) it has been cleansed effectively from 'dead works' and so can appropriately 'worship the living God' (Heb. 9:13–14), and (ii) when it thus operates as a *good* conscience—that is, as a pure and undefiled conscience—in the life of the person who has faith in God. Even then it is constantly open to the temptation and problem of self-justification. Philip Hughes quotes Luther further, regarding the deceitful delusive power of sin:

This phrase 'the deceitfulness of sin' . . . ought to be understood in a much wider sense, so that the term includes even one's own righteousness and wisdom. For more than anything else one's own righteousness and wisdom deceive one and work against faith in Christ since we love the flesh and the sensations of the flesh and also riches and possessions, but we love nothing more ardently than our own feelings, judgment, purpose, and will, especially when they seem to be good. For the same reason Christ said, when he healed the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda, that it was impossible for such people to be able to believe: 'How can you believe who receive glory from one another?' (John 5:44). Why are they not able to believe? Because the 'deceitfulness of sin', that is, the love of their own righteousness, blinds them and hardens their hearts. Yet at the same time they think it a good thing to glory in their own righteousness and be pleased with it, though that indeed is the very worst of all vices, the extreme antithesis of faith. Faith rejoices and glories in the righteousness of God alone, that is, in Christ himself.⁶

³ G. C. Berkouwer's book *Sin* ('Studies in Dogmatics', Eerdmans, 1971), p. 14.

⁴ Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47A, *Hebrews 1–8* (Word, 1991), p. 81.

⁵ A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews by Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (Eerdmans, 1977), p. 148.

⁶ op. cit., p. 149.

The conscience is not a great help in working out what is sin and what is not sin, since it is so often occupied with so many cultural laws and ethics, and the constant pressure that we feel towards self-justification often drives us to train our consciences away from the purity of God's law. As we will see, sin is refusal to obey God's law, and this at heart is refusal to obey God and to seek to actively disobey Him.

The Reality of Sin

From a practical point of view we cannot deny the reality of sin. Often personalised and called '*the sin*', it is a power working amongst and against mankind. We deny it ontological reality, since it was never created by God, but we cannot deny it 'provisional reality'. Just as Satan was not created as an evil being, anymore than Man was so created, he—Satan—has devised created beings to be enemies of God, and to do evil. 'Devised reality' may be a contradiction in terms, ontologically speaking, but it is a present, personal power to be contended with. Sin, in the true sense, is no essential reality:

When the Church spoke of God as the 'Origin' of all things she certainly had in mind those things with creaturely reality, whether visible or invisible. But no matter how sin burrows and burns in reality and seethes its way into the deepest crannies of our hearts, it can never be seen as part of the reality itself. Its goal is always the disruption and destruction of reality. Therefore it is impossible to conclude from the notion of God as the 'Origin' of all things, that he is also the 'Origin' of evil.⁷

If, then, we have defined 'the reality of sin' as something which constantly confronts us and brings us into bondage but which has no authentic ontology, we can face it on the practical level such as Jesus did when he said, 'He who commits sin is a slave of sin'. Christ saw himself as competent to defeat sin in the lives of human beings. Indeed, John the Baptist had pointed to him as the one who was to take away the sin of the world, and the angel had told Joseph to name the coming babe 'Jesus' because he would save human beings from their sins. Likewise Christ pointed to the cup on the night of the Last Supper and said, 'This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins'.

The Coming of Sin into the World

In Romans 5:12 Paul said, 'Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned . . .', and this statement tells us all we need to know about the so-called 'origin' of sin. We may seek, of course, to rationalise it, but the statement points us to Genesis 3, the temptation and the Fall. The facts of the case are that the serpent affected the gullible woman who listened to its word rather than to God's. She called her husband to share with her in the event. Paul said of them both, 'Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor'. Volumes have been written on what was the nature of their sin but the heart of it was the desire 'to be like God, knowing good and evil'. They looked for a freedom of being without the authority of God impeding it. We need not pause to amplify this but simply conclude that Paul is saying they reneged on all that God had put before them to know and to do.

When we have the discussion and comparison of Adam's sin and Christ's obedience in Romans 5:12–21 and, for that matter, the discussion of sin and obedience throughout the Scriptures, we who study them may develop a doctrinaire view of both. We may fail to see that the human couple wanted to develop their own plan, independent of God. Whether they knew it or not—and we doubt they did fully because of the deceitfulness of sin—they were opposing and discarding the whole plan of the will of God for His ultimate Eden for the human race. There are many theologians who see that the First Adam was created to be and do what the Second Adam was, did, is doing and will do. The first Adam was intended to be *the prophet, the priest and the king*,

⁷ Berkouwer, *op. cit.*, pp. 62–3.

to and for his whole race. Instead Adam became the means of sin entering into the world, and bringing death to all his progeny. It may well be that Adam did not see himself as *not* fulfilling the mandate given to him—which embraced the plan of God—but simply saw himself as doing it by his own ability, in autonomy. One side of sin is that Satan has his plan to fulfil, one which is a counterpart or counterfeit of God's, and that he—Satan—seeks to use sinful Man to assist him in that. This seems to be part of the idea of Ephesians 2:1–3.

If we take the verse quoted above (Rom. 5:12) we can see that Paul made a statement which was not completed, because in verse 13 he introduced a parenthetical statement which he pursued in verse 14 and did not return to the matter in verse 12 in order to complete it. I seek, here, to supply what I believe to be its logical conclusion—the portion in italics: 'Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned, *so obedience came into the world through one man and life through obedience because all men obeyed*'. The contrast is that Christ as the Second Adam brings life through obedience and all humanity is credited with his obedience because they are one with him.

Sin Acting in Each Person's Life

In James 1:12–18 the author gives us a powerful description of the way sin acts in a person's life and the way God acts against sin:

Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

Leaving for a moment the fact of original sin and its attendant guilt, let us look at James's explanation in our passage. James is saying 'Let no one say . . .'⁸ A man or a woman says, 'Sin has its origin in God, and not in me. God's power is greater than mine. But for Him I would not sin'. James says this is dangerous talk. It is the talk of one deceived: this is the deceit of sin that it can be blamed on God. Now, 'Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change'. There can be no suggestion in such a God that He originates evil. How then does sin 'happen'? It is clear enough:

each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death (James 1:14).

Here the order is evil desire,⁹ sin, death. All of this happens *within the person*. It is the person's evil desire, it is '*his own* desire'. Desire conceives and gives birth to sin. Sin is first a babe, then a child, and finally a full-grown and formidable offspring which kills the host-parent. This is how transaction takes place in the self. By contrast, God has His word which can only bring forth the kind of person who is 'a kind of first fruits of his creatures'.

⁸ Throughout evangelical comment on the origin of sin there is a reasoning which says that God is against sin, but that in the ultimate it does stem from His purpose to redeem Man. There is a kind of inherent monism in this argument; that is, that ultimately evil is in some way necessary for salvation to be able to take place. Many texts are then interpreted by this monism, and so a rationale develops that (i) God is against all sinning and sins, but that (ii) He permits it (sinning and sins), and indeed uses it for His purposes. We are here presented with the kind of argument a monist was using and which James was refuting in the passage quoted above. That God 'turns the wrath of man to his praise' does not mean that origination of sin proceeds from God—a matter impossible for One who is holy.

⁹ Desire is part of the nature of created Man. Desire is not wrong, but the object of our desire decides whether it is good or evil. Incited by the serpent, Man desired to be as God, knowing good and evil. In the case of Adam he desired to be free of God and free in himself. That desire conceived and gave birth to sin.

If we were to apply this principle of ‘self-sinning’ to the original act of Adam, then we would see that the objective, ‘outside tempter’ was the serpent. There could have been no interior response if the man had rested in the word God had given to him regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The desire in the woman enticed her to be ‘lured by her own desire’ and, through the woman, the man likewise to be ‘lured by his desire’. Paul intimates in I Timothy 2:13–14 that the man deliberately took the action of sin. The beguilement of the woman seems to indicate she was deceived into thinking her action was not disobedience.

The Power of Original Sin

The term ‘original sin’ has been dealt with in a great body of theology over many centuries. Romans 5:12–21 should here be read for it is the context of the term ‘original’ which, however, does not appear explicitly in its text. The various historical Church confessions which state the fact of original sin are primarily confessions rather than theology, though often a supportive theology is used, yet that theology, too, is in the way of confession. The difficulty of seeing original sin as a matter of human guilt asks the question whether questioning original sin is not the very result of human guilt. The question as to *how* original sin can be transferred through generations may be prompted by a desire to see how it can be authentic, how it ‘operates’.

Romans 5:12 says clearly, ‘Therefore, as sin came into the world through one man . . .’, and the simplicity of that cannot be denied. Sin—as Scripture so often and aptly illustrates—is a power of tremendous force and its depredations within a world of humanity are enormous. When David cried, ‘Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me’, he was not necessarily crying this with a learned doctrine in mind, but more from the fact that he was discovering his own rascality, his own vicious evil, especially in immediate regard to his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite, and his long, personal experience of dreadful sin.¹⁰ In discovering his own terrible sinfulness he was discovering the power of sin in the world of humanity. That he belonged to God is not to be doubted, but it made the evil of evil so much more recognisably evil.

Our confessing the *fact* of original sin—‘all have sinned’ (v. 12), and ‘by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners’ (v. 19), means that the human race was sinful from the beginning. It lived in the presence and turmoil of sin. None was exempt from that, and none was sinless. Perhaps it will sound naive to say that corporately all were—and hence are—involved in Adam’s sin. Each person is involved and cannot rationalise the fact, but must confess it. Of this Berkouwer says:

Therefore the confession of original sin is not a lamentation of a strange burden we bear against our will. It does not imply an alien charge which is levelled against us because of our ‘heredity.’ It does not suggest in the face of that charge we are only impotent. It does imply that we are delivered from the labyrinth of self-excuse. One can say, with no hesitancy at all, that the Church has constantly groped for this acknowledgment of guilt and has constantly underscored this attitude as her only sure confession. As we see in her formularies, her intention has never been to ‘explain’ man’s actual or universal guilt. When faced with such an option (as in the case of Pelagius)¹¹ she has spoken of a lack of appreciation for the depth and gravity of sin. She has taught to refute the notion that sin is spread in the manner of *imitatio* and has proposed, instead, the idea of *propagatio*. That term, of course, has given rise to much discussion and misunderstanding. Yet it remains a fact that this answer is found not only in the Council of Trent but in such a document as the Canons of Dort.¹²

¹⁰ In Psalm 25 David prays, ‘Remember not the sins of my youth, or my transgressions; according to thy steadfast love remember me, for thy goodness’ sake, O LORD’. He realises that his youth was no impeccable stage of his life. Compare with Genesis 6:5 and 8:21, especially ‘from his youth’. See also Job 13:26.

¹¹ ‘Kierkegaard typified Pelagius in the following terms: “that every man plays his own small history on his own small stage without deriving anything from humanity” (*The Concept of Dread*)’, (Berkouwer’s footnote).

¹² The Roman Catholic Council of Trent was in 1545–63, and the Reformed Synod of Dort, 1618–19.

What is clear is that however original sin has been explained as to its causal elements and the doctrine of imputation,¹³ yet the universality of grace speaks of a universal corporate sinfulness which has its origin in Adam. Hence **Otto Weber** says:

The Church's doctrine of 'original sin' is basically the theological formulation of the fact that God's work in Jesus Christ applies absolutely to all men, and that man is absolutely in need of this work without restrictions, can contribute to this work neither actively nor receptively, but merely must let it happen to himself.¹⁴

THE PRACTICAL POWER OF SIN ENSLAVING MAN

Matthew 1:21 spoke of Jesus saving his people *from* their sin. Here it is implied that sin has people gripped in its hold. The fact of early history in Genesis shows the sin of Cain as an immediate and dynamic force:

If you do well will you not be accepted [be forgiven]? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.

In this saying the whole principle of sin—especially as we have seen it in James 1:14–15—is set forth. For example, the sin which has been given entrance by Adam cannot have power unless the person involved does not seek to do well. Leaving aside for the moment the question of the ability or inability of a person to defeat sin on its own,¹⁵ we see the tyrant sin has entered by Adam's disobedience and all so-called 'self-righteousness' is a delusion. Abel is the man who 'did well' and defeated the power of sin.¹⁶

Some Old Testament Views of Sin

Whilst there has always been a faithful and loving people of God—through grace—yet the human race, in the environment of original sin, almost as a whole, slithered downwards into violence and corruption, halted only by the Flood. It then threatened to repeat the same performance after the Flood, via idolatry, and would have done so but for the covenant of universal grace made with Abraham. In Genesis 6:5:

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

This statement was made pre-Flood whilst the following statement (Gen. 8:21) was made post-Flood:

I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth¹⁷; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

¹³ If we think Adam's sin has simply been imputed to his posterity then we have missed the point. Being in Adam—that is, one with Adam—we are part with him in that sin. It is not imputed, for we participated in it. Christ's obedience is not simply imputed to us: we are participators with him in his obedience: we participate in it.

¹⁴ *Foundations of Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Eerdmans, 1983), p. 599).

¹⁵ Romans 7:13–25 makes it clear that a person cannot, out of his own resources, defeat sin when the two are in direct battle. Only the power of the gospel through the Spirit can give the person power and victory over what the Puritans called 'inbred sin'.

¹⁶ From the beginning Man has had a solution to being tyrannised by sin. Undoubtedly it is linked with sacrifice, and undoubtedly in that sacrifice is the principle of propitiation. It must have been that such propitiation was given by God to Man, a protological ritual of the principle of Leviticus 17:11. I believe that we can find the whole nature and operation of sin when we examine the case of Cain, and examine it in the light of Abel's obedience.

¹⁷ Jeremiah 17:9–10 repeats some of the thought of David's penitential Psalm (51): 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?' Man's responsibility for his deeds is not lessened by his inherent propensity to sin. 'I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doing'. Ezekiel 18:30–32 needs to be studied: 'Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of any one says the Lord God; so turn, and live'.

Proverbs 5:22–23 has it:

The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him,
and he is caught in the toils of his sin.
He dies for lack of discipline,
and because of his great folly he is lost.

We ought to keep in mind that in the Old Testament we have men and women who are people of God, and those who are wicked, but all are sinners. All are confronted with the fact that they come into the world as people who sin, yet there is a differentiation between being sinful through birth—as are all—and wicked through intention. Psalm 58:3 has, ‘The wicked go astray from the womb, they err from their birth, speaking lies’. This means that sin is always a matter of will, no matter who sins, but wickedness is a state of mind and an attitude, just as faith and obedience are a matter of the will, primacy being given to obedience. This links in with the question of accountability. In Exodus 34:6–7 we have the nature of God expounded, in which the sins of the fathers will be visited unto the third and fourth generation ‘of those who hate me’ (Deut. 5:8–10), that is, who are deliberately idolatrous. As early as Deuteronomy 24:16, the accountability of a person shows that:

The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

This is reiterated powerfully in Ezekiel chapter 18 and Jeremiah 31:29–30. God tells Israel to renounce its false claim, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge’. The *fact* is that the children’s teeth are set on edge: everything *is* bitter for them. The cause is their own sin. Ezekiel 18 shows the necessity for each person to make his or her own choice.

We might as well observe here that no one could or did excuse himself for sinning on the basis of original sin. One might take into account the force of original sin in all lives, but the refusal to sin was always an expectation of God: indeed it was a demand.

The New Testament and Some Views of Sin

We have seen Jesus’ strong statement, ‘He who commits sin is the bondsman of sin’. The idea is, surely, that to commit sin is to come under its power. Christ spoke of the foul fountain from which all sins flowed as a defiling reality:

What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man (Mark 7:20–23).

Jesus was speaking in much the same way as James. In John 2:23–25 we read that when many believed on Jesus because of the signs he had done, Jesus did not trust himself to them for he knew all men; he knew what was in Man. At the same time Jesus came to set men free from their sin.

Paul used a large portion of his Letter to the Romans to speak of sin. In Romans 1:18–32 he speaks of a revolt against God, a turning away from the truth of God to the worship of idols. He shows the descent into the most terrible and hideous of sins. He may be referring to the Fall or just to the outcome of the Fall. In chapter 2 he spends his time addressing Jews who think they are better than Gentiles but who are no better. Indeed, their sin is more reprehensible, for it is the kind of sin Jesus condemned in the Pharisees and other Jewish

leaders: it is hypocrisy.¹⁸ In verses 9–19 he quotes passages from the Old Testament which are written by Jews about Jews, showing they are no better than Gentiles. His passage of 3:9–18 spells out the actions of various sins:

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all; for I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written:

‘None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands, no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong;
no one does good, not even one.’
‘Their throat is an open grave,
they use their tongues to deceive.’
‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’
‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’
‘Their feet are swift to shed blood,
in their paths are ruin and misery,
and the way of peace they do not know.’
‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’

Paul has much more to say about sin. One example is Ephesians 2:1–3, where he shows the state of sinful man as being one of death, one of enslavement to Satan, one of constant disobedience to God, one of fleshly passions and lusts—all warranting the wrath of God. In Romans 14:23, he sheds some light on sin when he says, ‘whatever does not proceed from faith is sin’. This recalls the pattern of the Fall.

In I John 3:4, the apostle John says, ‘Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness’. John is saying that to commit sin (*hamartia*) one is guilty of lawlessness (*anomia*), that is, of rebellion against God’s law. This statement of John is of great importance.

SIN IS KNOWN BY THE LAW, AND ITS CONVICTION IS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

We conclude—reasonably, I believe—that from the beginning Man chose lawlessness: he was sinning against God’s law. There was law in Eden in the prohibition against eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This confronts us with the whole matter of law and enlarges even more the scope of our subject, ‘Sin’. We ask, for example, whether the mandate of Genesis 1:28 is not God’s true law and, since it has to do with the fulfilling of God’s plan, whether, then, disobedience is not heinous sin. We stated at the beginning of our paper that sin is really opposing God in His plan for creation—the *telos* He has designed—and now we are suggesting that God’s holy law must be obeyed so that that plan may be fulfilled.

The Existential Knowledge of Sin

We have a vast history of Man’s experience of sin. It is set out in history, portrayed in all forms of art and discussion in philosophy and religion, and yet Man does not know the true nature of sin. One of the reasons—as we have seen—is that he is a sinner and cannot be in a position to know what it is.¹⁹ Not only does he lack objectivity, but his own sinfulness

¹⁸ Luther is reported to have said, ‘There are two devils, a white devil and a black devil, and I fear the white devil more than the black one’. He was, of course, speaking of delusive self-righteousness.

¹⁹ Christian theologians also find it difficult, if not impossible, to understand the nature of sin. This matter is discussed well in Hendrikus Berkhof’s *Christian Faith* (Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 192–6. On page 196 Berkhof commences his discussion of the *origin* of sin in order to speak more fully of the *nature* of sin. His summary of the various views of the nature of sin is extremely valuable. He differs from Berkouwer’s view that ‘one cannot at the same time profess sin and explain it’ (p. 197). It does seem, nevertheless, that when theologians strongly disagree on what is the nature of sin, our involvement in sin precludes us from a definitive understanding of sin. What we know of it must come primarily from a revelation by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures he unfolds, the scope of sin being so wide. The fact that it is not ontological, that it is an attack upon what is ontological, is one indication of the difficulty of defining it satisfactorily.

precludes him from the knowledge of sin. Man, nevertheless, feels the *impact* of sin. Its penetration into his being, his immense guilt, his painful experiences of the wrath of God which necessarily and inevitably accompanies sin, are all experienced realities of the subject. In our Studies on 'The Freedom of God and Man', we will need to look into the other related elements to which Man is in bondage, such as God's Wrath; the Law; Conscience; the Flesh; Satan and his World and World Powers; and Death and Idols. Man feels the existential pain, threat and doom in all of these elements, especially when they are posed against him.

The Knowledge of Sin by the Law

In Romans 3:19–20, Paul may have a number of things in mind which we ought to discuss, but time and space preclude a full treatment. He does make the point that in face of the law, 'the whole world may be held accountable to God'.²⁰ He then adds 'through the law comes knowledge of sin'. When we ask how it is through the law we have knowledge of sin, Hendrikus Berkhof explains:

Paul is saying here: through the law we become 'acquainted with' sin, that is, it awakens our resistance and we begin to transgress the law.²¹

Some would agree that the experience of Man with the law does incite transgression of it, but would add that a person has to run the whole gamut of this experience—as set out by Paul in Romans 7:1–5, 7–24 (cf. Gal. 3:19–25)—before that person would come into 'a knowledge of sin'. Others would see it far more simply; the law sets out the standard of true moral conduct and by observation of this law one sees what is sin and what is not. What is evident is that without the law there is no knowledge of sin.

The Conviction of Sin by the Holy Spirit

In John 16:7–11, Jesus said clearly that it was expedient that he should leave the apostles, otherwise the Holy Spirit would not come, but when he did come he would convict (*elegxai*) the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. The verb 'to convict' has the ideas of reproving, rebuking, convincing. The *NRSV* has 'prove the world wrong about sin'. This conviction regarding sin is 'because they do not believe in me'. Sin, then, is unbelief in Christ. It seems to me to be permissible to say that conviction will be the bringing home to the convicted person the nature of sin, the sinner's involvement in it, some unmasking of the evil of sin, and so knowledge of it to the degree that is necessary for the step which should follow conviction. Doubtless the Holy Spirit uses the law in bringing this knowledge to the person.

CONCLUSION: SIN BRINGS BONDAGE: CHRIST RELEASES FROM BONDAGE

Because we have not dealt with sin in its relation to other elements, especially in regard to God's wrath and judgment, we will need to pursue the subject further in our next Study. For the moment we simply hold to Jesus' statement, 'the Son shall make you free', and we will

²⁰ John Murray in his 'Collected Writings of John Murray', vol. 2: *Systematic Theology* (Banner of Truth, 1977), pp. 78–80, seems to give the greatest prominence to sin as violation of God's law. It is interesting that in Romans 3:19, Paul largely takes this view. His point in Galatians 3:19–25 is another one altogether.

²¹ *op. cit.*, p. 196.

pursue the way in which he does this. In regard to the difficulty inherent in our subject, I feel I can do no better than to quote from **Berkhof**:

That we have some knowledge of the atmosphere of sin in which we live is thus because in the encounter with God we have been handed a criterion from the outside. Knowledge of sin is faith knowledge. What God calls sin goes infinitely deeper and is infinitely more comprehensive than what we can dig up out of our own 'heart,' even with the most merciless introspection. For in that case we are still engaged in comparing ourselves with ourselves: our deeds with our conscience, our conduct with our ideal of what we would like to be, our 'lower I' with the moral law in us. In our association with God it is announced to us that also and specifically with 'the higher in us' we affirm our independence over against God.²²

Personal Note: I set out to discuss the matter of sin and its bondage, and in order to be faithful to the subject read again sources I had used in the past when I had written—in 1978—the **Living Faith Study, No. 24, 'The Nature, Effects and Cure of Sin'**.^{*} In almost 20 years additional materials accumulate and a person's way of communicating them—I trust—matures. I could see that in the scope of this Study much would have to be admitted and much omitted. I trust in the next Study we may be able to widen the approach to sin's bondage and Christ's liberation from it, especially in regard to the wrath of God which is present in the guilt of sin with which Man lives. I trust that readers of this present Study will peruse the footnotes.

²² Berkhof, *op. cit.*, pp. 193–4.

The Freedom of God and Man—III, Sin and Liberation From Satan

INTRODUCTION: SIN'S BONDAGE

We have seen that God's freedom is to do as He wills from the counsel of His own will.¹ We have seen that Man, as created, was also free when he was one who acted involuntarily to do God's will. His bondage came when he deliberately refused to do God's will but instead turned to do his own will. This, so speak, put him out of kilter with God's creation in which he lived, and with which he was to be occupied according to the mandate of Genesis 1:28.² We have also seen that his sin was his rebellion against God, in that it was a refusal to work in the action of God by which He intended to bring all creation into a final and irreversible unity, which would constitute the redemption, sanctification, glorification and perfection of all the creation, the 'Edenising' of all things when there would be the Holy City or Paradise into which would enter all that had been redeemed and sanctified. Man is in bondage when he is not a partaker in God's freedom. He has come into that bondage by sinning, and acts and moves in this realm, though never with genuine satisfaction. As we shall see, it is his attitude to God, and his acquired ignorance and spiritual blindness³ which constitute the turmoil, the awryness of all creation, and his pain and fear which are elements of his bondage, his non-freedom to live harmoniously in his world, that world which God pronounced to be 'very good'.

SIN AS A PRACTICAL REALITY

Leaving aside philosophical–theological discussions regarding the origin and nature of sin, we have claimed that sin is a practical reality. It confronts us, attacks us, keeps us in bondage, and is a fact and a power that we have to face in every area of life. Once we see that the principle of sin is the action for and of human autonomy which totally disregards the will of God, then we begin formally to understand generally the nature of sin. This sense is heightened if we hold that creation was a gift to humanity, and the eternal covenant of God a relationship for the good of Man and creation, so that all relationships were in love and with a view to the ultimate climaxing of that love in the new heaven and the new earth.

The Nature of Sin in the Old Testament

In our last Study we saw a little of the Old Testament view of sin, and this we need to fill out. The most important words are *hatta't* meaning 'a missing'; *pasha* meaning 'rebellion' and 'transgression'; *awon* meaning 'perversion'; *ra* meaning 'evil' in disposition; and *resa* meaning 'impiety'.⁴ There are other words which have the ideas of guilt, iniquity, being bad,

¹ cf. Psalm 115:3, 'Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases'—as against the idols who are helpless, Psalm 135:6f., 'Whatever the Lord pleases he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps'.

² We will shortly talk of the intention of the serpent in Eden to undermine the purpose of God for creation, and so his use of Man to thwart the plan of God, in order that he—that ancient serpent the devil—might erect his own structure, as we see him attempting to do in the Book of the Revelation.

³ By this sentence we do not mean Man is ignorant in the sense that he lost the power of reasoning. Not at all: he continues to be brilliant in his reasoning, but in the bias of that reasoning he cannot comprehend the true nature of God, Man and the Creation.

⁴ For a comprehensive listing of OT and NT words for sin, see Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Eerdmans, 1964), pp. 268–9.

doing evil, being wicked, acting as guilty persons, doing injustice, making toil, trouble and mischief. There are also words such as pride, folly, uncleanness, deceit, impurity and the like. All of these terms are eminently practical because observable.

The list we took in our previous Study from Romans 3:10–18 consists of quotations purely from the Old Testament, not necessarily speaking of Gentiles:

‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one.’ ‘Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive.’ ‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’ ‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’ ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood, in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they do not know.’ ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’

We have the evident states of persons, like David in Psalm 51, which is a classic statement on the nature and effects of sin; the false confession of King Saul in I Samuel chapter 15, ‘I have sinned!’; and the true confession of David in II Samuel 12:13, as also his statement in Psalm 51:4, ‘Against thee, thee only, have I sinned’. Hezekiah in II Kings 18:14 says, ‘I have done wrong’ to the king of Assyria. The states of sinfulness are harrying the sinner, as in Psalm 32:3–4, and as in Isaiah 57:20:

The wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God for the wicked.’

The Psalms are filled with confessions of sin and failure, and with imprecations against the wicked. Psalm 40:12 speaks of the power of sins, ‘For evils have compassed me without number; my iniquities have overtaken me, till I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me’. In Psalm 65:3, ‘our transgressions prevail over us’. Proverbs 5:22 has it, ‘The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is caught in the toils of his sin’. In Proverbs 20:9 the writer asks, ‘Who can say, “I have made my heart clean. I am pure from my sin?”’ Isaiah 24 is one of the many passages which denote the terrible retribution of God which falls upon the sinful, and their reaction to His judgment for their sins.

All the time we have to keep in mind God’s eternal covenant; His particular covenant with Noah, then with Abraham, and then with Israel; the giving of His law which deals in grace with the sins of the people; and His demand for Israel to be the priest–nation among all nations as they witness to Him, their Covenant Father.⁵

The Nature of Sin in the New Testament

Many are the words also for sin in the New Testament, and most of those of the Old Testament come to us through the LXX, that is, the occasions in which sin is described. Sin in the New Testament is thus ‘a missing of the mark’; ‘a transgression of the law’; ‘a living in doubt’ of God—that is, a ‘lacking in faith in His nature, promises and intentions’. Sin is ‘knowing what is right and failing to do it’, and finally it is a ‘refusal to believe in Christ’.⁶ These descriptions of sin do not convey to us its essential being, but indicate acts and attitudes by whose formations we can recognise the *fact* of a sin. Sin is to depart from union with God into independence and autonomy, this happening originally in Eden with the primal couple. Had it not happened, there would not now be the sins which we call personal and accountable,

⁵ If God made a covenant of creation with Man in Eden, then Adam’s sin is the more reprehensible. The covenant with Noah had very much to do with sin, and the Abrahamic covenant is linked universally with both blessing and cursing. The Sinaitic covenant certainly has sin in its sights, and no less the Davidic covenant. The New covenant has much to do with sin and true understanding of law—now the law of the heart. See my *Love’s Most Glorious Covenant* (Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill, 1997).

⁶ These five descriptions of the nature of sin are found in Romans 3:23; I John 3:4; Romans 14:23; James 4:17 and John 16:7–11.

Man having become sinful through original sin. We need this Old Testament background when we hear Christ talking of the evil which proceeds from the muddied fountain of the human heart, particularly in Mark 7:14–23, where his words were directed at those whose emphasis was on ritual purification and not on purification of the heart. We have already seen that Christ attacked pride born of self-righteousness. In regard to the doctrine of original sin, we saw that it is virtually what Paul was speaking about in Romans 5:12–21. From original sin there has derived what constitutes depravity—the infection by sin of every part of Man—and which also brings the elements of *privatio* or deprivation of the good elements of true human relationship with God,⁷ the ‘glow’—so to speak—of the *Imago Dei*.

We get the strong impression that throughout the New Testament the matter of sin and Christ’s deliverance from it is extremely important. Jesus recognised the sinfulness of taxgatherers and harlots, but most of his uttered criticisms are of those who fancied themselves as righteous when what they were was, in fact, self-righteous. This means that his mind held the true nature of sin, for it was this which he came to take away; it was this from which he came to liberate Man; it was this which he was to be made on the Cross when he would ‘bear the sins of many and make intercession for the transgressors’.⁸ In one sense he did not wait even for the event of the Cross, because he had come with authority from God to forgive sins. So we see those who came to him who entered into God’s forgiveness. Doubtless there was a proleptic element in this authority, since it had in view the Cross which was to be forever the basis of all forgiveness for all humanity. We think of the story of the taxgatherer crying for mercy in the court of the sinners in the Temple, the woman who was a sinner, the woman taken in adultery, the man afflicted with the palsy, and numerous others, including, finally, the thief upon the Cross when Jesus cried to the Father for the forgiveness of his persecutors and crucifiers. We think of his three outstanding predictions⁹ of his going to the Cross, then of his work on the Cross and, later, the summary of Paul concerning it and the resurrection, when in Romans 4:25 he writes, ‘Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification’.

The apostles were deeply concerned with the forgiveness of sins, particularly from the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The message of Pentecost climaxed with:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

In 3:19–21, the promise is again made of forgiveness of sins, and in various situations, in Acts 4:12, 5:31, implicitly in Acts 8, and in chapter 9 Paul’s conversion, to which the apostle later alludes (Acts 22:16) when he says that Ananias had bid him be baptised ‘washing away your sins’. In chapter 10 the story of forgiveness of sins granted to the Gentiles is recounted. In 13:38–39 Paul proclaims forgiveness of sins through Christ, and also the parallel justification by faith, and in 26:16–20 he refers to his commission to preach forgiveness of sins to the Gentiles.

The Epistles of the New Testament—in particular Romans, Galatians and Hebrews—are filled with the teaching of forgiveness, justification, the centrality of the Cross, the power of the resurrection, the High Priesthood of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit to communicate the matters of sin and God’s deliverance from sin through the person and work of Christ. Because of the abundance of this material we will have to be selective as we now move towards the matter of liberation from sin which was promised by Christ. First, however, we

⁷ By using the term *privatio* we are not speaking of God withdrawing the gifts of humanity which He gave at the creation, but rather the loss of the beautiful and functional things of relationship with God and fellow human creatures, the living in love, the glowing of the image of God—and so on.

⁸ Isaiah 53:12; cf. Matthew 1:21; 23:1–36; John 1:29; 8:31–36; I John 3:5; Hebrews 9:26; II Corinthians 5:21.

⁹ We note the use of the Greek word *dei*—the ‘must’ or indispensability of his going to the Cross. It was not simply a chance effect of his life and ministry which led him to the Cross.

need to see the nature of sin's bondage, especially as it is linked with the factors of Satan, his world system and world powers, the wrath of God, the law, conscience, idols and death.

THE POWER OF SIN AND OTHER RELATED POWERS

The Power Called Satan and the Devil

Sin has power over humanity by reason of its guilt: 'He who commits sin is the slave of sin'. Matthew 1:21 points to Jesus saving his people *from* their sins for they are evidently in the grip of these. John 1:29 denotes Jesus as *taking away* the sin of the world—a quite extraordinary statement. Zechariah, in his prophecy of Luke 1:68–79 says his son John, 'will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, to give *knowledge of salvation* to his people *in the forgiveness of their sins*'. Setting forth the cup, Jesus says, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many *for the forgiveness of sins*'.

Linked with Man's bondage is the fact of his being under the power of the Evil One, called variously 'Satan', 'the Devil', 'the Adversary', 'the Accuser'. Man will have to have all his guilt removed and atoned for before he can be free of Satan. Jesus was aware of this, and of the nature of Satan. He referred to him as 'a murderer from the beginning', and said that, 'there is no truth in him', and that, 'he is a liar and the father of lies'. The apostle John says of him 'he has sinned from the beginning'.¹⁰ This 'from the beginning' surely refers to the work of the serpent in Eden as well as the ongoing activation of sin in the human race. Revelation 12:9, speaking of the 'red dragon', says, 'And the great dragon was thrown down, *that ancient serpent*, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world'. 'Ancient serpent' does appear to refer to the creature in Eden. If John 10:10ff. is contrasting the wolf as the Devil and Christ as the Shepherd, then it fits the case, 'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they might have life and have it abundantly'. Satan's being 'a murderer from the beginning' may—in a secondary sense (cf. I John 3:10–11)—link with the sin of Cain, but 'to steal and kill and destroy' surely speaks of the Devil's ravaging of the human race, his lying against the truth of God to Eve, along with his seduction of her so that Man would die—be delivered up to death—in the day he ate of 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'.¹¹

We recognise that the primal couple were wholly responsible for the dreadful sin they committed but they were tempted by the serpent to disbelieve God's word. It is clear from Hebrews 2:14–15 that Satan has power over human beings:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

How does Satan hold humanity in 'lifelong bondage'? Ephesians 2:1–3 indicates that bondage also:

And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, *following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air*, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

The answer must be that Satan has power over guilty human beings by reason of their guilt. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, '*Satan only tempts where there is innocence. Where there is guilt he has already gained power*'.¹²

¹⁰ See John 8:34–44; I John 3:8. Sinning from the beginning.

¹¹ See Genesis 2:17; 3:2–3, 13; II Corinthians 11:3. The serpent lied, but lied seductively so that Eve desired. See also James 1:14–15.

¹² I regret being unable to document this. I quote only from memory.

In his role as Accuser or Adversary, Satan pins the sinner down to God's inevitable judgment. In Zechariah 3:1–5, as indeed in Job 1:6f. and 2:1f., Satan is adversarial. We gather from Jude 9 something of the same condemnatory action. In John 14:30–31, Jesus claims that 'Satan has nothing *in* me', which we might translate, 'nothing *on* me', because he, Jesus, had not sinned and so given himself over to the power of Satan. Only the innocent are free. In the Garden, Adam had used his true freedom of will in order to be more free, only to find he had lost his freedom through that choice. Since then Man has been under the power of Satan by virtue of his guilt. It is Satan who torments Man with the 'fear of death', that is, the fear of judgment. John's statement that 'He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning', links it with Jesus' statement, 'everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin . . . So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed'.

In passing we may observe the wider picture, that the serpent, from the beginning, sought to subvert God's plan for creation and humanity, and establish his own. In this story is the subversion of an entire course of angels, and the attempt to subvert all humanity.¹³ This system of Satan we call 'the world'—that aeon over which he is 'the prince of the power of the air'.¹⁴ It is in his interest to deceive the whole world and bring it under his control. In Daniel chapters 10 and 11, we find the princes of Greece and Persia are angelic creatures hostile to God's angel who, himself, needed the assistance of 'Michael, your [Daniel's or Israel's] prince'. Such powers are called 'world powers' because they seek—for good or evil—to set the destiny of the nations of the world.

The Satanic system is clearly a system opposed to God and His Kingdom, and one which the Devil would make as a counterpart or counterfeit of the Kingdom of God. If Man is to achieve the fulfilment of Genesis 1:28 then he is to do it *for* Satan and *under* him.¹⁵ This is seen in the Book of the Revelation, where chapter 12 shows the heavenly rebellion of Satan, and chapter 13 his endeavour to get all mankind under his control through the Beast who is his clone, and the Second Beast or False Prophet, so that all who do not wear the mark of the Beast—that is, they will not serve or worship the Beast—are to be persecuted and slain. We can trace this development back to Eden where the serpent seeks to bring Man under his control.¹⁶

DELIVERANCE FROM SIN BRINGS DELIVERANCE FROM SATAN

Man in Painful Bondage to Satan by Reason of Conscience and Guilt

Speaking of that Satanic system the apostle John wrote, 'The whole world is in the power of the evil one'. Certainly Satan does not control the created world, for that is God's by reason

¹³ Revelation 12:3–4. One third of the stars of heaven would be, it seems, a course of angels. If they had been an hierarchy of celestial creatures over which Satan was the hierarch as an archangel—the other hierarchs being Michael and Gabriel—then it would mean the angelic principalities and powers who had suzerainty of nations would work for Satan in his ambition to 'set my throne on high', that is, 'above the stars of God', the stars being the angels.

¹⁴ The story of Satan's 'aeon' or 'world' can be put together from various passages of Scripture, and although they seem fanciful, and even fantastic, yet it is certain Satan has that system the New Testament calls 'the world'.

¹⁵ We mean that if he is forced to 'walk according to the prince of this world' (Eph. 2:2), or to do his desires (John 8:44), then it will be to be used by the Evil One to fulfil his plan for the creation. This is countered by Christ who told his disciples 'All authority is given unto me', showing the nations were his alone, also countering the Devil's claim at the Temptation time, that authority over the nations was delivered to him (Luke 4:5f.).

¹⁶ Jesus pictured Satan as a liar and murderer 'from the beginning'. He also depicted him as 'your father the devil'. Satan would have his family and his kingdom in aping God who is Father and has His Kingdom. In Revelation 13 the red dragon has an offspring—the Beast—and he is a counterfeit of Christ, as the Second Beast, or False Prophet, is a 'spiritual being', the counterpart to the Holy Spirit. Thus all in the kingdom of darkness—Satan's kingdom—is an aping of all that is God's. By this means Satan deludes himself into thinking he is as the Most High God.

and authority of creation. Whilst Man is a sinner Satan has power over him, as is shown in Ephesians 2:1–3, Hebrews 2:14–15, and John 14:30–31 (cf. Jude 9). In I John 3:8 the apostolic author says, ‘He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning’. We take it by this statement that all through history Satan has been active in the matter of human sinning, working on the desire in Man that conceives and brings forth sin, and so also death, and fear of death compounds Satan’s grip of Man. As we have said, Satan has power by reason of the guilt of sin. Whilst Man remains unjustified and unforgiven, he is still subject to the accusations of the Adversary–Accuser.¹⁷ Accusation may well be what Paul calls ‘the flaming darts of the evil one’. It is certainly the most painful part of Man’s existential suffering, since ontologically his conscience was not meant to be the vehicle of accusation, so much as that faculty by which he was to be aware of God or ‘co-aware’ with Him. To be made aware of his evil in his fallen state was to be brought into the most terrible agonies of shame and the fear of judgment. This is brought out clearly in Hebrews 2:14–15, ‘who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage’. Let us not forget the place conscience plays in human misery, for when it listens to the word of Satan and forgets the word of God, as it did in Eden, then Man is exposed nakedly to the devices and cruelty of Satan.

Satan Fears the Revelating and Liberating Power of the Gospel

That the gospel of God¹⁸ is a mighty power to liberate sinners is shown in II Corinthians 4:3–6:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Because of this power which the gospel has to unmask and expose Satan and show Christ’s deliverance from Satan’s hold, Satan is ever seeking to raise up false gospels. Paul says that he who preaches a false gospel is accursed, and in II Corinthians 11 he discusses the seductive ‘gospel’ of the so-called ‘super apostles’. The true gospel is inimical to the whole system of evil. This explains the whole matter of the persecution of those who hold to the gospel, especially as we find the same principle running through the Book of the Revelation, to say nothing of the warnings against Satan which Paul, James, Peter and John deliver in their Epistles.¹⁹

The Liberation of Man From Sin and So from the Power of Satan

We have seen that Man is in bondage to Satan by reason of his guilt of sin. He is the target of the accusations of Satan and his principalities and powers, as also, doubtless, of all his other minions. When in John 14:30–31 Christ said Satan had nothing *in* him but that as the Father had commanded him, so would he (Christ) do, he must have meant that he would take upon him the burden and judgment of human sin whereby Satan used the power of guilt to manipulate Man. He spoke about the judgment of this world and the casting out of the ruler of this world. He also spoke about the judgment of Satan.²⁰ Before going to the Cross he said to

¹⁷ Note in Revelation 12:10 he is called ‘the accuser of our brethren . . . who accuses them day and night before our God’.

¹⁸ Note that in the New Testament it is almost always called ‘the gospel of God’. It is—among other things—the good news of Man’s liberation from Satan’s control, and his re-entry—so to speak—into the reign of God where he can now fulfil the mandate of Genesis 1:28, along with the gospel mandate, and so be a partaker in the whole plan of God.

¹⁹ II Corinthians 2:5–11; 4:4–5; 11:1–4, 12–15; James 4:6–7; I Peter 5:8–9; I John 2:18f.; 4:1ff.; cf. 2:12–14. The whole of the Book of the Revelation needs to be read to keep us in awareness of the ambition and plan of Satan.

²⁰ John 12:31; 14:30–31; 16:7–11.

those who came to take him into judgment, ‘But this is your hour and the power [authority] of darkness’ (Luke 22:53). He was aware of the hour of the Cross as the hour of his judgment, but even more of the judgment of evil.

We see, then, that when Christ was crucified the powers of darkness were present in the event, and present to destroy him. His aim had always been ‘to destroy the works of the devil’,²¹ and those works had begun in Eden, persisting through all human history,²² and were seeking to culminate in the Cross in the destruction of this ‘Seed of the woman’ who was to crush the serpent at his head. It is a significant and powerful fact that in the New Testament the defeat of Satan takes place at the Cross. Jesus had forecast such a battle and such a defeat when he had spoken of ‘the strong man’ and ‘the stronger than the strong man’ in the passage of Luke 11:14–23. The strong man was evidently Satan, and the stronger than he was Christ. The battleground was surely all history, but the conclusive defeat of Satan was at the Cross.

We shall now proceed to look at passages which tell of the defeat of Satan:

(a) *Hebrews 2:14–15*. In this text it is clear that Man is kept in lifelong bondage through the fear of death. Paul Tillich’s saying comes to mind:

To be in servitude to the fear of death in our lifetime means being in servitude to the fear of death which is nature and guilt at the same time. In the fear of death it is not merely the knowledge of our finiteness which is preserved, but also the knowledge of our infinity, of our being determined for eternity and of our having lost eternity. We are slaves of fear, not because we have to die, but because we deserve to die.²³

The serpent’s temptation, once acceded to, brought Man into the realm of death, and so of the fear of death. This fear of death is what is behind the passage of I John 4:15–18. Quoting from verses 17 and 18 we read:

In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.

The fear of death and the fear of judgment are virtually the same—‘after death the judgment’. The believer in relation to judgment is exactly the same as Christ is to judgment—totally guiltless because Christ removed his guilt at the Cross, the action of which was ‘perfect love’. So Satan’s power is removed: he has nothing for which to accuse Man.

(b) *Colossians 2:13–15*.

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, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.

This passage makes reference to the law, which so far we have not dealt with; in fact, it is our sins before the law—‘dead in trespasses’—whose guilt Christ bears on the Cross. All that the law speaks of as judgment of the sinner is borne by Christ. Bereft of their grounds of accusation of Man, the principalities and powers can no longer retain their hold on Man and use him for their nefarious actions, especially in supplanting God in His Kingdom. Notice that without the death of Christ, death’s hold cannot be severed, but with the death the hold of principalities and powers is broken. Undoubtedly, in Galatians 1:3–4, ‘the present evil age’ is the Satanic system of which

²¹ cf. I John 3:8. Note in this context that John says, ‘He who commits sin is of the devil’. To destroy the works of the devil is to abolish both sin and death and bring life and immortality to light (cf. II Tim. 1:10).

²² It has often been noted that there is little said about Satan in the Old Testament. This, of course, is true, but it must not be taken to mean that Satan was active only to a similar degree. To the contrary: Paul speaks of the sacrifices offered to idols being equal to having fellowship with demons. We cannot see prediluvian Man’s descent into violence and corruption as apart from Satan, and idolatry was clearly his way of keeping Man apart from God, however much idols may seem to issue only from Man’s devising. At the time of Christ, idols seem to have been wholly abolished, but the presence in Palestine of demons was manifold even without them!

²³ Unfortunately I am unable to document this quote.

principalities

and powers are part. Paul says of Christ, ‘*who gave himself for our sins* to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father’. This would also hold in Galatians 6:14, where the world which is crucified not only is rebellious Man but Satan and his powers, ‘But far be it 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’:

(c) *Ephesians 2:1–10*.

And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 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. 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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

This passage has several notable points. Primarily we see that Man was in bondage to Satan because of his trespasses and sins, and that God ‘made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)’. We might think that was an act apart from the Cross until we are referred to grace, and grace in 1:7 is associated with the death of Christ. We take it, then, that Paul is saying that through Christ’s death and resurrection we have been liberated from ‘the prince of the power of the air’ and are, in fact, seated with Christ in the heavenlies. Now we are able to do those works that God had prepared beforehand for us to walk in, and what are these but the fulfilment of his mandate. We come to the wider picture in chapter 3 where redeemed humanity—the church—is the means by which God fulfils His plan, which is a mystery to all but those who are one with Christ—both Jews and Gentiles. This is a great liberation!

(d) *Revelation 12*. The whole chapter—which we do not quote fully here—needs to be read. The thrust of it for our purposes lies in the verses we have already referred to, namely 10 and 11. Here those accused ‘day and night before our God’ by the red dragon overcome this creature ‘by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony’, and by not loving ‘their lives unto death’. That they have no fear of death is because of the blood of the Lamb. Accusation cannot seat home to them because they are guiltless. It is also interesting to note that ‘the devil has come down to you with great wrath because he knows that his time is short’. Since he has no valid accusation to make he has no hold on redeemed mankind.

(e) *I John 2:12–14*.

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

In this passage John writes to the young men, as also the children and the fathers. Commentators debate whether these are three categories or not, but the point is that *all* know their sins are forgiven, and this will be the basis of the strength of the young men. They will be just as those in Revelation 12:10 who overcome the Accuser by the death of Christ. The point is common to all the passages we have used for Christ’s liberation of his people, namely his taking away the sin of the world by his becoming sin, and by his bearing sin.

CONCLUSION: THE SEED OF WOMAN HAS CRUSHED THE HEAD OF THE ENSLAVING SERPENT

We conclude that our emancipation from the bondage of sin has been effected because Christ bore the guilt of Man and obliterated it. Whilst Satan still operates, he has, in fact, been 'destroyed'. The verb to 'destroy' (*katargeo*) does not mean 'annihilated' but 'paralysed', 'put out of action', 'to make of none effect' and even 'put out of employment'. It is used in the contexts of destroying the body of sin in Romans 6:6; of the last enemy, death, in I Corinthians 15:26; of the Devil in Hebrews 2:14–15; and of 'the lawless one' in II Thessalonians 2:8. The enemies of the believer are rendered as destroyed by the action of Christ on the Cross. Satan is destroyed and the principalities and powers are defeated and made 'a public example'. We remember the proto-evangel of Genesis 3:15, and realise the serpent is crushed at its head, and Man is released to live in freedom from sin, and so freedom from the other enemies opposing him, such as death, the law, the flesh, conscience, the idols and the wrath of God.

It is these we will have to deal with in coming Studies, but here we see Man is not freed just to be free, but freed to live in active freedom which is to know the will of God for all creation and to share in the outworking of that will. As with God, so with Man. God is in His heaven and does what He pleases. Liberated Man is in God and does what God pleases, for such is Man's true pleasure.

The Freedom of God and Man—IV, Sin and Liberation From Law

INTRODUCTION: THE FREEDOM AND BEAUTY OF LAW

We come to law today recognising, biblically, that it was first known by Man created in innocency and, as such, must have been known almost unconsciously, and certainly was not an entity which worried him. It was his way of life, his way of being with and under God. In innocency, it would have been his natural way of life—the way of the mandate of Genesis 1:28f., and the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Given that the Fall marred the view of the law, yet *under covenant grace*, sinful human beings can see the beauty of law as the following passage shows:

In the way of thy testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.
I will meditate on thy precepts,
and fix my eyes on thy ways.
I will delight in thy statutes;
I will not forget thy word.
My soul is consumed with longing
for thy ordinances at all times.
Thy testimonies are my delight,
they are my counselors.
let me not be put to shame!
I will run in the way of thy commandments
when thou enlargest my understanding!
Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes;
and I will keep it to the end.
I will keep thy law continually,
for ever and ever;
and I shall walk at liberty,
for I have sought thy precepts.
I will also speak of thy testimonies before kings,
and shall not be put to shame;
for I find my delight in thy commandments,
which I love.¹

What we need to understand is that the law of God is not primarily the law *from* God, but the law *of* God, that is, the law which is the law *of* God's being. By this we would mean the law which is the *torah* of God is that which He has as His way of being. In creating Man in His image, He gives to Man, innately, the way of His being, that is, the law. Of course, in a secondary sense, He gives that law *to* Man. It is a gift innate to Man. P. T. Forsyth puts it this way:

But God's holy law is His own holy nature, the principle of His own holy heart, the life action and norm of His moral personality, with no source or authority outside Himself, and no claim He could even wish to

¹ Psalm 119:14–16, 20, 24, 31b–33, 44–47.

*THE FREEDOM OF GOD AND MAN—IV,
SIN AND LIBERATION FROM LAW*

ignore or evade. To tamper with it would have been to deny His own soul. He loves it as He must love Himself, or His other self, His very Son, His Holy One, dearer to him than all men and prodigals. A wound to that holy law of His Being is a stab to His own heart at least as keen and urgent as any love or pity He might feel to men.²

J. A. Motyer speaks of the law as we find it in the Sinaitic covenant, with its variety of commands it contains. He says:

we find in Lev. 19 that God has provided another image of himself on earth. Every aspect of human experience is gathered into this rich review of man's life under God's law: filial duty (vs. 3), religious commitment (vs. 4), ritual exactness (vs. 5), care of the needy (vs. 9), honesty in deed and word (vv. 11–12), and many more, touching on relationships and even on dress, hygiene, and horticulture. Yet all this variety suspends from one central truth: 'I am the Lord.' Lord is the divine name, the 'I am what I am' (Exod. 3:14), so that the significance of the recurring claim is not 'You must do what I tell you' (i.e. 'Lord' as an authority word) but 'you must do this or that because of what I am'; every precept of the law is a reflection of 'what I am'. Man is the living, personal image of God; the law is the written, preceptual image of God. The intention of Leviticus 19 is declared at the outset: "You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy" (vs. 2). The Lord longs for his people to live in his image, and to that end he has given them his law'.³

Notice that, although Motyer insists that the law of God as it operates in Israel under the Sinaitic covenant is 'the written, preceptual image of God', yet he is, nevertheless, pointing back to creation, to Man who by that creation was being 'the living, personal image of God' and so correlating with law at creation.

We have noted that, as fallen creatures, we cannot know the beauty and purity of God's law as it was pristine. We find it remarkable that within God's Sinaitic law-covenant with Israel we have—amongst many more—such Psalms as 1, 19 and 119. These give us an extraordinarily rich and beautiful view of God's law. In Psalm 1 the man who delights in the law of God and meditates on it day and night, is said to be a man who is like a tree that has an inflowing source of water to keep it green and fecund. In Psalm 119 there is not a detail of life which is not, somehow, covered by the law of the Lord in a wonderful and helpful way. That it correlates with the nature of God and that of obedient Man is seen in Psalm 19:7–10:

The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring for ever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.

² P. T. Forsyth, *The Preaching of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1987) p. 109.

³ Article 'Law, Biblical Concept of', in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker, 1990), p. 624.

In order to see the beauty and power of the law, we simply have to take away ‘the law of’—for example, ‘The LORD is perfect, reviving the soul’, and so on—to see that ‘the law’ and ‘the LORD’ are as one. Read this way, the Psalm is very moving and instructive.

THE BREAKING OF THE LAW OF GOD AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Adam’s sin, we have seen, was one which involved the whole human race. We participated in that act, and it was not merely imputed to us. Sin is the breaking or transgression of God’s law. Adam transgressed against God his Creator. Rightly understood, it was not primarily against the law as an entity that he acted, but against God as personal Being. King David is an example of this. In Psalm 51 he acknowledges his *transgressions*, his *iniquity*, and his *sin*. These words may have particular meanings or nuances, but David says, ‘Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment’. He is firstly saying that he has personally and directly sinned against *God*. Secondly he is saying that there is a sentence, a judgment, which is God’s action and prerogative. All of this presupposed *law*. It is not difficult for us to know what the law was in its *form* in David’s time, because he was under the Sinaitic Covenant and its expressed law. The principle of the Covenant–law situation of Israel is that God’s law is given in covenant grace, God having redeemed the people from Egypt (Exod. 20:2), and the *nature* of God sets the pace for the understanding of ‘words’ or ‘commands’ (20:3f.). Deuteronomy 5 is really an expansion of this principle.

The principle by which all sin acts is that it came into the world through Adam. Romans 5:13 may seem puzzling, since it says ‘sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law’. Paul would seem to be saying that law did not exist before Moses, but sin presupposes transgression of law. Thus Paul must be saying ‘The *Mosaic law*—as such—was not in the world from the beginning’, which gives point to 5:20, ‘Law [i.e., the law of Moses] came in, to increase the trespass’. This is similar to Galatians 3:19, ‘law . . . was added because of transgressions’.⁴ Adam went against the law which we will call ‘creational’, and sin came into the world.⁵ This law which was ‘the written, preceptual image of God’, correlated with Man who was ‘the living, personal image of God’.

It is clear that pre-Flood Man, and post-Flood Man, was conscious of law. Of Abraham it was said, he ‘obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws’ (Gen. 26:5). Nothing could be clearer regarding the fact of law. Paul in Romans 2:14–16 makes it clear that all nations have some knowledge of law, whether we call it ‘natural’ or not. Always it seems it was innate to Man.

MAN IN INNOCENCE AND GUILT

Created Man lived in innocence. He had a good, or clear, or pure conscience, being co-aware of God. In being aware of God he was in that way aware of himself. Bonhoeffer sees conscience in the following manner, namely that Man is co-aware of himself. Of course one cannot be truly co-aware of oneself without at the same time being co-aware of God:

Conscience comes from a depth which lies beyond man’s own will and his own reason and it makes itself heard as the call of human existence to unity with itself. Conscience comes as an indictment of the loss of this unity and as a warning against the loss of one’s self. Primarily it is directed not towards a particular kind of doing but towards a particular mode of being. It protests against a doing which imperils the unity of this being with itself.

So long as conscience can be formally defined in these terms it is extremely inadvisable to act against its authority; disregard for the call of conscience will necessarily entail the destruction of one’s own being, not even a purposeful surrender of it; it will bring about the decline and collapse of a human existence. Action against one’s own conscience runs parallel with suicidal action against one’s own life, and it is not by chance that the two often go together. Responsible action which did violence to conscience in this formal sense would indeed be reprehensible.⁶

⁴ Most exegetes take the meaning of Galatians 3:19 to mean that the law was added to exacerbate sinning and so increase transgressions.

⁵ Note Genesis 2:16, ‘The Lord GOD commanded the man, saying . . .’ Man was definitely commanded. There *was* a law.

⁶ *Ethics* (SCM, 1978), p. 211.

In the acts of the Fall we can see the signs of an uneasy conscience, and one conscious of sin, and conscious of law rather than of having a pure co-awareness of God. Is this the meaning of Proverbs 20:27, ‘The human spirit is the lamp of the LORD, searching every innermost part’? Time and again we have recognised that whilst all human beings are sinful because of the Fall, yet some have a conscience which is peaceful⁷ because of faith in God’s forgiveness through propitiatory offerings, the offerings themselves being first supplied by God (Lev. 17:11). The primal couple hid themselves—as they thought—from God. They had transgressed His law. Initially they had not seen it that way. Now they were under the condemnation of law. This principle we need to follow throughout the Scriptures: on the one hand law is beautiful, not threatening, but once it is transgressed the ruthless nature of law reveals itself in unremitting condemnation. This is what the writer of Hebrews calls ‘a sinful conscience’—‘consciousness of sin’, or ‘an evil conscience’ (10:2, 22). To be conscious of sin is to be aware—how ever much we may fight the matter—of judgment.

The matter of judgment, is the matter of God’s wrath. Until we have some sense of the holiness of God, which means at the same time the holiness of His law, and until we realise we have not only violated the holiness of God but at the same time our own holiness as created, then we will not realise the just wrath of God. Realising this, is what Paul calls ‘the knowledge of sin’, so that the law which could have constituted the unspeakable sweetness of life now becomes the bitter force which damns us, curses us and slays us. Luther spoke of the terrible nature of law:

The Law of the letter is everything written with letters . . . This is the Law of works, the old Law, the Law of Moses, the Law of the Flesh, the Law of sin, the Law of wrath, the Law of death. It condemns everything, makes all men guilty, increases lusts, and slays; and the more spiritual it is, the more it does . . .

THE TERROR AND BONDAGE OF THE LAW

As pastors and elders who have pastoral care of the flock, or are proclaiming the evangel to the lost of the world, we must have understanding of men, women and children who are under the judgment of God. As we have seen, time and again, the power of original sin is ever with us. It is a blight on our humanity. The savage attacks of Satan in ever alerting us to our original sinfulness and our continuing acts of sin, effect a strong bondage which keeps us in the toils of our guilt and shame. We are further hardened against acknowledging our guilt, whilst all the time sin is making inroads into our beings, thus increasing our dread of wrath and judgment even as we deny the reality of such. Some seek to escape its misery by being ‘lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God’, by ‘seeking the praise of men more than the praise of God’, or just by giving themselves up to wild profligacy, as Jude depicts their acts:

as they boldly carouse together, looking after themselves; waterless clouds, carried along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved forever.⁸

We have seen other strong descriptions of human sin in Romans 1:18–32, 3:9–18, Mark 7:20–22, and Galatians 5:19–21, to say nothing of other Old Testament references. Certainly ‘the way of the transgressor is hard’.

⁷ We do not mean that a fallen human being who has faith in God has always a conscience which is peaceful, but basically one who *can* be peaceful, and that insofar as the person remains in a direct faith-relationship with God. The battle to remain in peace is always going on whilst Satan accuses. Faith must quench the fiery darts—the accusations—of the wicked one.

⁸ Jude 12–13.

The Judgement of the Law

In the law sins were reprehensible enough to require sacrifices to secure the sinner against God's direct judgment. Deuteronomy not only warns against certain forms of sin, but also prescribes what shall be done in the community to those who do certain kinds of sins. General warning is given against ascribing God's blessing, health and wealth, to human attainment or idols. Judgment shall quickly follow. Thus the tables of cursings and blessings linked with Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal shall be loudly pronounced, and the people will audibly respond to the curses, thus becoming accountable to the curse of the law. Warnings are given of the plagues and sicknesses which will follow rebellion, likewise the blessings which shall come from obedience to the Lord. Some of these judgments are quite horrific, and should not be thought of just in technical law language.

The law was always favourable to the obedient, but ruthless in judgment against those who transgressed it. This can be seen in I Timothy 1:8–11:⁹

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

It is here we return to the conscience, to recognise that it causes deep convolutions within the human spirit and, if our conclusion about Proverbs 20:27 is correct, then the spirit of Man is deeply troubled. Traumas of the deepest kind exist. Man feels pain and distress from his inner division, dissonance and awryness. Bonhoeffer's statement that 'Responsible action which did violence to the conscience in this formal sense would indeed be reprehensible'.¹⁰ Man has a sort of judgment continually coming to, and even from, the conscience as sin 'does violence' to it. But then that is really the wrath of God, which is always linked with God's immediate action, since, 'the wrath of God is [being] revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth'. The wrath is being revealed, as, indeed, the nature of God is being revealed in creation, but so terrible are the two revelations together that Man rejects them both as unreal and untrue. This increases Man's ruin and misery.

God's wrath—the wrath from His side—is not to be thought of in human, emotional terms, but it must be seen as God's ruthlessness which is pitted against sin and is determined to rid His world of it. That is why Romans 1:24, 26 and 28 speak of God giving Man up to his compounding sin and guilt—guilt and sin—so that he feels in his tortured conscience the dynamic components of sin, and is sorely troubled, even to the point of exploding with wrath against God, His humanity, His world, and the person's own self. This is because Man suppresses the truth by ungodliness and wickedness. That is, he breaks the law, God's *torah*, and at the same time opposes God.

At the same time, Paul speaks of the self-righteous person who is presuming on God's kindness and patience and forbearance by not realising that his heart is hard and impenitent. Such a one is storing up wrath for himself for the day of wrath when the righteous judgment of God will be revealed. Paul does not say it is necessarily the self-righteous person like the

⁹ We certainly need to look at the context in which Paul quotes this. Fanciful preachers of the law have somehow been taking the edge off the law, and perhaps even been lauding it, not as a judgmental unit, but as something else. We do not rightly know. Even so, the text stands on its own as true to what it says. It is suggested that Paul here is speaking in general of law, and not just the Sinaitic law, whatever the foolish teachers may have been referring to.

¹⁰ *op. cit.*, p. 211.

Pharisee who is here indicated. It could be any Jew who simply rested in the fact that he was a Jew, and, for our case, any Christian who rests in the fact that he is a Christian! What Paul does speak of is his own trust that as touching the law he was blameless, and this is the evil which some have called ‘the white evil’, and which is more under the indictment of the law than of the admitted sin of the sinner.

Paul’s statement is apt here, as he speaks to deluded believers who may wish to go back under law of some kind or another. ‘For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them”’.

Pauline Teaching Concerning Lethal Law

‘All who live under law are under the curse of the law.’ For Jews this curse was primarily that of Deuteronomy 27, but there was also a wider sense of curse in that Israel had failed God and was under judgment, at least until the coming of Messiah. However, all are under such a curse, stemming from the time of Adam and continuing until the ultimate judgment. In Romans 8:1–4 Paul speaks of the law of God as ‘the law of sin and death’, meaning that when a person sins against the law he breaks the law and it brings death; therefore it is the law of sin and death. That is why Paul says in Romans 4:15, ‘For the law brings wrath’. This is shown in Romans chapter 7 where the law of God in itself is pronounced ‘holy’, ‘just’, true’, ‘good’ and ‘spiritual’, but the same chapter shows that sin operates by means of the law, inciting the person to increasing sinning, and it is certain that this is the meaning of Romans 5:20, ‘law came in to increase the trespass’, and Galatians 3:19, ‘It [the law] was added because of transgressions’, that is, ‘to do with transgressions, to incite and extend them’.

Paul can even speak of an event in his life when ‘I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died’. There is no need to comment on the passage, except to say that a person may think he is alive when in fact he is dead in trespasses and sins, and will one day be brought into terrifying recognition that the killer-law is on to him—or her.

When we pause for a moment and ask whether we are conscious of these elements and see them not merely as noetic matters, but matters of dire importance in the saving of sinful men and women, and in the pastoral healing ministry, we may be shocked to find that we do not even apply them to ourselves; hence the lack of our urgency and exhortation, both to ourselves and others. We have, therefore, to think in terms of the state of Man in his alienation from God, his fear, loneliness and dread of God, as the primal couple had experienced it in the Garden after their defection from God. We need to understand the nature of Man not knowing God in all His holiness and love, but the great and slavish fear of God, the anger he has towards God, the passionate attachment to the idols, the devotion to his own ego, the vast worldwide nature of rebellious flesh, and in the light of all this the fragmented and often vicious nature of human relationships, and all of this before the law. Anyone standing before a magistrate or judge under indictment will know something of the uneasiness and dread this brings. Human flesh sees the law as a ruthless, inexorable, death-dealing thing. As we have previously seen, Man detaches the law from God, and if he should think of it as one with God, then the dread is no less, but rather the more. Detached from God, the law appears to be an entity which is bent upon dooming the accused and bringing him or her to terrible retribution and punishment, even punishment that is not wholly deserved.

Unless we have a sense of these elements we cannot understand Man-under-law. The guilt and its dynamic components bring misery immeasurable, along with the loneliness sin brings to the human spirit, this being coupled with the tyranny of the relentless conscience. So the law works its dreadful works. Moses accuses. The Judge accuses. The conscience accuses. Through the law comes knowledge of sin, of wrath, and of death. That knowledge is an experienced dread—the dread of death and eternal doom.

GOD'S ANSWER TO MAN IN THE BONDAGE OF SIN, OF THE CONSCIENCE AND OF THE LAW

Now we come to the statement just given above—‘Through the law comes knowledge of sin’ (Rom 3:20). There is no place to hide, when by the Holy Spirit Man is confronted wholly with the law. It is the purpose of the Holy Spirit to rebuke, convict, and convince of sin (John 16:7–11). The process is painful, and we do not always know how this is accomplished in the human depths. If the spirit of Man is the lamp of the Lord searching the innermost depths, then it is the Spirit using the human spirit to seek out its transgressions, and these in the face of God! If it is that the law shines most gloriously as the very beauty of God, then pangs of shame invade the human heart. If it is the lethal nature of the law which becomes apparent, then a revelation of one’s personal sin shocks the mind. If it is the due penalty of the law, exacting itself in some measure, then the fire of it burns painfully. If it is the realisation that one can never keep the law, then ‘the knowledge of sin’ is profoundly despairing in its presence.

Yet the working of all this is effective to bring the sinner to freedom from the bondage of sin, which is at the same time the bondage of the law in its penalty. In the context of saying that through the law is the knowledge of sin, Paul shows us in Romans 3:19–26 that God rightfully justifies the sinner, that is, acquits the condemned sinner from the judgment of the law on the basis of Christ’s propitiatory death:

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ¹¹ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation [propitiation] by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.

The argument is clear enough: no one has ever kept the law. All have sinned. All are under the judgment of the law. Yet God’s righteousness is such that He can, and does, apart from the law, justify the sinner who has faith in Christ. Prior to this faith is the grace which (i) provided the propitiation for sin by the bloody—propitiatory—death of Christ, and (ii) which moved—and moves—in the life of a law-condemned, law-bound sinner. By this act of the Cross, God is justified in justifying the sinner. The sinner receives this justification and is liberated from the law. The law, far from being ignored or passed over in the sinner’s justification by grace, is indeed upheld and honoured. Its demands for the judgment and death of the sinner are fulfilled in the judgment and death of Christ. Colossians 2:13–14 speaks of Christ nailing to the Cross the handwriting of ordinances—that is, the law—which was against us.

In Galatians 3:21–26 Paul takes a slightly different line from the Romans passage though it is substantially the same:

Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not; for if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the scripture consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

¹¹ Some theologians are of the opinion that ‘faith in Jesus Christ’ should be read ‘the faith of Jesus Christ’, thus making the act one of pure grace which supports the sinner who has seen his doom in the law, but through Jesus Christ, the faith of that one who saves him by His bloody death. D. W. B. Robinson in *The Reformed Theological Review*, vol. 29, no 3, has an article ‘“Faith in Jesus Christ”—a New Testament Debate’.

Presenting the fact that God had promised freedom for the children of faith, the true children of Abraham, and that this freedom would come through Abraham's seed, Christ, and that the law was only there to increase the transgression, Paul shows that the righteousness came by Christ. The text 'the scripture consigned all things to sin' (RSV) which is translated 'But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin' in the NRSV,¹² may mean the law consigned all things to sin, but it matters not much whether it was the law, as such, or the scripture, as such,¹³ the fact is that linked with the law all sinful humanity is imprisoned. There is no way out. Verse 23 says we were all imprisoned under the law until faith should be revealed, and (v. 24) 'until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith'.

On the one hand, then, the law is confining, imprisoning, but what it has in view is the way of faith, as against the way of law. That is, it shuts us up to one way, faith in Christ or, as we might say, the faith of Christ. Justification is certainly mentioned here, but then so is adoption—being made sons of God through faith.

Going back to Galatians 3:10–14 we see that the curse is over all humanity, and, of course, in a special way over all Israel. In becoming *curse* for us, Christ abolishes the curse and sets the sinner free, whether he be Jew or Gentile. Pastorally, we need to open up this fact of the curse to our congregations, since many may be analysing the sin-guilt-curse complex as being of a psychological nature, deriving its frightening elements from a source other than the law and our sin.

Being Killed by Law to Law

Twice Paul speaks of a killing the law makes. The first is in Romans 7:9–10:

I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; the very commandments which promised life proved to be death to me.

We have previously dealt with these verses. The second is in Galatians 2:19–20:

For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God¹⁴ who loved me and gave himself for me.

Paul was crucified with Christ, and in that crucifixion the law took its due and total toll of Christ for Paul and all others. In the end it was Christ who defeated the law by nailing its handwriting or ordinances to his Cross, which means the law was virtually crucified and has no more dynamic to aid the principalities and powers, nor keep the believer in law-bondage. Nevertheless, Paul says he was crucified with Christ, and in this killed by the law. Some would like to be freed from law without dying to it—a notion brought out by the Judaisers visiting Galatia. The believer dies a terrible death to law. There is no Cross without pain and tears to the flesh of Man. Modern evangelism often sees no death to Adam, no killing by the law, hence its doctrine of repentance is empty and its idea of faith is mere believism.

Herman N. Ridderbos comments:

The thrust is that the law is in no position to give man what it demands of him. All it can do is to demand, to forbid, to judge, and to condemn. So it is that man dies *through* the law: he is beaten to death by it and falls into God's judgment. That, then, is not the fault of the law, but of the sinner. The law cannot save, quicken, but only slay the sinner. And this death Paul has now died so *that* he might live unto God.¹⁵

¹² Commentators differ as to whether this refers to Psalm 143:2—'Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for no man living is righteous before thee'—or Deuteronomy 27:26, quoted here in Galatians 3:10.

¹³ Richard R. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Word, 1990) p. 144, says, 'Paul is then saying that a primary function of the Mosaic law was to bring all humanity under the curse of the law'.

¹⁴ Some commentators prefer 'the faith of Christ', rather than 'faith in the Son of God'. D. W. B. Robinson translates, 'I live by *pistis* [faith] which is of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me', op. cit., p. 75.

¹⁵ *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, New London Commentary of the New Testament, by Herman N. Ridderbos (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1961), p. 104.

Luther also comments:

In Romans viii. 3 it is said: 'For sin hath condemned sin'; in Psalm lxxviii. 18, Ephesians iv. 8: 'He hath led captivity captive'; in Hosea xiii. 14: 'O death I will be thy death: O hell I will be thy destruction!' So he saith here, that through the law he is dead to the law. As if he said: the law of Moses accuseth and condemneth me; but against that accusing and condemning law, I have another law, which is grace and liberty. This law accuseth the accusing law, and condemneth the condemning law. So death killeth death: but this killing death is life itself. But it is called the death of death, by a vehement indignation of spirit against death. So righteousness taketh the name of sin, because it condemneth sin, and this condemning of sin is true righteousness.¹⁶

When through this faith I am crucified and dead unto the law, then the law loseth all its power which it had over me, even as it hath lost all its power which it had over Christ. Wherefore, even as Christ himself was crucified to the law, sin, death and the devil, so that they have no further power over him; even so I through faith being now crucified with Christ in spirit, am crucified and dead to the law, sin, death and the devil, so that they have no further power over me, but are now crucified and dead unto me.¹⁷

Freedom From Law Complete in Justification

Paul adds in Galatians 2:21, 'I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose'. In verse 16 he has said, 'By works of the law shall no one be justified'. In Romans 3:24 Paul has said clearly, 'they are justified by his [God's] grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus'. So dynamic a contrast does Paul see in works-righteousness and righteousness by faith, that he says, in Philippians 3:8–9:

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

One of Paul's most powerful statements concerning the law and the believing person's freedom from it is found in Romans 8:1–4:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The passage of Romans 8:1–11 should be read thoughtfully since it deals fully with the law, especially in verses 5–8, where it shows that the flesh will not and cannot obey the law of God. It is incorrigible. But, we may ask, 'Do we have to obey the law? Is it not abrogated? Do not both Matthew 5:17–18 and Romans 10:4 show that Christ fulfilled the law and thus it is abrogated?' This is far from the truth.¹⁸ Christ does not fulfil the law, but establishes it. Romans 10:4 is capable of many interpretations; too many for us to deal with here.

What we see in Romans 8:1 is that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That is, total freedom from the penalty and bondage of the law. 'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death', must surely mean that the gospel, taken, proclaimed and applied by the Holy Spirit, is 'the law of the Spirit of

¹⁶ *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* by Martin Luther, ed. P. S. Watson (James Clarke & Co., Edition 1953), p. 158.

¹⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 166.

¹⁸ Here I would dare to recommend my two books, *Oh No, Lord! Not Law, Lord!* and *Sweeter Than Honey, More Precious than Gold* (both NCPI), for I believe they take up the matter thoroughly. Even more thorough is another book which will be published, *The Law of Eternal Delight*, also one of mine, which contains an ample bibliography.

life in Christ Jesus'. This law of the Spirit so liberates us from law, bondage and guilt that 'the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit'. 'The just requirement of the law' (*dikaionoma nomou*) here must not be taken forensically, but actively—what the law requires us to do in obedience. Verse 8 suggests that those who obey the law please God.

In many ways this is linked with Galatians 5:16–26:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.

The way in which there are parallels is that to walk under law is to do the works of the flesh and these represent lawlessness and transgression. To walk by the Spirit is to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit and this is surely the fulfilling of the just requirement of the law, for 'against such there is no law'. Against the works of the flesh there is a law—*the law!* We conclude, then, that once we are freed from the condemnation of the law we are freed from sin-and-law bondage. We are free from conscience-judgment. We are free!

Yet, to be free must mean

- (i) we are freed from the **penalty—condemnation of the law**;
- (ii) we are now **free to obey God's holy law** without being forced to do so to justify ourselves, since we are already—and forever—justified; and
- (iii) we are now **free not to do the things that we are free to do**, especially if our consciences and faith are strong. For the sake of weaker brethren we will refrain from doing what is not expedient in their case even though it is 'lawful'.

The matter of 'the law of Christ', which is 'the law of love', which is, in fact, 'the law of God', we must leave to another time, or perhaps pursue in the books I have recommended. We are free, indeed! As Paul warns us in Galatians 5:1, 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery'. Armed with the truth of freedom, and the warning against further entanglement with sin, conscience and law, let us go to our people to share this great freedom. This is the gospel of Christ!

The Freedom of God and Man—V, Sin and Liberation from the World

INTRODUCTION: THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Two triumphant realities in the world and in heaven are the Kingdom of God and the Church. The King of the Kingdom of God¹ is Christ who has defeated, and continues to defeat, the kingdom of darkness. The other reality is the Church of God, which is 'in God the Father', and whose Head is Christ. He is Head over all things *for* the Church (Eph. 1:22), and is Head *of* the Church (Eph. 5:23). The Church proclaims the Kingdom, the gospel of the Kingdom, under the headship of Christ. All true members of the Church are said to be in the Kingdom, and will ultimately inherit it, then they—the Church—will be 'a kingdom of priests unto their God'. Whilst Christ is King there is no other king of it on earth. Whilst he is Head of the Church there is no other head of it on earth, no pope or archbishop is head of the Church or ruling representative of Church or Kingdom.

What is significant is that Christ is always with the Church as is the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Church is the Community of the Triune God and as such is freed from the bondage of sin, death, Satan, the world, the flesh, the law, the wrath of God, and the conscience,² as enemies and despots. These enemies have no right or authority over the people of God, the Kingdom and the Church. Even so, they are under the authority of the Triune God.

The sum of what we have said here is that there is a liberated people of God who can remain in liberty provided they abide in the Triune God. There is no position of command or control to which any believer may aspire. Gifts are given for the life and action of the Church, and in the case of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher, these are not so much offices as gifts to the Church, the persons being those gifts for all to profit by.

We commence our understanding of freedom by recognising that God through Christ defeated all Man's enemies by the work of the Cross and the Resurrection, and yet for us in the present these enemies have not been extinguished. According to I Corinthians 15:24–28, Christ is putting down these enemies, the last one to be destroyed being death. Members of the Church and Kingdom must continue to fight the enemies which will be defeated in the eschaton.

THE PLAN OF GOD AND THE EVIL ENEMIES

In this Series we have stated, time and again, that the freedom of God is His ability and prerogative to do what He pleases—Psalm 115:3, 'God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases'. We have seen that His 'good will and pleasure' is what He has planned for His creation. In giving the mandate to Man in Genesis 1:28f., God had the whole range of history in sight—the Edenisation of the creation. This was the beginning of the end, and the fulfilment of the *telos* will be the end (or completion) of the beginning. *Man's true freedom lies in being on the earth and doing what pleases God.* The theme of fallen Man trying to attain this goal is throughout Scripture, and the promises of God that believing Man can be His partner in the

¹ In Ephesians 5:5, the Kingdom is that 'of Christ and of God'. In Revelation 11:15, the Kingdom is that of 'our Lord and his Christ'. In I Corinthians 15:24–28, Christ is putting down all enemies, aided by the Father, and when this is completed he gives the Kingdom wholly to the Father that 'God may be all in all'.

² Sin, death, Satan, the world-system, and the flesh are evil enemies, but the law, the wrath of God and the conscience are not evil; sin (etc.) uses them to keep fallen humanity in bondage.

fulfilment of the promises is also present. The New Testament, basing itself on the Old Testament, makes the ultimate intention of God quite clear in an Epistle such as that of Paul to the Ephesians.³ Helpful, too, is John Calvin's thought and comment in regard to the creation and God's purpose for it, as Zachman interprets Calvin:⁴

The scriptural self-attestation of God the Creator depicts God as Father not only in relationship to the Son and Holy Spirit but also in relationship to humanity, by portraying the work of creation through the Son and Holy Spirit. *The whole purpose of the creation and governance of heaven and earth is that humanity might know God as its Father in the Son by the Holy Spirit.* This means that the related knowledge of ourselves as created has at its heart the knowledge of ourselves as children of God. 'To conclude once for all, whenever we call God the Creator of heaven and earth, let us at the same time bear in mind that . . . we are indeed his children, whom he has received into his faithful protection to nourish and educate'.

Humanity was created in order to know and live under God as the fountain of every good, so that it might petition God for every good thing, acknowledge all things as God's benefits, and thank the Father for them; allured by the sweetness of God's benefits, humanity was to love and serve God with sincere obedience from the heart. To put this another way, humanity was created in the image of God by having bestowed on its immortal yet created soul the powers that come from God, especially wisdom and righteousness. In grateful response for these things freely given by the Father, humanity was to strive by obedience and holiness of life to become united with God, *thereby attaining the goal of its creation* [my emphases].

Any creature—celestial or terrestrial—which goes against God's plan, 'His good will and pleasure', is evil. The creature which has this mind will be one seeking to do his own will and pleasure against that of God. This is the heart of evil—to prevent all good coming to its climax in the fulfilment of God's plan. The Letter to the Ephesians speaks of 'the mystery of his will', 'the counsel of his will', 'the hope to which he has called you', 'the mystery of Christ', 'the plan of the mystery', 'the eternal purpose', and of this there is an echo in Revelation 10:7, 'the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled'. There can be said to be another echo in Romans 16:25–26, 'the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is now made known to all nations'.

We take it, then, that what God has planned for His creation is of the utmost importance, and should occupy all His creatures. Those among His creatures who oppose this plan and fight it are, as we have said, to be seen as evil. This opposition to God is the very heart of evil.

SATAN AND HIS WORLD BRING BONDAGE TO THE HUMAN RACE

In previous Studies we have seen that Man's acceptance of the mandate and his intention to do it meant that innocent Man lived in freedom: he could desire no more. The serpent was a subtle creature and transmitted a 'wisdom'⁵ to the primal couple, which was against the wisdom of God. The serpent virtually weaned the first couple from the plan of God. The unity which constituted creation was now broken. Creatures and created things other than Man were affected by his abdication as Romans 8:18–25 signifies. God does not wholly leave Man to pursue his own path, for grace begins in the Garden of Eden with the promise of the Seed of woman. Nor do we hear much regarding the serpent in the Old Testament. Even so, the mention of 'the great dragon . . . that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan' of Revelation 12:9, would seem to be linked with the primeval serpent. In this NT context he is called 'the deceiver of the whole world' and 'the accuser of the brethren'.

³ Chapter 1 catches up all that God has designed for Man, and creation. All things are to be summed up in Christ. Unity is the great theme of the Epistle, and chapter 3 speaks of the mystery of the church as it is caught up into the ministry of unification.

⁴ *The Assurance of Faith* by Randall Zachman (Fortress Press, 1993), p. 135. Zachman quotes Calvin Inst. I.xiv.22; O.S. III.173.11–15 (1:182).

⁵ Paul speaks about 'the wisdom of this world' in I Corinthians 1:18–25 and 3:18–20.

What we discover from Ephesians 2:1–4 is that he is called ‘the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works [energises] in the children of disobedience’. By nature the slaves of this prince in following him follow ‘the course of this world [aeon]’. Jesus also called him ‘the prince’ or ‘ruler’ of this world, so that ‘world’ is a significant term. For the moment we will think of it as that system devised by the serpent which is composed of all celestial and terrestrial creatures which have been ‘captured by him to do his will’ (II Tim. 2:26). He went out ‘to deceive the whole world’ (Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3, 8, 10), and he began this practice at the beginning. Christ said of him to Jews whom Christ said were to be of their ‘father the devil’, that (i) they desired to do the will of that father, (ii) that the Devil was a murderer from the beginning, (iii) that he had (and has) nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him, and (iv) that when he lies it is according to his own nature, ‘for he is a liar and the father of lies’. When Jesus said he was a liar, that he had nothing to do with the truth, and that he was—and is—a murderer, he is saying that the Devil from the beginning was against the truth of God, that is, His plan for creation and all such things.⁶ This certainly links him with the primeval serpent, and shows that he had set out to devise a world-system of his own which was opposed to that which God had planned for creation. John 10:10 speaks of the thief coming to steal and kill and to destroy, by contrast with Christ who came to give life and give it plentifully. Here are two strong antitheses, and they are Satan and death, and Christ and life.

The History of Satan and His World-System

In one long paragraph above we have brought together the theme of Satan, but tracing the history of the Evil One throughout Scripture is a much wider task. For example, there are few mentions of Satan in the Old Testament, where the term ‘satan’ is used for people opposing one another as in II Samuel 19:22 and I Kings 11:14. In Numbers 22:22, the angel of the Lord was an adversary, that is, a ‘satan’. In Job chapters 1 and 2, Satan—a proper name—is shown to be a son of God, that is, an angel, and he opposes God’s estimate of Job as a righteous man, inferring that Job does righteousness because it pays to do this before God. He also infers that God is deceived by Job. In Zechariah 3:1, he is an angel who accuses Joshua the high priest, and is rebuked by God. In I Chronicles 21:1, he moves David to number the people, with disastrous results.

Two other passages in the Old Testament are held by some to be descriptions of Satan. These are Isaiah 14:12–14 and Ezekiel 28:12–15. Most commentators refer them to the kings of Babylon and Tyre respectively, but other commentators say the descriptions are beyond being applied to earthly kings for the creatures here depicted can be no less than celestial. There are angelic elements in them. If these do apply to earthly kings, then they certainly go beyond what humanity can have been or can yet achieve, which is why some scholars welcome them as descriptions of the nature of Satan, Lucifer, Son of the Morning and so on.⁷ What we should not miss is the prevalence of idols in the Old Testament. Paul later speaks of offering sacrifices to idols as having fellowship with demons. So in Psalm 106:36–38, it is said:

They served their idols,
which became a snare to them.
They sacrificed their sons
and their daughters to the demons;

⁶ See John 8:39–47.

⁷ In Ezekiel 28, the brilliant creature of whom the prophet speaks is said to be with ‘an anointed cherub’ or, according to some translations, to be the anointed cherub. He is said to be on the ‘holy mountain of God’ and is ‘the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty’. In Isaiah 14 the creature is ‘Day Star, Son of the Dawn’—a high figure, and one who aims to set his throne above the stars of God, i.e. control the angels (cf. Rev. 12:7). It has been pointed out that both Babylon and Tyre are part of God’s system, the ‘world’. Certainly Babylon is at one time the haunt of all foul spirits, and is a name for the capital of the great worldly system.

they poured out innocent blood,
the blood of their sons and daughters,
whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan.⁸

Romans 1:19–25 speaks of idolatry as universal, and we can be assured that in this case and through this method Satan was very much occupied with his work in Old Testament times. The people of Israel seem not to have kept Satan in mind very much. Here we shall not try to describe demons, but they were powerful in their presence in the Promised Land where the Canaanite deities were many. Hence in Deuteronomy 32:17, we read of ‘demons which were no gods . . . new gods that had come in of late, whom your fathers had never dreaded’. However, when Christ came to Palestine it seemed to be infested with demons even though the idols themselves had disappeared. ‘Demons which were no gods’ has an echo in I Corinthians 8:5, ‘For although there may be so-called gods in heaven and on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”’. In the Promised Land, infested with demons and religious leaders who are said to be of their father the Devil, there seemed to be a fierce attack upon Israel and a perversion of its calling to be the priest-nation among all the nations (Exod. 19:5–6)—a waylaying of the plan of God.

What we also have to look at is the fact that all nations seem to have their patron angels. On the one hand we have deities which nations severally espouse and on the other—such as are seen in Daniel chapters 10 and 11—there are celestial ‘princes’ which must be linked with the principalities and powers of the New Testament. These angelic powers seek to control the destinies of nations, their rising and falling. According to one understanding of Deuteronomy 32:8–9, each nation was given a patron angel, whilst God was the Angel of Israel, or perhaps this was ‘the angel of the Lord’ who intimately represents God Himself:

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,
when he separated the sons of men,
he fixed the bounds of the peoples
according to the number of the sons of God.
For the LORD’S portion is his people,
Jacob his allotted heritage.

This may well link with Acts 17:26, ‘He made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation’. When we find evil celestial principalities and powers we detect the conflict of the nations, and can recognise the evil system of Satan in, and as, its own ‘world’ (*aeon*), so that Ephesians 6:12 is not only a New Testament phenomenon, but also that which can be seen generally in the Old and New Testaments of the rise and fall of nations:

For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

In other words, from the time when the serpent effected a change of mind in the primeval couple, and caught up Cain and his descendants into his ‘system’,⁹ there has been a cosmic struggle for control of the nations. This control rightfully belongs to God as Creator–Father, but is contested all along the way of history. Much of the OT is unintelligible to us unless we have this key to history and recognise that at heart it is salvation history, and the history of Satan’s world-system is anti-salvation history. Then we can understand the judgments of the nations, especially those who have opposed Israel.¹⁰ The prophets enter into this action of God,

⁸ Other mentions of similar evil worship are Leviticus 17:7, Exodus 22:20, and Deuteronomy 32:17. For satyrs and demons see II Chronicles 11:15, and Isaiah 13:21.

⁹ See I John 3:10–12, where the true community of love is nominated as beginning with Abel, and the community of hatred with Cain. It should be noted that Abel is said to be the first of the ‘elders of faith’ in Hebrews 11:4, in which context Cain is mentioned as a person of anti-faith, worshipping unacceptably.

¹⁰ See Genesis 12:1–3, where the blessings and cursings of nations are linked with their attitude to Israel and action for or against that nation.

the Book of Daniel having many parallels with the Book of the Revelation. The giving of the nations to the Messiah in Psalms 2 and 110, and the proclamation of the gospel of Messiah to all nations and to the end of the earth, is linked with this battle for the nations between God and Satan, which had its genesis in Eden.

CHRIST AND SATAN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We understand very little of the battle for the nations and the liberation of the slaves of the Devil, unless we understand the mind of Christ in his work of incarnation and the end events of his life on earth, namely the Cross and the Resurrection; events which led to his Ascension and his accession to his Session at the right hand of the Father.

It may be possible to link Herod's slaying of the Innocents with Revelation 12:4–5, where the red dragon seeks to devour the Christ child. What is clear is that in the act of the Temptation in the wilderness no mean struggle takes place as the Devil, claiming to have the authority of all the nations,¹¹ tempts Christ to win the nations by means other than the Cross.¹² Having failed he leaves Christ 'for a season' and obviously returns to the fray when that 'season' has run its course. The point of the Temptation is to seduce Christ from being the Holy One of God who would help to bring the plan of God to its eschatological fullness. It is clear from Jesus' teaching and action that he had a strong view of the nature and enmity of the Devil, and that he understood it this way. Hence, in the parables of Matthew 13 he speaks of the work of the Devil as that of 'the enemy'. Of the seed on the path he says, '*the evil one* comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart'. Of the tares sown he says, 'the weeds are the sons of *the evil one*, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil'. Here there can be no doubt; all that is evil is of the Evil One and they who do evil are of the Evil One. Again, all that do good are of God, the good done is of the Son of Man. The created world holds both the evil and good ones within it until the judgment, but the Kingdom of God is always regnant, the kingdom of Satan always doomed. We remind ourselves that there is always 'the clash of the kingdoms', always the Devil trying to subvert God's glorious plan. In Matthew 25:31–46, in the parable of the sheep and the goats—the sheep and goats being nations—Jesus spoke of 'the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'.¹³ In this matter of the Devil's angels we pick up the theme of fallen celestial powers which are of the Devil's world.

When Christ is baptised and anointed with the Spirit he commences his work of the Kingdom. This announcement is made at Nazareth (see Luke 4:16–30) that he will preach the gospel and bring release to the captives, set at liberty those who are oppressed, and proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, that is, the Year of Jubilee when all prisoners, debtors and slaves are liberated. His message is one of liberation—freedom for the bound. It is to be noted that when Jesus had finished his discourse, the congregation of the Nazareth synagogue rose up in wrath to destroy him, and the *source* of their anger is not to be doubted since they intended his death. In Acts 10:34–38, Peter later describes both Jesus' baptism and his effective ministry:

¹¹ Satan appears to make the claim that the nations have been given into his authority, but a closer reading shows that Satan makes a claim to all the authority and glory of these kingdoms and it may simply be his view of them being in his control—his Satanic eschatology, so to speak. Whatever his claim—remembering he never spoke the truth at any time—it may be seen to be a hoax.

¹² The Synoptics show Christ as being ministered to in relation to the Temptation. Matthew places this as happening when the event had concluded, and whilst it may be a matter of speculation as to whether these were the good principalities and powers who were on—so to speak—international business, yet Luke reports that Christ returned into Galilee in the power of the Spirit.

¹³ This parable has been considerably softened by advocates of a social gospel. The parable is to do with evil people who will not help those who work for the gospel and the Kingdom, and those who do. 'My brethren' are those in the Kingdom and for the Kingdom; those refusing to help them are the goats and as evil are consigned to the 'hell of fire'.

And Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.’

Verse 38 shows that Christ’s ministry was one against the Devil and was as Jesus, in Nazareth, had declared it would be, namely ‘healing all that were oppressed by the devil’. In Matthew 12:28, Jesus said, ‘But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you’. This brings us on to the forms of oppression the Devil had brought to humanity. Here is one of them, namely the oppression and possession of men and women by demons. The mentions of demons in the NT far outnumber mentions of the Devil, so it seems humans did not have direct contact with the Devil but primarily with his agents.¹⁴ The demons are part of his world-system and a vicious part at that. Comment on demon-possession is too wide a subject for this paper, but of the woman bowed down with spondylitis, Jesus said that she had been bound of Satan for eighteen years. He released her from the ‘spirit [demon] of infirmity’. She is given freedom as is fitting for a daughter of Abraham. There is the demoniac in whom the demons are ‘many’. Mary Magdalene is freed from seven demons. Jesus does healings which are plainly of sicknesses; other bodily and mental states are demonic and such are not so much healed as exorcised. We gather from this welter of demonic possession and Jesus’ exorcisms, that within Israel—the people of God—the Devil had worked tirelessly to oppress the covenant nation.

The attention of Satan is towards Jesus. The Temptation does not divert Jesus from participation in the Father’s plan for creation: to the contrary, for he releases the children of Abraham from the Devil’s hold. At the same time he is constantly aware of that power in those who accuse him of being Beelzebul (the Devil) himself, or having a demon in him. He is aware of ‘the world’ which in this case appears to be the leading Jews, themselves. Satan inspires Peter to prevent Jesus from going to the Cross. In Luke 11:14–23, Satan is ‘the strong man’, but Jesus is the ‘stronger than the strong man’ and overcomes him, denuding him of his armour and possessions. Jesus can also give powers of the Kingdom to his disciples to overcome demonic creatures by healing and exorcisms. After the return of the seventy disciples, Jesus has a vision, seeing Satan falling as lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18). All the time he is battling with the Evil One and each time Jesus is successful. The vision portends the ultimate and utter defeat of Satan.

In John’s Gospel the light is said to be in the Word (*logos*) and the darkness cannot overcome it. This is a statement about the whole ministry of Christ which is against darkness —Satan and the powers of evil—and is the power of light, Christ being the light of the world. He prophesies the defeat of Satan in John 12:31, ‘Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out’. ‘Cast out’ may well be what Jesus saw in his prophetic vision and may link with Revelation 12:7, 12. In any case Satan is defeated as the prince of this world—his world-system which, as we have mentioned, includes the Jews who are against Christ and ultimately crucify him. In John 14:30–31, Jesus is aware of the closeness of the crucifixion in his ‘The ruler of this world is coming’. He says that Satan has nothing *in* him but that he will do the will of the Father, which is the Cross.¹⁵ In John 16:11, he speaks of the ruler of this world having been judged. All of this is summed up in the words of I John 3:8, ‘He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the Devil’.

¹⁴ The origin and nature of ‘demons’ and ‘spirits’ and ‘principalities and powers’ is quite obscure, but the fact of them is not to be doubted. Generally they are thought of as fallen and degraded celestial creatures.

¹⁵ Satan has nothing *in* him, but in the act of the Cross Satan has everything on him, i.e. the whole of the guilt of the sins of the race which he bears vicariously, works it out in suffering its judgment, and in the centre of this are the accusing Devil and all his minions, as Christ suffers the forensic judgment which is, at the same time, the existential anguish of the fallen race.

The Power of Satan and the World and Christ's Liberation From Their Power

As we have seen, Satan is the ruler of this world, and he is served in it by the fallen celestial principalities, the powers, the world rulers of this present age, and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. The time has now come for us to see how it is that Satan and his powers have human beings in their control, holding them as captives.

One of the keys lies in I John 3:8, 'He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning'. John has said in 3:4 that sin is lawlessness. The Devil has been lawless from the beginning and he who commits lawlessness is of the Devil.¹⁶ In Genesis 3, the serpent instigated sin, and Man responded to his urging and joined him in sinning. So he is one with Satan, and hence 'follows the course of this world, follows the prince of the power of the air'. Satan is the activator of sin, although sinners are not obliged to sin, but we say in another paper that since sin springs from illicit desire (James 1:13–14), so Satan keeps placing before the sinner that which breeds desire. Man is one with Satan in sinning. In I John 3:4–9, one is either with Satan *or* with God. Another key to the power of the Devil is found in Hebrews 2:14–15:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

Satan has the power of death. 'Power' here is 'might' (*kratos*) and not 'authority' (*exousia*). Sinning humans because of their fear of death are in Satan's bondage. It could not be said more clearly. What, then, of fear of death? It is fear of judgment, fear of what is elsewhere called 'the second death'. It is also personal fear of—at last—being confronted with God Himself, in all His holiness, love and glory. The Devil (*ho diabolos*) is 'the slanderer' and 'accuser' and 'adversary': he dwells on this dread of the holy and righteous Triune God. Just as he accused Job and Joshua, so he keeps humanity in guilt. Humanity joined with him against God, and its guilt lies in the fact that it has failed God in the mandate, and in His plan for the creation. Man fears to meet his Judge. His rebellion and sin is deeply reprehensible.

Likewise in Colossians 2:13–15, the evil powers of the world have a legal or forensic hold over their subjects:

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, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.

Here, those who were dead in evil are liberated when 'the bond which stood against us with its legal demands' was cancelled because of Jesus suffering the death of the law. We take it, then, that the principalities and powers had the same accusing power as their Ruler, but lost this power when the accusation was destroyed by Jesus' suffering on the Cross. Paul in Ephesians 6:16 speaks of 'the fiery darts of the wicked one', and these are obviously the accusations of Satan and his powers (cf. Rev. 12:10, 'accuses them day and night before our God').

Justification by grace, through faith, finishes the power of the law—'the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law'—so that Christ has delivered us from the law, and in so doing has delivered us from the fear of the Devil, and the power of the principalities. In Colossians 2:15, the principalities and powers are disarmed and disgraced by the Cross. Likewise in Hebrews 2:14–15, the Devil is disarmed by Christ removing the fear of death—

¹⁶ We have to keep constantly in mind the fact that lawlessness is not just breaking set rules. It is this, but more. It is the refusal to live out the *Torah* of God, the way of life that is moral and spiritual and is always eschatological in the hope of the fulfilment of the *telos*—God's goal for history. Law is not composed of static standards, or even of ontological moral demands. It is the way of life that is, from the beginning, eschatological.

that is, the guilt of sin—so that all who believe are wholly liberated. This is what is meant by I John 3:8, ‘The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil’.

We can see, then, that sin, Satan, the world, the world deities (idols), the wrath of God, death, the law, the conscience and our fleshliness, all hold us in bondage as one composite whole, dominating every detail of our lives. By bearing the guilt of sin on the Cross, Christ has removed it from us, and thus has destroyed the bondage of the enemies. Thus the statement of Christ comes to fruition, ‘everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin . . . so if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed’.

THE PLACE OF THE CROSS IN THE VICTORY OF CHRIST

Whilst we have shown the forensic basis for Satanic accusation is the fall of Man, and his refusal to obey the law of God has been met in the death of Christ, yet we need to see more in the act of the Cross to show it as the great work of Christ. Luther’s ‘theology of the Cross’ is the teaching that what is seen—that which can be accomplished by the ego and work of Man—is a false way of human righteousness which Luther calls ‘the theology of glory’. It is proven false because it does not have its basis in suffering. It takes up no Cross daily. What is unseen is the basis of faith, and the unseen which is necessarily eschatological is from eternity planned by God, but accomplished only by and through the Cross.

We can say that in one way sin is unseen. This must be the case for Paul says in Romans 7:13:

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.¹⁷

Evil is seen fully only at the Cross. It was at the hour of the Cross that Jesus said, ‘But this is your hour, and the power [*exousia*, authority] of darkness’ (Luke 22:53). This was the time when ‘the ruler of this world’ was coming (John 14:30). Colossians 2:14–15 and Hebrews 2:14–15 have shown that the Cross was the place of evil’s exposure—just as the law exposed sin—and its doom.

To see this we must look at two significant Messianic Psalms, namely 22 and 69.¹⁸ In Psalm 22 we see evil forces fighting against the speaker of the Psalm. We need to enter as far as possible into the action and the anger of his opponents, with all that is revealed to us by the Cross:

Be not far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is none to help.
Many bulls encompass me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.
I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax,
it is melted within my breast;

¹⁷ The wider principle of ‘the mystery of iniquity’ (II Thess 2:7; cf. Rev. 17:7; *passim*), is that it works unseen, though the eyes of faith will perceive it since they perceive the Kingdom of God. All evil is unseen, and the god of this world seeks to blind the eyes of those who do not believe from seeing the glory of the gospel (cf. II Cor. 4:1–6). Only at the end-time will all be exposed in the great Judgment.

¹⁸ We are claiming that these are Messianic Psalms without offering proof, but if not Psalms referring to the Cross, then it is difficult to see them as otherwise, so deep is the measure of suffering, and so vicious are the persecuting acts of evil forces.

my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
 and my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
 thou dost lay me in the dust of death.
 Yea, dogs are round about me;
 a company of evildoers encircle me;
 they have pierced my hands and feet—
 I can count all my bones—
 they stare and gloat over me;
 they divide my garments among them,
 and for my raiment they cast lots.

What we must not miss is the intensity of hatred, the sheer blackness of evil, the fetid breath of it, and the intense suffering as the Second Adam bears all the evil, guilt and filth of the First Adam, amidst the mockery and jeering of Satan and his bitter hosts. Psalm 69 no less shows the spasms of pain and suffering in words that undoubtedly refer to Calvary:

Thou knowest my reproach,
 and my shame and my dishonour;
 my foes are all known to thee.
 Insults have broken my heart,
 so that I am in despair.
 I looked for pity, but there was none;
 and for comforters, but I found none.
 They gave me poison for food,
 and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

Out of this suffering the Sufferer cries to God for deliverance and receives it. Isaiah 53 is surely the song of the theology of the Cross, so deep into suffering it is, but in the ultimate the Sufferer is triumphant, evil is exposed and defeated, God's nature as Love is also made manifest, and the human race is liberated from Satan and all evil. Those who believe this and are emancipated must now enter into 'the fellowship of his suffering' by virtue of 'the power of his resurrection', and know the conformity to Christ's Cross that makes them invulnerable to Satan.¹⁹

THE DEFINITIVE REALITY OF THE FREEDOM OF GOD AND OF MAN

In our future study of the freedom of God and Man we will see that true freedom lies in what God has planned for the glorious *telos*. We defined the freedom of God as His being in heaven and doing what He pleases, that is, creating creation, planning its goal, sustaining it, redeeming it and ultimately effecting its redemption, glorification, sanctification and perfection. We saw that Man's freedom lies in his doing what pleases God, that is, his being in communion with God and in union with Him to be a partner in His plan. We saw that the imagined freedom of the Devil and his world-system was that Satan and his powers could do what they pleased which, by nature of the case, was to go against God's plan and establish their own plan. In the ultimate, of course, their doing what they please leads to their total defeat and destruction.

Without doubt we have established the fact that God has liberated His elect to join Him in His plan, but it appears that the enemies we have named are all still with us. How, then, can we say we have an undiluted liberty? The answer must lie in two facts: (i) that whilst the present evil age still exists there will be conflict between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, and though we are free from the enemies the danger of being caught into bondage will always exist (Gal. 5:1), and (ii) true freedom will never be perfect until the enemies are destroyed. Whilst in Hebrews 2:14–15 the Devil is spoken of as being destroyed,

¹⁹ See 'Conclusion'.

the verb does not mean ‘annihilated’ or ‘extinguished’, but ‘paralysed’, ‘put out of action’, ‘rendered inactive and unemployed’.

Because of the present existence we have to look forward to see the promises that all such enemies will cease, and be rendered ineffective for always. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen. We must, then, live in faith and hope, and these two virtues are both engendered by love.

In our future study we will see the battle which is going on until the moment of Christ’s appearing and the fulfilment of God’s plan. Of the outcome there can be no end. The Scripture is plain, and the living Triune God is with us for the completion of the plan.

CONCLUSION: THE VICTORY OVER SATAN OUTWORKED IN TRIUMPH

Satan first seeks to blind the human race to the brilliant victory of Calvary (II Cor. 4:4). Unsuccessful against the revelation of the victory of the Cross as the Holy Spirit unveils it, Satan then blusters against the Church. He is weaker than the ‘Strong Man’—Christ—and yet goes about as a roaring lion to terrify his listeners. They are to call his bluff (I Pet. 5:8)—to stand firm in the faith—but it will be within the theology of the Cross that they do this. John tells his young men that, ‘You have overcome the evil one’, and James says, ‘Resist the devil and he will flee from you’. He no longer rules the believer by the fear of death, for in Revelation 12:11 we are told, ‘And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death’. Yet as eternal vigilance is the price of continuing liberty, so they must resist Satan as the seducer (I Cor. 11:1–6; cf. Eph. 6:10f.).

So then, as Luther said in his great hymn, ‘One little word shall fell him’. Such felled him in the Temptation of Christ, and such will continue to fell him if we utter the word of faith in the experience of faith which is the true theology of the Cross.

The Freedom of God and Man—VI, Flesh and Liberation From Its Death Bondage

INTRODUCTION: THE MEANINGS OF THE TERM 'FLESH'

We use the term 'flesh' today in general understanding as meaning our humanity. 'All flesh is as grass' is often used in funeral services to denote the transitory nature of our humanity. It thus indicates bodily being which has no hope of perpetually surviving. We are forced to agree that human flesh is temporary, and we, as fleshly beings, are necessarily temporary. We sometimes say, 'This is more than human flesh and blood can stand', meaning that human capacity for suffering is limited. 'Flesh and blood' also stands for living humanity, both personally and corporately.

When it comes to the biblical use of the term 'flesh', then we have a wider view. The Bible has many usages and meanings, some good, some neutral, some bad.

OLD TESTAMENT USAGE OF 'FLESH'

In the Old Testament the word *basar* is the prime word used for what in the NT Greek is *sarx*, yet they are not always synonymous. *Basar* can refer to all human beings—'all flesh is as grass'—to the body which is flesh, to the marital union ('one flesh', Gen. 2:24), and on the whole, means a dweller on the earth who is human. It can refer to the flesh of the body, including the bodies of creatures other than humans. It is recognised that humanity (flesh) is weak and limited, and requires God's spirit (*ruach*) to keep it living. Even so, it is fallen Man who is before us following his ejection from Eden, and his flesh has no guarantee against death. The transient nature of humanity is seen in the saying, 'All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades' (Isa. 40:6f.). This is really the equivalent of Man coming from dust and returning to dust—'If he [God] should take back . . . his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to the dust' (Job 34:14f.; cf Ps. 104:29). Even so, there are good things relating to 'flesh', namely the whole of this life in which are the gifts of creation, the manner in which a godly person can live. Our modern idea of 'person' includes the elements of body, mind and spirit, and the Hebrew saw himself as a total being—as it has been put, 'not as an embodied spirit, but an animated body'. The fact that the first man and woman can be called 'one flesh', shows that relationship of flesh is not only a bodily one, but a personal one of intimacy of personalities—a union of the deepest order—so that Adam could say of Eve, '[She] is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'. It has been said that the woman is the man's home.

There is a glory of Man—of 'all flesh'—but this glory is only seen in all its fullness and richness when it is dependent upon God in Whose image Man was made. Even so, sin and death have invaded the human realm, and Man is not to trust his own flesh. Jeremiah 17:5 says, 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm, whose heart turns away from the LORD'. Psalm 78:38–39 speaks of Israel's sin against God:

Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often, and did not stir up all his wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again.

Summing up, then, we would say that 'flesh' in the Old Testament speaks of Man as a creature who needs to depend upon God throughout all his life, who is otherwise weak and

perishing without this dependence. The good side of flesh is just that humans may enjoy the creation, and especially as they do God's will. Flesh, as the body, is not evil, though, of course, it can be used for evil. In fact the term 'flesh' is used in a very good sense in Ezekiel 36:26 where a 'heart of stone' is wrong, but a 'heart of flesh' is a living and warm one, commended by God. Flesh is not a distinct part of Man which operates on its own; we see in Psalm 73:26 that 'the flesh' and 'the heart' are linked together, 'My flesh and my heart may fail'.

NEW TESTAMENT USAGE OF 'FLESH'

Flesh Is the Body in a Good, Normal Sense

In the New Testament the noun *sarx* is used for the term 'flesh' and the adjectives are *sarkikos* and *sarkinos*. There are references which speak of Man's flesh as his body, or of 'flesh' as a bad principle, and this we shall examine below. 'The days of his flesh' (Heb. 5:7), as also Jesus' partaking of humanity—'flesh and blood' (Heb. 2:14)—are simply terms for Jesus becoming human. It is true in Romans 8:3 that Jesus is said to have been born 'in the likeness of *sinful* flesh', but this has a wider reference than to physical flesh. It refers to humanity which has become sinful, but Jesus' flesh was without sin, hence it was only 'in the likeness of sinful flesh', although it was human flesh. The principle still remains that human flesh—that of bodily nature—is not, as created, sinful.

'All flesh' may refer to 'all humanity' as in Mark 13:20, and in Luke 3:6 'all flesh shall see the salvation of God' is again a reference to 'all humanity'. In Acts 2:17 God—as written in Joel 2:28—is said to pour out His Spirit upon *all flesh*. In John 17:2 Jesus, in speaking to the Father, says of himself that 'thou hast given him power over all flesh'. As we have said, the body as a fleshly creation is not of itself evil. Paul talks in Galatians 2:20 of living his life in the flesh, meaning living it in the body. In Ephesians 5:25–32 the same man–woman 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' relationship exists as the two become 'one flesh'. The husband is said to love his own flesh—meaning his body—and treats his wife as being his body in a figurative sense.

Again, 'the flesh', as in the Old Testament, is what God has created: it is humanity. It is frail and is 'as grass', even though it has a transient beauty (I Pet. 1:24–25; cf. Isa. 40:6–9). In this flesh there can be sicknesses as in Paul's body (Gal. 4:13, 'bodily ailment'; cf. II Cor. 12:7, 'a thorn . . . in the flesh'). Many similar passages refer to human flesh as being good and not evil. When the sense of 'flesh' as humanity, albeit mortal, is gathered from both Old and New Testaments, then we can accept the fact that our physical flesh is not evil. We have to see what is evil, namely the attitude or *nous* of us, the mind and the direction of the will which come with our fallenness. Body, soul and spirit as created are one as they make up our personal being, and as created are not evil. The choice of Man to become autonomous was what put him into the realm of death (cf. Gen. 2:17; 3:1–6). Whilst God's grace redeems Man, yet the entail of sin determines his mortality. As Paul says in Romans 8:10, 'the body is doomed to death because of sin'¹ and it is this which makes us have a critical view of the body, that is, of its flesh. We need to keep this in mind as we turn to the bad sense in which 'flesh' and 'body' are used in the New Testament.

Note: There may be some uses of the word 'flesh' which cannot be clearly defined. One of these is the statement by Jesus, 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit'. It comes on the heels of Jesus' other statement, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God' (John 3:5, 6). This comes very close to, 'I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot

¹ This translation has a touch of paraphrase about it, but without doubt it is the sense of this part of 8:10.

inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable' (I Cor. 15:50). Does 'flesh' in the first reference mean simply 'humanity', that is, 'that which is born human is human'? Is it used in a factual sense of our humanity or is it also pejorative, that is, flesh is in some sense imperfect and even evil? Different interpretations are made. In the second quote 'flesh and blood', and also in Matthew 16:17—'Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you'—refers primarily to human thinking. It may also contain the idea of faulty and even sinful thinking (wisdom). What we do gather clearly is that 'flesh and blood' as a human entity does not, of itself, conduct us to spiritual truth and experience. In this sense it is deficient.²

Let us also keep in mind the fact often 'according to the flesh' is simply speaking of linear blood descent, for example, Romans 1:3 'of the seed of David according to the flesh'; Romans 4:1, 'Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh'. See also Romans 9:5f. A statement such as 'Gentiles in the flesh' (Eph. 2:11) does not have a direct pejorative sense.

The Flesh Is an Evil Principle of Man Working in Man

Something we will have to see, time and again, when we consider 'the enemies' is that they are all operating, so to speak, in one bundle. Satan incites to sin; sin uses the law to incite sin in Man; sin has its power, penalty and pollution which the law condemns; the world-system grips sinful man, keeping him in slavery to sin; the principalities and powers are part of this enslaving system and control sinful Man by reason of his lawlessness and guilt; God is wrathful upon Man in his sinning; the wages and outcome of sin is death; the physical flesh is linked with sin and death and Satan has power by reason of human fear of death; the conscience torments Man in his guilt; Man seeks to evade God by the use of idols, and falls into deeper sin, guilt and wrath. So these enemies, so to speak, keep ringing the changes, ever having Man in a cruel vice of bondage. The effects in Man and society are constantly compounding themselves.

So, when we come to Man and 'the flesh' we see flesh is that egotistical principle within Man whereby he opposes God and insists on his own autonomy. He also seeks to control his own worship and religious activities, to contain his idols, and to utilise all the faculties he has to forward himself, to entertain himself, and to derive pleasure for himself. The list of quotations given below will show us some of these elements of the flesh:

Romans 7:5: While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

Romans 7:18: For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.

Romans 8:1–13: There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal

² Note also another difficult passage, namely John 6:47–58 where Jesus speaks of being the bread sent down by God to the earth—to Israel—and this bread Jesus will give for the life of the world, namely his flesh. 'Flesh' here stands for himself, but also, surely, for the physical flesh he will give on the Cross for the life of the world.

bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you. So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live.

Romans 13:12–14: the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

II Corinthians 7:1: Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body [*sarkos*, flesh] and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.

II Corinthians 10:2–4: I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of acting in worldly [fleshly] fashion. For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly [fleshly] war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly [fleshly] but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

Galatians 3:3: Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?

Galatians 4:23, 29: But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh . . . But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now.

Galatians 5:13–21: For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:24: And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Galatians 6:7–8: Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Galatians 6:12–13: It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh.

Ephesians 2:3: Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Philippians 3:3–4: For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh. Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.

Colossians 2:11–14: 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, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

II Peter 2:10: ‘especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority’ (RSV) = ‘But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement’ (AV); (lit.) ‘and chiefly those going behind in the flesh in desire for uncleanness and lordship despising’ (*Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible*).

II Peter 2:18–19: For, uttering loud boasts of folly, they entice with licentious passions of the flesh men who have barely escaped from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved.

I John 2:16–17: For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever.

Commentary on Pejorative Mentions of ‘the Flesh’ in the New Testament

Romans 7:5 has the context of sinful passion, aroused by the law, our members bearing fruit for death. Romans 7:18 speaks of nothing good dwelling in a person, that is, in his flesh.

Romans 8:1–13 shows what good the law *would* do it cannot accomplish because of ‘the flesh’, the flesh being a powerful, evil principle. To live ‘according to the flesh’ is to have a mind which is wholly against God and His law. The fleshly mind cannot and will not serve God and please Him.

In Romans 13:12–14 the flesh is linked with debauchery, revelling, drunkenness, licentiousness, quarrelling and jealousy. These are its desires and practices, very much as in Galatians 5:19–21.

In II Corinthians 7:1 the flesh is ‘defilement of body’ and is against holiness.

In II Corinthians 10:2–4 one can use weapons either of the Spirit or of the flesh. Fleshly weapons are ‘carnal, fleshly’ and ineffective for spiritual warfare. They are anti-spiritual.

In Galatians 3:1–3 Paul shows the futility of beginning a spiritual life and seeking to perfect it by the flesh, which here means by the law! In Galatians 4:23, 29 Paul is speaking of Ishmael born of Hagar—a fleshly union and producing a fleshly result, including spiritual bondage. In Galatians 5:13–21 Paul contrasts living by love and living by the flesh. The flesh is vicious, and yet in the case of the legalistic Galatians who walked ‘by law’, they were in fact walking ‘in the flesh’. This roused up sin in them—‘the lusts [desires] of the flesh’—so that what issued was the mass of ‘fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like’. This horrific evil was really ‘against the law’, in contrast to the fruit of the Spirit which was not against the law.³ In Galatians 5:24 the Cross so works that the flesh ‘with its passions and desires’ is crucified. In Galatians 6:7–8 one who lives by the flesh—‘sows to the flesh’—reaps the horrible corruption of death (cf. Rom. 8:13). Paul, in Galatians 6:12–13, points to another aspect of the flesh, that of the Judaizing Christians troubling the Galatians, hoping to have ‘glory in [their] flesh’ by the circumcision of the flesh of the Galatian (Gentile) Christians. This is a horrible travesty of the gospel of grace.

In Ephesians 2:3 we read of ‘the passions [lusts] of the flesh’, linked with ‘the desires of body and mind’, and those in the flesh being ‘children of wrath’, energised by Satan.

Philippians 3:3–4 distinguishes, virtually, between the worshippers in the Spirit and the worshippers in the flesh. To have ‘confidence in the flesh’ is to rest in one’s background, attainments, and so on, but to worship in the Spirit is to abandon these works-justifying elements and to rest in the righteousness of Christ which comes by faith.

Colossians 2:11–23 is a powerful dissertation of the Cross which cuts away the fleshliness of a person and liberates him from the domination of evil principalities and powers.

II Peter 2:10 speaks of those who ‘walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement’. These are lawless, ‘despising government’. The description which follows says:

But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and killed, reviling in matters of which they are ignorant, will be destroyed in the same destruction with them, suffering wrong for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, revelling in their dissipation, carousing with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way they have gone astray; they have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked

³ Paul is saying that ‘Against the fruit of the Spirit there is no law’, meaning it was really the fulfilled ‘righteous demand [*dikaïoma*]’ of the law (cf. Rom. 8:4).

for his own transgression; a dumb ass spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness (II Pet. 2:12–16).

This is a frightening revelation of fleshliness! The deceit and false promises of the flesh are described in II Peter 2:18–19. 'Liberty' here is promise of freedom which engenders a dreadful bondage. In I John 2:16–17 the Apostle John takes us back to Eden where firstly 'the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes' was displayed with what was really the lust of pride embracing all of life. Adam was caught by it and so the whole human race came into it.

THE FLESH, THE ENEMIES AND HOLY FREEDOM

How, then, shall we define 'flesh' in its evil sense and not just in regard to its meaning of 'humanity', 'physical flesh' and 'body'? A. C. Thiselton in his article 'Flesh' in the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* ⁴ quotes both R. Jewett (*Paul's Anthropological Terms*, 1971) and R. Bultmann (*Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, 1952), Jewett's statement being, 'sarx for Paul is not rooted in sensuality but rather in religious rebellion in the form of self-righteousness'. Bultmann's comment is that flesh is 'trust in oneself as being able to procure life . . . through one's own strength and accomplishment'. Thiselton says that 'The outlook of the flesh is the outlook *oriented towards the self, that which pursues its own ends in self-sufficient independence of God*'. Thiselton adds, 'It is most striking as R. Bultmann and R. Jewett have rightly pointed out, that Paul explicitly speaks of the "fleshly" outlook in connection with the law and circumcision. The fleshly mind in Gal. above all implies "shifting one's boasting from the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14) to the circumcised flesh (6:13)"'.⁵

Elements of the Flesh

(a) We have already noticed in Galatians 5:16–21 that 'the works of the flesh' spring from being 'under the law'. That is, the line the Judaisers were trying to get the Galatians to walk would seem to be a good obedience to the law, but turned out to produce the works of the flesh—horrible as they are! This is bondage terrible.

(b) The same passage speaks of two powerful forces interlocked. On the one hand the power of the Spirit, and on the other the power of the flesh. We should make no mistake, the flesh has awful power. From Romans 8:5–8 we see it is incorrigible: it is utterly hostile to God and His law. Although this may seem to contradict what Thiselton, Jewett and Bultmann have said, yet the flesh is a chameleon. It always acts in the interests of itself. It can be utterly religious, and has immense satisfaction in being perfect, especially in regard to law-righteousness as can be seen in the first part of Philippians chapter 3. In Romans 10:2 Paul says of his religious brethren, 'I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened [or "according to knowledge"]'. We could take many examples of this religious zeal amongst the Pharisees, scribes and lawyers, against whom Christ warned his listeners. We see evidences in the world today that religious zeal can do the cruellest of all things. It is to be feared. It is self that takes the higher moral ground and will murder in the intensity of its ideological actions.

(c) The passage of Romans 8:1–13 needs close attention—something we cannot give it here. What is interesting is the absence of the Holy Spirit in everything of the flesh. The mind of the Spirit is life, and the mind of the flesh is death. We need to realise that Man is in

⁴ Edited by Colin Brown, Paternoster Pr., Exeter, 1975, vol. 1, pp. 671–682.

⁵ Above quotations from N.I.D.N.T.T., p. 680.

fear of death because his flesh is mortal. He lives in fear of death. Verses 8–13 show us that Man in the flesh thinks he is ‘a debtor to the flesh to live after the flesh’. Here there is a bondage: how is he in debt to the flesh? Surely it is just in the same way that unregenerate Man is in debt (bondage) to sin, to the law, to death, to conscience, to the wrath of God, to Satan and the world. *He is a guilty being!* In this 8th chapter of Romans, Paul is saying we are freed from such bondage. The flesh cannot keep us in bondage. Galatians 5:24 says, ‘They that are Christ’s have crucified [“did crucify”] the flesh’. On the Cross Christ dealt with the ‘debt’ of the flesh which was the guilt of Man. Man has a horror of his actual flesh becoming diseased, aged, decrepit, dying. He has a psychological bondage in trying to keep flesh alive and whole. The moment he understands the thrust of Romans 8:10–11 in the sense that I here paraphrase it, then in that moment he is freed from bondage: ‘If Christ is in you, although your bodies are doomed to death because of sin, yet the Holy Spirit is life-giving because of justification. If the Spirit of him [God] who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then that Spirit will raise your mortal bodies from death’. On the basis of this Paul can proceed to say in verses 12 and 13, ‘So then, brethren, we are not debtors to the flesh to have to live after the flesh, but we are debtors to the Spirit to live after the Spirit, for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if you by the Holy Spirit put to death the deeds of the body which are fleshly in intent, then you will live—you will gain a resurrection’. On the basis of this there is no debt to the flesh. The Cross, the Resurrection, Christ and the Spirit have put an end to the power of the flesh. Now we ‘walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit’.

(d) We have taken up the point in this paper that the flesh is linked with all other enemies of Man—enemies that have power by reason of human guilt. In the light of these and other observations we can say the flesh is that manner of human attitude and action which is Adamic. ‘Our old man’ is the principle of flesh in action. Whilst the two are not wholly synonymous they are wrapped up in the one bundle. When we act Adamically we act in a fleshly way. When we act in true, spiritual fashion we act according to the Second or Last Adam in whom we have our true being.

CONCLUSION: LIBERATED FROM FLESH; LIVING IN THE SPIRIT

We have left our freedom from all enemies to be discussed in our last Study—the next and final one, ‘Living in the Liberty of God and Man’. We have gathered enough materials on the enemies to which Man is enslaved, so that we can know how to become free, and then how to remain free. For example, to be freed from the flesh is henceforth to refuse the domination or bondage of the flesh. The Holy Spirit fights for us, and he enables us to bring forth his wonderful fruit in our lives. It is enough to know that we can walk in the Spirit, and live in and by the Spirit.

It is not the domination of one or a number of enemies that is broken, but *all* enemies and *at once*. This we will examine in our next paper as we see the marvel of being liberated, and then the battle, continuously, to live in that liberty.

The Freedom of God and Man—VII, Living in the Liberty of God and Man

INTRODUCTION: GOD'S LIBERATION OF MAN

It goes without saying that Man-in-innocence—Man as created and unfallen—was Man who lived in freedom. It was not 'freedom *from*', for Man had nothing from which to be free. He was *in* God and was under bondage to nothing, and his was a freedom to choose to continue to be as created, that is, God's partner in His will for creation.

It was not that Man was not aware of God's plan. We have seen that the plan of God was to work towards an *eschaton* and its *telos*, which would mean Man filling out himself to perfection, and so helping the creation to realise the goal set before it, which might be called 'the Edenisation of all things'.¹ We saw that Man at the time of the Fall chose to have an autonomy of his own, devising a so-called 'freedom' to do what he would please. He would—he believed—realise his devised goals by his own energies and merits. It could be—he must have imagined—that he would even shape up the goals God had for Himself and humanity, and that he would accomplish those goals by these very powers which he—Man—supposed he had. Certainly that is the thinking or the so-called 'wisdom' of the serpent.² The serpent attacked God in the incident of being subverter of the primal couple. To be in accord with the serpent meant that Man attacked God. This is the nature of sin. Sin cannot be thought of or considered, as to its being, apart from God. It is always in relation to God that sin has to be seen and assessed.

Against this serpentine or human view of freedom we saw that God is in the heavens and does what He pleases. The conflict Man knows as he goes against the will of God is the bondage in which he lives. He lives this bondage at the centre of his conscience *in guilt*. *Guilt* determines his bondage to sin, to flesh, to death, to the law, to God's wrath, to conscience, to Satan, to the world and its powers, and to the idols. We will see, later, that even when Man is freed to do the new thing that he pleases, yet he is still vulnerable to slavery of conscience and the other enemies if he listens to accusations concerning guilt that he may have or even that he may not have.

How Has God Liberated Man?

How then in essence has God liberated fallen Man from the power of all the enemies? If we go back over previous studies we will see—as we have just stated—that God has liberated us from the power of *guilt*. The place and power by which God has liberated from guilt is the death of Christ, the propitiatory work of the Cross. In doing that, God in Christ has freed us from the enemies. Guilty Man is under the power of each enemy by reason of his sin and its guilt. Notice that where sin is committed then with it comes the guilt of that sin. This can be seen in Psalm 32:5 where David confesses his sin and is forgiven 'the guilt of my [his] sin'. In Jeremiah 33:8 God says of erring Israel, 'I will cleanse them of all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me'.³ Leviticus 6:4

¹ This is not a new idea in our Pastors' Studies. For the primal couple to 'fill up the earth' is to take what is in Eden—the sanctuary of God to Man—and to take its elements to fill up the earth with them. It is obvious that Man has lordship over all the earth (Gen. 1:28; cf. Ps. 8:3ff.) and must govern it in accordance with Edenic principles.

² See my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989) along with I Corinthians 1:19–25 and 3:18–20, where this 'wisdom of the world' is not tolerated by God, but opposed and destroyed, doubtless because of the danger it represents.

³ Many in Judaism today see no point in the necessity of the Cross to deal with guilt. They point out that in the Old Testament it can be shown that God deals with sin without the necessity of sacrifice. It is doubtful, however, that this can be the case. The Levitical principle is the shedding of blood. National sin, national apostasy, certainly demands repentance and turning back to God, but the demands for national repentance which the prophets made—and John the Baptist in particular—speak mainly of the New Covenant. Jesus translated this into the need for the shedding of blood—his blood (Matt. 26:27–28; cf. Heb. 10).

speaks of a person who ‘has sinned and become guilty’. The chapter then speaks of the person bringing his ‘guilt offering’ to the Lord. Leviticus 7 speaks of the mode or manner of making the guilt offering. Guilt of sin is primarily a penal matter for which God makes a grace provision of sacrifice. Had Man not sinned he would have had no guilt, that is, no objective guilt, so that he would never have felt subjectively the sense of guilt. Being guilty he was necessarily caught as the plaything of the horrific enemies. His life, then, was un-ontological, asymmetric, deprived of the pure experience of communion with God, out of focus relationally with God and fellow-humanity, in emotional pain, suffering the dread which is part of subjective guilt—and so on. He was open to innumerable accusations, and had to harden his conscience, even to the point of searing it. Always he was followed by the lack of genuine love, joy, peace and assurance of a true vocation. In respect to all this, it must be said that what has been called ‘God’s common grace’ was—and is—so exercised as to take some of the terrible burden of human fallenness from Man, for the whole burden is intolerable, beyond human bearing. The provision of sacrifice as propitiatory atonement has brought comfort to the human race.

Whilst the human race did not have the law of Moses and its Levitical teaching regarding propitiation, yet the narrative of Genesis 4 tells us propitiation was God’s way for Man to have freedom from guilt. Cain could have had such freedom had he offered sacrifice in the proper way—‘If you do well, shall you not be accepted?’ This has also been translated, ‘If you do well shall you not be forgiven?’ Man needs nothing for his guilt but God’s forgiveness. Certainly he needs to have faith in God and His forgiveness, and this it seems was what Abel had when he offered up his sacrifice by faith (Heb. 11:4). We do not here enter into the basis of all propitiation being Christ’s work of the Cross, but this is the event in history which alone substantiates all sacrifices offered in faith—wherever such may happen. The principle of this offering can be found in Job 1:1–5. Indeed it could be argued that Job was found (Job 1:6–8) to be such that ‘there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil’.

The Immediate Fruits of Freedom

When Man is freed from all enemies then he is free to obey God. This we will need to discuss to see it in its fullness and operation. He is also free *within* the operations of his obedience, as God’s will and God’s law are the very *way* of freedom. By obedience he proceeds in freedom. As we shall also see later, Man-in-freedom is free not to do what he is free to do. All things are lawful for him to do, but not all things are expedient. Of course all sin is unlawful for Man to do, but there are things he can do (cf. Rom. 14 – 15; I Cor. 8), which would not be sinful if he were a man of strong conscience and strong faith, but for the weak brother they would be sin. For this reason the strong brother desists from doing the things which would cause the weaker brother to stumble. That is the meaning of ‘All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient’ (I Cor. 10:23).

These, then, are the immediate fruits of God’s liberating act in Christ—fruits as mediated to redeemed Man by the Holy Spirit. The Son makes free as we are shown in John 8:31–36 and Galatians 5:1; as also the Spirit through Christ makes us free, as we see in II Corinthians 3:17–18 and I Corinthians 6:11. All the time we must keep at the back of our thinking that true freedom is freedom to do the will of God, freedom to be partners with Him in His plan.

THE LIBERTY OF GOD AND MAN

In order to understand the actual nature of the liberty of God—and thus of Man—we must go back to the beginning of this series of Studies (Study 1, 2/6/97, pp. 2–4). There we discussed Psalm 115:3 in its setting of verses 3–8 where the contrast is between God and the foolish idols:

Our God is in the heavens;
he does whatever he pleases.
Their idols are silver and gold,
the work of men's hands.
They have mouths, but do not speak;
eyes, but do not see.
They have ears, but do not hear;
noses, but do not smell.
They have hands, but do not feel;
feet, but do not walk;
and they do not make a sound in their throat.
Those who make them are like them;
so are all who trust in them.

'Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases', is repeated in Psalm 135:5–7, and in that context He is again the One above all gods and idols. True freedom issues from complete authority. God is free to do whatever He pleases. It needs only to be said that God is only pleased to do what is consistent with His own nature and being. What He pleases to do springs from what He is. Man's freedom is true freedom when he, under the grace of God, himself chooses to do what pleases God. Freedom in living is doing what is pleasing to God. In the Scripture this freedom of God is seen throughout history—from what is protological to what is eschatological. Such living in God cannot be effective if God has not released us from the power of the enemies. Indeed, part of our freedom is to be militant against the forces of evil. The other part is to do the will of God as He has given us the freedom to do.

GOD IS TRUE COMMUNITY: HE IS TRIUNE

God in the Unity of Community and Communion

Nothing of what God is in the Old Testament is contradicted by what is revealed of Him in the New Testament. The Shema (Deut. 6:4) proclaims, 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might'. This is stated in Mark 12:29 as 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one'. This is undoubtedly spoken *against* the gods which are many, but also has much of the meaning of Exodus 3:14:

God said to Moses, 'I Am Who I Am.' Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'

It is interesting to read in the verse following Exodus 3:15:

Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Even before the incarnation of the Son, God named Himself by His chosen human beings—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Before His Son became a man, a human being, God named Himself by His covenant people and 'thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations'.

Even at this point we can see His freedom not to be named only by Himself. He stated His union and communion with these covenant patriarchs.⁴ In fact, if we understand the whole matter of covenant properly, we will understand that God-in-Community created Man in covenant to share with him that community. Man's bondage then is when he moves out of full community—community in grace, community in love, community in sharing the doing of the will of God. This latter state is the true freedom of Man—to be in covenant fellowship with God and integrally every human being with all others—the meaning of all being neighbours to others, as those others to all.

The integral unity of God which we find in the Old Testament, His sufficiency in Himself, is by no means contrary to the later, fuller revelation of Himself as the Triune God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Indeed God does not achieve such tri-unity with the passage of history. The revelation of this tri-unity comes at the appropriate time in history when the Son in his incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension reveals the Father. That is, his revelation is of God as Father.⁵ This followed at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit, as Christ predicted, revealed the glory of the Son and the glory of the Father. From Pentecost onwards we see the works of the Father, the Son and the Spirit in the life of the community, the church of God.

We saw in Deuteronomy 6:4 the unity of God, His self sufficiency as the true God over and against the false gods, as He is denoted in Exodus 15:11, 'Who is like thee, O LORD among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?' No less do we see Him as the One God in the New Testament, but He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is essentially unity, and yet His unity is that of community. His sociality is in His communion within Himself.

It is in accordance with this integral communion that He created Man. Man was made in the image of God and communion was essential to his true being. We cannot authentically think of Man unless we think of him in relation to God. Man not being in communion with God is not Man truly. He is not the full score of the image of God. He is Man not as truly Man for he lacks the creational union and communion given to him as the image of God. In the Old Testament, the 'Let us . . .' is thought by some to be Yahweh speaking to 'the council of God' which was composed of Himself and His chief celestial powers, but this is denied by others who, rightly enough, cannot see Man made in the image of the council of God.

God's unity as community is essential for Man to be one in community, and indeed for him to be truly Man. That is why Paul points out that God had made of one blood—one ancestor—all nations to dwell upon the face of the earth. They have their unity in God, for 'In Him we live and move and have our being'. Paul in Acts 17:26–28 is surely pointing to the integral unity of the human race as created. His emphasis is, surely, that there is a tension in the human race for denying this integral unity, a tension which can be resolved when all men and women recognise God as their Creator–Father—'for we are His offspring'. From the Fall in Eden there has been grace of the kind which never allows that unity to be utterly decimated. The image of God is not erased, not even in the most depraved. 'This divine image is neither losable nor reducible, but its ethical direction is reversible. It assumes its proper form, of course, in conformity to God's holy will.'⁶

Humanity as created was intended to be a community in communion with God and inwardly one in all its corporate being. Its freedom was to be known as the experience of God's freedom and it was to be the reflection to creation of the same: creation was to become itself fully in this reconciliation of God with Man, Man with God, and humanity inwardly as community. This was to be Man's freedom. As is usual, we must go back to the innocence,

⁴ In Mark 12:24–28 this intention of God denoted in Exodus 3:15 is quoted by Jesus who reproves them with, 'Is not this why you are wrong, that you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of god?', and concludes, 'He is not God of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong'.

⁵ See John 1:14, 18: 5:36–37; 10:36–38; 14:1–10; 16:12–15; 17:1–5; Matthew 11:25–27; etc.

⁶ Meredith G. Kline, *Genesis*, 'The New Bible Commentary Revised', eds D. Guthrie & J. A. Motyer (IVP, London, 1970), p. 83.

bliss and purposeful vocation of the first couple in Eden, where the two had union—communion with God and between themselves. This, now, can be seen as their freedom. The moment the union with God was broken by sin, the union between the couple was also broken, and the constant fragmenting of all relationships proceeded in history until its first convulsive violence was stopped by the Flood. Whilst covenant grace brought forth God’s children of love and His people of faith, yet it awaited the dynamic work of the Cross to bring about cosmic reconciliation between God and Man, between Jew and Gentile, between husband and wife, parents and children, as between all other forms of anti-communion action.

The Liberating Power of the Cross: Freedom is the New Community

We have dealt in the first Section of our paper with the outcome of the work of the Cross—to destroy all guilt and liberate the now-redeemed person/s from enchaining guilt. We have seen how the enemies all lost their hold on the believer and the believing community, by the atoning death of Christ and the enlivening resurrection, to say nothing of Christ’s Lordship over all things in his ascension, session and intercession at the right hand of God.

It is this which brings us to the true meaning of freedom, and this freedom is the manifestation of the Triune Godhead—the Three in Community—in the new community of Christ, God’s Church, the Church which is ‘in the Father’, whose Lord and Head is Christ, and whose Unifier and Keeper in love is the Holy Spirit.⁷ Through forgiveness, and the gift of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the three thousand were bound together by the outflowing *perichoresis* from the Community of God, and so the new community took on the configurations of love. They were the image of God in union with Him. They expressed God’s *agape* in the *modes* of their living. Whereas we can talk of the liberating power of the Cross in regard to cancelling of guilt, and the justifying and sanctifying of the believers of the new Community, yet it was the Community—not an aggregating of individual ‘souls’—which, coming into being, gave evidence of the *agape* of God. This was by the inflowing *perichoresis* from the Triune One.⁸ This miracle which we call ‘the Church’ is one of freedom, of the exercise of true liberty. In it all are *one*. There are no divisions of Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free-person: all are *one*. This, then, is the truth. Ephesians 2:11 – 3:19 tell us the revelation of this unitary community, this kenotic, perichoretic communion which obtains because God and His people—his family—are *one*. In this love and unity they are all free.

The *evidence* of this people of communion is found in the Book of the Acts—to say nothing of the large body of teaching in the Epistles. Acts 2:41–47 and 4:23–35 show us an Edenic freedom, an integral unity, a rich and deep communion. In history we see the event which brought true freedom. Not here just the jubilant, ‘I am saved!’, but the whole community expressing the love of God, where everyone is my brother, sister and neighbour. No person thinks anything is his or hers. On the tide of perichoretic love the whole community is swept towards the ultimate Eden, having proleptic faith-experience of it, in the *now*. The Book of Acts shows us that this caring love spread out beyond Jerusalem. The churches in Asia Minor and Europe sent back help to the church at Jerusalem which knew something of continuous poverty.

⁷ I Thessalonians 1:1 and II Thessalonians 1:1 speak of the Church as being ‘in God the Father’. The Church is almost always called ‘the church of God’, and God is ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ and ‘God our Father’—as in Ephesians 1:2, 3. Christ is ‘head over all things for the church’ as well as ‘the head of the church’ (Eph. 1:20–23; 5:23). The Holy Spirit is the one who brings love to the believer and the believing community (Rom. 5:5; 15:30; cf. Eph. 1:13–15; Col. 1:8) and is the Spirit of fellowship. For all the members of the Trinity and the 7 ‘unities’, see Ephesians 4:1–6.

⁸ We speak of the Trinity being ontological, by which we mean the way the Triune God subsists as the Unity of the Three Persons and their inner works as ‘the works *ad intra*’. We then speak of the ‘going out’ of this ontological Trinity in the actions of creation, redemption (etc.) as ‘the works *ad extra*’. Many theologians today see these all as one—‘ontological’ and ‘economic’. There is no dichotomy of the two ‘facets’, since they are really one. God is One.

The Epistles, too, constantly seek to vivify people to the state of this primary experience of freedom-in-community. After all, union and communion with God is sweet to the human spirit, beautiful in its reality and energising in all its relationships. So the apostolic leaders warn against the things which disunify, and commend and exhort that which maintains the unity of the Spirit. The teaching of the Lord's Supper in the 10th chapter of I Corinthians, plus the disquisition on love in the 13th chapter, and then the 3 Epistles of John, all combine to keep the level of such love flowing. It is in love that God's freedom in His Being is ever dynamic. It is that love constantly enlivening the Community that constantly ensures the Community of Christ of the exercise of freedom. Again we mention the regard love-in-freedom has for the weak in faith (Rom. 14 – 15) and for the weak in conscience (I Cor. 8). The freedom which is God's becomes the freedom of Man as, by the Spirit, Man proceeds in union with, and dependency on Him, in obedience.

'STAND FAST THEREFORE . . . '— THE BATTLE FOR MAINTAINING FREEDOM

The Enemies Still Battling the Believers

In our previous Studies we have seen that the defeat on the Cross of all enemies and the liberation that issues from that victory, does not mean that the enemies are now destroyed in the sense of their being erased or annihilated. In regard to Satan and the evil principalities and powers of the sinful aeon, we saw that we must fight them, and more than ever. Satan will keep coming around as a roaring lion, but in humility before God we must resist him steadfast in faith. Then, having fought, we must stand, vigilant as ever (Gal. 5:1; Eph. 6:13). We must be constantly on the alert against deceptive sin which can so easily beset us, and we must continually 'lay it aside' (Heb. 12:1; cf. 3:12–14).

Freedom Always Operates in Grace

The early Church, the community of unity, was said to live under 'great grace'. Grace was the action of God liberating sinners from the bondage of the enemies, and so we find true freedom shown as the Church lived under grace. Paul, perhaps more than other apostles, warns against departing from grace. Not only do his epistles all commence in praying grace upon them, but he warns them 'not to accept the grace of God in an empty way' (II Cor. 6:2), and also against departing from grace. Indeed the whole Epistle to the Galatians is on this theme (e.g. 3:1–3; 5:5–6, 13–21; 6:15–16).

Even so, God does not leave us to maintain our freedom wholly by our own efforts. God's grace is His constant action for us, and against all evil. It is He who is in us 'both to will and to work for his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:13). 'He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 1:6). These references have their basis in Ephesians 2:8–10, where God has planned even the works we do. We must remember that God is constantly working against all forms of evil, not leaving us alone to achieve their defeat in daily Christian living.⁹ So, in the early Church he brought about the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira when they would bring corruption into the love communion of the Community (Acts 5:1–11), the result of which was that 'more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women'. Simon Magus was rebuked by Peter for his scandalous desire to control and manipulate the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18–23). Herod is smitten by God with a lethal disease (Acts 12:23). Thus Paul tells us that 'the desires [lusts] of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires [lusts] of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, *to prevent you from doing what you would*'. If we would walk under law we

⁹ See footnote 2 (above), where God sets out to defeat false wisdom—the wisdom of this world. Note that the Spirit is ever striving against the flesh, seeking to defeat it (Gal. 5:17).

would also be under the flesh with its dreadful ‘works of the flesh’. If we would walk according to the Spirit then we would bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. Walking by the Spirit means we stand in our liberty and thus live in it. If we would revert to law as the justifying way of life, then our freedom becomes bondage to flesh as well as to law (cf. Gal. 5:16–25).

That is why Paul warns against the wrong use of freedom—‘do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh’. What, then, are we to do? ‘Through love be servants one of another’, for this is the highest experience of kenotic, perichoretic community. The dreadful perversion of ‘biting and devouring one another’ is the consequence of wild, antinomian ‘freedom’ (cf. Gal. 5:13–17). The context shows us that the law of love to our neighbour is the true law of the Community .

Against such false use of liberty Peter also warns us in a long description of lawless men ‘who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority’ (II Pet. 2:10–22). He says, ‘They promise them [‘men who have barely escaped from those who live in error’] freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved’.

We see, then, that ‘eternal vigilance is the price of liberty’. We must ever be on the alert to fight what seeks to enslave us, but the best vigilance is to love one another. This is the law of Christ, the law of the Community. It is the most simple and the most powerful law. It is the only law. It is the true law of God.

Living in Faith, Hope and Love

We have seen that power is God’s freedom to do what He will by that action which is consistent with His nature. Power is not a matter of raw or brute force, a mere smashing down of its opponents. It scarcely needs to be said that the early Church was aware that for living in true freedom it needed to live in faith, hope and love.¹⁰ It is too vast a subject to cover here, but the essence of the matter is that the loving Community must live in this triad of virtues, the members of which are inseparable. *Faith* gives entrance to the true Community to those once outside it, and of having ‘the assurance of things hoped for’—that is, the present, proleptic possession of that which is yet to come. That is, it sees what is unseen, namely the object of *hope*. We mean that it sees all the things of the end time, the time of the Holy City, which is the Holy Community; the time of the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, the *theosis* (or *theopoiesis*—‘the divinisation’¹¹) of the Holy Community, when it shall fully ‘be partakers of the divine nature’ (II Pet. 1:4; cf. Col. 3:3; I John 1:3) as the Bride, the Church is inducted into the mystery of the Godhead. Calvin put it that ‘Christians are admitted, through the Holy Spirit, to participation to the inner life of the Godhead’.¹² Faith and hope are both dependent upon love, since faith ‘works by love’ (Gal. 5:6; cf. I Cor. 13:3; Rev. 2:1–6) and hope is given confidence by love (Rom. 5:5). A theology which does not take this triad of faith, hope and love as its way of living in freedom will be deficient. As we have said, the three virtues do not exist apart from one another, that is, one of them does not exist without the others. When Paul stated, ‘So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love’, he meant that since God is love, there can be no faith and hope apart from Him, for those virtues—faith and hope—are not Him, even though they are inspired by Him.

We will need to see that, just as freedom is present in the Godhead, so the Three Persons are present in the life of the Church and the life of the believer. Galatians 5:1 (cf. John 8:31–36) tells us that Christ sets us free for freedom, so also Paul teaches that ‘where the Spirit of

¹⁰ See my booklet *Living in Faith, Hope and Love* (NCPI, 1983), which has a good coverage of this theme in the New Testament.

¹¹ *Theosis* or *theopoiesis* is the doctrine of the divinisation of Man held by the Greek Orthodox Church that redeemed persons will become divine. Divine, however, does not mean they will have deity, but rather be partakers in the Divine nature as set out in II Peter 1:4 and other related Scriptures.

¹² See the article ‘Trinity’ by G. L. Bray in the *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by S. B. Ferguson and D. F. Wright (IVP, Leicester, 1988), p. 694.

the Lord is, there is freedom'. Here we refer back especially to our previous Study, where to live in the Spirit is the life of freedom from the law and the works of the flesh. Romans 8:18–30 declares that the work of the Father is what brings us to conformity with Christ and so into 'the glory of the liberty of the children of God'. Yet it is not just texts which tell us of the work of each Person in the life of the Church, but it is the works *ad extra*¹³ of the whole Trinity which keep us supplied with their freedom, from their freedom.

Our point in emphasising that freedom is lived only in faith, hope and love is to counter the ideas of power as being raw or brute use of strength. The enemies are constantly overcome by faith, hope and love. The believer is secure in this triad of virtues. By this we do not mean that the enemies are impressed by our faith, hope and love and accede to it. No: we mean that when we have *faith* it is in the God of *heilsgeschichte*, the God Who is Creator and is in control of all things; Who is Redeemer and redeems His elect; Who is Sanctifier and will sanctify all things. When we have *hope* it is in the culmination of history in 'the glory of the liberty of the children of God', that eschatological liberty when all enemies will cease to be. When we have *love*, we have communion with God and share proleptically in 'the reconciliation of all things'. In present practice, love is—as it is with the Three Persons of the Trinity—'other-persons-centred', being servant, considering others before oneself and thinking more highly of them than of oneself. No wonder the enemies cannot penetrate or defeat this formidable triad of virtues!

Thus it is that in the whole matter of union with God as we are His image, and being in communion with Him in that God-image relationship through faith, hope and love, the believer is invulnerable to the enemies. Where faith, hope and love are operative the enemies are not invulnerable to the Church militant. We have seen that God's freedom is His authority over all things by reason of His creating all things, and then by His Redeeming the elect, having broken the power of the enemies in the act of the Cross. Thus it is in the freedom of the Triune God that the Church is able to work out in history the will of God. God's freedom is such, as we have seen, that He names Himself by the Covenantal patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—and it is by the incarnation of His Son that He names Himself as 'the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ', and thus the Church is 'the church of God', so that His freedom is operative in and through the Church (cf. Eph. 3:8–11). When in His freedom God names Himself by anything, He thus gives His freedom to that object. Our names are written on the palms of His hand. He is the One Who has liberated us.

CONCLUSION: THE LIFE OF LIBERTY

We have seen that Man-in-innocence had an untested but genuine freedom as the image of God. By his refusal to go God's way in His plan for the creation, he virtually attacked God and came into bondage. He lost participation in the freedom of God which in His Triune Being is 'other-persons-centredness'. God's love for Man was to liberate him (Man) from the excruciating bondage of sin, the flesh, the law, the wrath of God, the conscience, Satan, the world system, the world powers, the idols and other similar elements.

God's freedom was such that he could and would and did become Man. Far from limiting His freedom, this was the very expression of it. The goal of His freedom was ours—'the glory of the liberty of the children of God'. This freedom was—and is—dependent upon the Second Adam in whose image we are being recreated, renewed 'after the knowledge of him who created us' (Col. 3:10), and this 'in true righteousness and holiness' (Eph. 4:24), and in whom we experience present freedom and live in the hope of the ultimate freedom of the sons of God—'the glory of the liberty of the children of God'.

¹³ The inward life and subsistence of the Trinity is called 'the works *ad intra*' and the works such as creation, and the redemption, sanctification, glorification and perfection of the creation are all called 'the work *ad extra*'.