

# *Walk worthy of your calling*

*The purpose of the commandment is love*

1Ti 1:5

**NATIONAL YOUTH SEMINAR AUGUST 2025**

## WALK WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING

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National Youth Seminar – August 2025

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August 2025

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Joshua Hay and Andrew Hay. 2025

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# Article I

## The sign of Jonah

*Victor Hall with Peter Hay*

During the time when Jesus ministered in the region of Galilee, He was asked by the scribes and Pharisees to provide them with a sign from heaven to verify that He was from God. Luk 11:16. Mat 12:38. Jesus answered them, saying, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.' Mat 12:39-40.

With this statement, Jesus revealed that the sign of Jonah is the sign of the Son of Man. This sign is the offering travail of His death, burial and resurrection! Furthermore, Jesus' declaration set Jonah's experience as a helpful, and certainly graphic, illustration of a person's connection to His traveling journey, which is necessary for salvation. Heb 5:8-9.

Accordingly, this account has implications for how we are to live and walk each day as a Christian. It also informs our understanding of how the gospel of God is ministered both at this time and in the time of the end.

Several Bible commentators have described the book of Jonah as being a parallel to the book of Acts. They have noted that Jonah's ministry was to a Gentile nation, in the same way that the book of Acts detailed the ministry of the gospel to the Gentiles, particularly through the apostle Paul and his fellow messengers. The congruence of these two books is further evident when we consider that the effectiveness of Jonah's ministry was the fruit of his figurative 'immersion' into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Likewise, when Paul was commissioned as an apostle and a light to the Gentiles, the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake [in the fellowship of My death, burial and resurrection].'<sup>1</sup> Act 9:15-16.

### Jonah's testimony

Jonah's account began with the Lord's directive, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me'. Jon 1:2. Obviously, Jonah was already a believer and had been established by God as a prophet. 2Ki 14:25. However, Jonah arose to flee from the presence of the Lord and from the works of obedience to which he had been called. He had his own view regarding the propriety of God's initiative and was disinclined to participate. He deliberately chose to proceed in another direction.

As he made his way to Tarshish in Spain, the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, bringing the boat and its passengers into jeopardy. Notably, as the implications of God's judgement became apparent, causing the mariners great fear, Jonah was fast asleep in the lowest parts of the ship. Jon 1:5. He was oblivious to the effects of his disobedience. It was time for Jonah to 'awake to righteousness' and to begin to watch and be sober! 1Co 15:34. 1Th 5:6. Certainly, the captain of the ship urged him to this state of sobriety, saying, 'What do you mean, *sleeper*? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.'<sup>2</sup> Jon 1:6.

As he was aroused from his slumber, Jonah recognised that this peril, which was now overtaking his associates, was the judgement of God because of his disobedience. The first step of his alertness was to accept God's judgement. At Jonah's direction, the mariners picked him up and threw him into the sea, causing the terrible tempest to cease. Interestingly, this had a profound effect upon the sailors. As Jonah

himself recounted, 'Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows.' Jon 1:16.

By charging the sailors to throw him into the sea, Jonah was acknowledging that he was rightly dying under God's judgement in 'the sea of His forgetfulness'. Testifying of this judgement, he said, 'For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me. Then I said, "I have been cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple".' Jon 2:3-4. As Jonah accepted the reality of his judgement on account of sin, *his death was joined to Christ's death*.

The Lord prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah, which became the context of his burial with Christ. The belly of the fish was an unpleasant place. It was dark and no doubt repugnant. In addition to the lack of oxygen, it is quite possible that the digestive secretions of the fish's belly would have impacted upon his physical body. In this place of burial, which should have killed him, Jonah was miraculously sustained by the same resurrection life that sustained Christ in each wounding event of His offering and suffering journey.

This initiative toward Jonah identified him with Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Jonah received and joined this sign, as evidenced by his personal expression of the prayer that belonged to Christ's travail in the course of His offering and suffering journey. For example, foreshadowing the resurrection life of the Father that brought Christ back from the dead, Jonah prayed, 'I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God.' Jon 2:6. This same life became the capacity for Jonah's obedience, as he then confessed, 'I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.' Jon 2:9. Jonah was delivered, through life, from the waters of judgement to the ground of new creation when 'the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land'. Jon 2:10.

Having received and then been identified with the death, burial and resurrection of the Son of Man, Jonah *became this sign* to the city of Nineveh. Jesus Himself noted this point, saying, 'For as Jonah *became a sign* to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation.' Luk 11:30. This sign, which Jonah had become, was expressed to the citizens of Nineveh through the words of judgement that Jonah had been sent to proclaim to them for forty days. Jon 3:4. Through the ministry of the word of Jonah, the whole region of Nineveh repented and found

deliverance from the judgement of God. In this regard, they were raised up by the sign of the prophet Jonah!

Some Bible scholars, such as the authors of *The Pulpit Commentary*, have suggested that the Ninevites were receptive to Jonah's message because they had been informed by the sailors of his miraculous deliverance from death. This account may have been complemented by the physical scars that Jonah possibly carried in his body as a result of his time in the belly of the fish. Exemplifying this principle of ministry, Jesus Himself appeared to His disciples on the day of His resurrection, showing them His hands and His side. Joh 20:20. Likewise, the apostle Paul testified that he was always carrying about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in his body. 2Co 4:10. Through this testimony, death was working in him, but life was being ministered to his hearers. 2Co 4:12.

Clearly, Paul became the sign of Jonah to his hearers, saying to the Christians in Galatia, 'O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose *eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?*' Gal 3:1. Paul's testimony exemplified the *sign* of the Son of Man, which is resurrection life in a mortal body. To this end, he confessed that he had suffered the loss of all things 'that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead'. Php 3:10-11.

### The sign of the Son of Man today

The sign of Jonah, which is the sign of the Son of Man, is the witness that we are to bear today as sons of God who are members of His body, and who live by the resurrection life of God outflowing from Him. This is the key point: the sign of the Son of Man refers to sons of God who live by *exanastasis*!

The beginning point of this expression is *receiving* the sign of the Son of Man through the ministry word of the cross that is proclaimed by Christ's messengers. The word of the cross makes a breach upon our heart, exposing our carnal thoughts and motivations which are at odds with the Father's call upon our life. Heb 4:12. Jesus identified these fleshly orientations as being 'the stones' of our other law and 'the thorns' of the cares of this world which impact upon our maturity and fruitfulness as a son of God. Weariness leading to slumber is the outcome of our walking according to the flesh. 1Co 11:30. Unless we are awakened from sleep,



and remain awake, to receive and walk in the light of Christ's word, we will eventually lose our sonship. Rom 8:13.

Jesus invites all those who are weary and heavy laden to come to Him to find rest. He says to us, 'Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.' Mat 11:29-30. This is Christ's invitation to join His offering and suffering journey. Mat 11:29. Each wounding event in the course of His journey was a *travail* involving death, burial and resurrection. The Spirit, who is the Spirit of adoption within us, leads us on this path and enables our participation in the *travailing* steps that belong to the pathway of salvation by giving to us the seven Spirits of God.

As we set our mind on the Spirit to walk in the way in which He is leading us, we are committed to die with Christ in the fellowship of His offering as a living sacrifice. Rom 12:1. We are committed to laying down our life to serve another in love. Gal 5:13. However, we also accept that this death includes the difficulties, distress and troubles that we experience during the day, wherein we *die* with Christ from the rudimentary trading principles of the world by which fallen man lives. We are *buried* with Christ as we cease from our anxious striving for self-expression, and we rest in hope of resurrection life with Christ. We are *raised* each day by the *exanastasis* life that is out-flowing from Christ's resurrection, through which we are able to express the sonship works of obedience from the Father that Jesus learned and finished for us.

When we live this way, we have received and joined the sign of the Son of Man. Significantly, *we have this sign within us!* The apostle John described the sign of the Son of Man as 'the witness of water, blood and Spirit'. He wrote in his first letter, 'This is He who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth'. 1Jn 5:6. Furthermore, John wrote, 'If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God *has the witness in himself.*' 1Jn 5:9-10.

A son of God who is embracing their daily participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ has the witness in himself. That is, they will be manifesting the sign of the Son of Man in their own mortal body. In the time of the end, it will be a great company of sons of God, manifesting the sign of the Son of Man in their mortality, who will overcome Satan in heavenly places. Describing this great multitude of

sons of God, the apostle John wrote, 'And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death'. Rev 12:11.

When we embrace our participation in the seven wounding events of Christ, we manifest the witness of blood, and we overcome Satan by *the blood of the Lamb*. When we are obedient to the word of the Father, which defines our sanctification as a son of God, we manifest *the witness of water* and overcome Satan by the word of our testimony. When we are enabled by the Holy Spirit, with the capacity of Eternal Spirit, to make offering for the purpose of revealing another, we manifest *the witness of the Spirit* and overcome Satan by 'loving not our life to the death'.

As we noted earlier, his daily participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ was the whole focus of Paul's life and ministry. It was his desire to express the sign of the Son of Man by knowing Him and the power of His resurrection, embracing the fellowship of His sufferings, and being conformed to His death as the means of attaining to *exanastasis*, or resurrection life in his mortal body. Php 3:10-11. Paul became a great light to the Gentiles as he expressed the sign of the Son of Man, which is the sign of Jonah. Act 13:47. Isa 42:6. This must become our desire as well.

The sign of Jonah is now in the heavens where Christ sits. It will be activated when the Lamb, the Lion of Judah, stands to rule from heaven over Earth, through His administration. This will happen after the Father takes His seat to be the God of all the families on Earth. At this time, the sign of the Son of Man, which is the sign of Jonah, will be given to all the nations. In this regard, we can liken 'the 144 000' to Jonah when he went preaching judgement to Nineveh. Like Jonah, the 144 000 will go forth in the world proclaiming the judgement of God upon all nations. They are the rider of the white horse, or messenger administration, under the direction of the twenty-four elders who sit upon thrones. These are the thrones of the house of David, which have been set for judgement. Psa 122:5.

## Escaping deception

Receiving and joining the sign of Jonah, which is the sign of the Son of Man, is necessary for our salvation and for our participation as a firstfruits company in the proclamation of the gospel of God to the whole world. However, it is also the means by which we are preserved from deception. Having established that the sign of the Son of Man is the only

sign that would be given to the world following His resurrection, Jesus warned the disciples, saying, 'If anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or "There!" do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show *great signs and wonders to deceive*, if possible, even the elect.' Mat 24:23-24.

The only sign that accompanies the declaration of the gospel in our day, and in the time of the end, is the sign of Jonah – it is the manifestation of the sons of God who are living by resurrection life in their mortal body, through fellowship in Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Any other sign is a deception, and accompanies the proclamation of false gospels by false prophets.

We will be vulnerable to deception if we are unwilling to walk by the Spirit in the light of the word that illuminates the pathway of travail that Christ has pioneered for us. Exhorting us to sobriety and to walk on this path, James wrote, 'But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, *deceiving yourselves*. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, *this one will be blessed in what he does*.' Jas 1:22-25. That is, they will receive and live by the blessing of God's life through the power of the Spirit.



## Article 2

# Continuing on the pathway of salvation

*Michael Fox*

The Scriptures declare that our predestination is to be born of God's divine nature and to be brought to glory as sons of God and sons of men in the image and likeness of God. Currently, the Spirit is illuminating to us the waypoints of salvation by which God is bringing many sons to glory. For instance, we are coming to understand the truth about new birth, baptism, and regeneration. The encouragement in this article is that, as sons of God who have *experienced* the various waypoints of salvation, we are to *continue to walk in them*.

Many of us were born to believing parents and therefore, from the point of conception in our mother's womb, became 'partakers of the divine nature', which is the life of God. 2Pe 1:4. We were born of God and baptised into Christ before we were even capable of choosing it. Growing through our childhood and teenage years is a time of maturing, which involves our progressively choosing what we have already received and learned. As adults, you are free to *choose* whether you will be the son

whom God has predestined you to be – and you are also personally *accountable* for your choice. The Holy Spirit, who is within you, is urging you to choose your sonship! Don't be vague about it. It is important to understand exactly *what* you are choosing.

Regardless of how and when we were born as a son of God, we will arrive at the hope of becoming man in the image and likeness of God if we *continue on the pathway of salvation*. The waypoints of salvation that the Scriptures identify do not describe 'the rungs of a ladder' that a person is to 'climb' in order to prove their position as a Christian. Rather, these waypoints are living foundations which define our ongoing desire and expression as a son of God. Consider the ministry of the Spirit of grace and supplication; loving Christ and keeping His commandments; and the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father', to name a few. We can appreciate that these expressions of salvation, which we have *already* experienced, will have a *growing and increasing* expression in our life as a son of God.

This growing expression of salvation is not because of the choices of our family; the responses that we have made in the past; nor our own determination to continue forward. It is on account of the *faith* that we receive by hearing the word of Christ. The righteousness of God, which is the expression of our sonship, is revealed *from faith to faith*.

Rom 1:16-17. Faith is the motivation and capacity to walk on the pathway of salvation each day. It is on this journey that we are being transformed into the image of the Son, from one degree of glory to another, by the Spirit. Our culture as a new creation is to see and know, by illumination, that all things have become new; not only due to an initial experience at a point in time, but every day! 2Co 5:17.

As a new-creation son of God who is walking on the pathway of salvation, we deliberately 'put away childish things'. This includes the way in which we speak; how we set our mind; and how we reckon ourself to be alive to God each day. 1Co 13:11. God's initiative of salvation toward us defines what the maturing expression of a son of God will look like. We will now consider some of these expressions in which we are growing.

## The Spirit of grace and supplication

The gospel of God is proclaimed by the Holy Spirit, through the ministry of Christ's messengers. It is accompanied by the Spirit of grace and supplication. God's grace is prevenient, meaning that it is ministered in advance of a person's need. Initially, the prevenient grace of God draws

back any influence that may impede the hearer's capacity to choose the call of sonship that God is offering to them as the word is being proclaimed. These influences may include, for example, sin and its consequences in their lives, their personal histories and traditions, lusts, bondages, addictions, hurts, anger, depression, protective reflexes, demonic oppression, and even their 'other law'.

The hearer demonstrates that they have not resisted the prevenient grace of God when they see the redemption that Christ accomplished for them, while they were dead in trespasses and sins. By grace, they are enabled to *look on Christ* whom they have pierced through their sin, seeing that Jesus died with them under the resulting condemnation. Zec 12:10. Through supplication, enabled by the Spirit, they begin to mourn with godly sorrow, leading to their works of repentance. 2Co 7:10.

Importantly for us, once we have been made alive and are born as new creation sons of God, the Lord *continues* to minister His grace to us. 1Th 1:1. Joh 1:16. This grace is also prevenient for it proceeds from God according to His initiative and purpose for us, not according to our own perception of our needs. Through the faith that we receive by hearing the word, we come boldly to the throne of grace, by the Spirit, in prayer. Rom 10:17. Heb 4:16. By grace, through the Spirit, we can *look to Jesus*, who is the author and finisher of our faith. Heb 12:2. The mercy and grace that we obtain yokes us to Christ in the fellowship of His dying and living so that we can put sin and its passions to death. And much more than this, because we are yoked to Christ, we can walk forward, fulfilling the *obedience* that belongs to our sonship, by His life. This is the effect of the 'grace of life' which is building us up according to our sanctification. Act 20:32-32.

Consider what this means for you as you continue on the pathway of salvation. You might not come to church every Sunday needing deliverance from an addiction such as smoking. However, there will be issues that impede your response to God's word, and your ability to walk with Christ each day, fulfilling the works of obedience that He has already finished for you. It may be relational upsets, such as carrying an offence toward the person who is a messenger of God's word to you. It may be past hurts – a comment that someone made about you to which you maintain the demeanour of a victim. Or, it may be habitual reactions to the difficulties of life such as anger and frustration which you can't 'shake' through natural determination. It could simply be an issue of

low self-esteem. Perhaps you are experiencing spiritual oppression because of uncleanness.

God doesn't ask us to diagnose our impediments. His initiative is to deliver us from the things which we don't even know are hindering us, and to enable us to walk forward in the obedience of our sonship. The important thing is that as He ministers His grace to us, we don't resist Him. Heb 3:7-8. Rather, in humility, we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus so that we can journey with Him in obedience to the Father's will for our lives. 1Pe 5:5. Jam 4:5. Heb 12:2.

### The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption in our heart

As a son of God, the Holy Spirit is dwelling with us and in us as 'the Spirit of adoption'. Rom 8:15. This means that *every time* that we hear and receive God's word spoken through His messengers, the Holy Spirit, who is with us, will be convicting us of sin, righteousness and judgement. Joh 16:7-11. Essentially, He says to us, 'Do you want to lay hold of this aspect of your sonship expression that you are hearing today? It is not yet true in you, but it can be!' As we say, 'Yes', to the Holy Spirit, He gives to us the faith to believe this word. And because He is in our spirit, we are enabled by the Spirit of adoption to cry out to God as our Father in relation to the things about which He has spoken to us. Rom 8:15. By this faith, we can let go of the fleshly attitudes and behaviours that are being addressed by God, and we can take the steps of obedience that He is asking us to walk in. Consider how the Holy Spirit is convicting you to grow in the expression of your sonship in areas such as trust, love, and obedience.

Because we are a son of God by adoption, we rejoice with *exceeding joy*. We rejoice, believing in the love of the Father toward us as His son; and, because we love God as our Father. This joy continues to grow within us as we embrace the mindset and conduct of a new-born son of God. Of course, we will encounter trials and tribulations – be it our own sin, a challenging relationship, or persecution on account of our choice to live as a son of God in the world. And while we accept that we often respond poorly in the face of these difficulties, there is no need for us to 'prove' our sonship through constant self-analysis regarding our failures and shortfalls.

Our crying out, 'Abba, Father', by the Holy Spirit within us will be evident in our life through our expression of *devotion* to God through prayer and worship. Jesus said that to know God is eternal life. Joh 17:3. He wasn't



speaking about merely accepting God's existence as a sovereign Being. He meant *relating to God* as our Father and worshipping Him by obeying His will for our life. Joh 4:23-24. This first involves listening to our heavenly Father in prayer, so that we can receive His will as the focus for our life. Each day, the Holy Spirit motivates us to seek God, to press on to know Him more, and to participate in the prayer discussion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Having received the Holy Spirit as our Helper we are able to live our life as a spiritual person. We yield to the Spirit in relation to the initiatives and decisions that we are required to make each day. Walking spiritually is extremely different from reacting to our circumstances according to our flesh. It requires a deliberate decision to set our mind on the Spirit and to obey Him as He leads us in a particular direction. Gal 5:24-25.

### **Being transformed through regeneration**

At the point of new birth, the Holy Spirit causes the unique seed of a person's name and life as a son of God to germinate in their spirit. Their spirit is reborn, and Christ becomes their life, making them a new creation. The Father baptises them by one Spirit into Christ and sets them as a member of the corporate body of Christ as He pleases. 1Co 12:13,18. They are then invited to be baptised by water into the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, wherein they are being saved through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. Tit 3:5. This process of regeneration includes the removal of the stones of law and the thorns of alternative priorities, through the circumcision of Christ.

This is important because, as the parable of the sower teaches us, the seed of new creation will die unless the heart of a son of God is changed through this process of the regeneration of their humanity. Mat 13:19-22. However, just as importantly, the opposite is also true. If, by the Spirit, we walk in faith each day with Christ, nothing can stop the incorruptible seed of our name and life from growing as a plant to full maturity and bearing good fruit. The water of God's word that we receive supports and promotes this growth.

Through the regeneration of our humanity and the growth of the divine nature in our heart, our entire person - body, soul, and spirit - is progressively transformed into the glory of our predestined sonship. Rom 12:2. The way in which we think will change. The way in which we speak will change. The way in which we set our mind each day will

progressively shift, so that we walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. Rom 8:1.

Consider, for example, our transformation from selfishness. Instead of anxiously attempting to prove to ourself and to those around us that we are performing well as a Christian, the transformative power of the life of God growing within us means that our focus shifts, from ourself, to revealing Christ. We reveal Christ through obedience to the word that we are hearing, which is expressed by serving those in our family, those in our local congregations, and those with whom we interact in the world. We will be genuinely interested in the welfare of others, expressing friendship and care toward them.

As a further illustration, consider a young person who is immobilised in their expression when they visit the home of another family, being unable to join the preparation of the meal in the kitchen or perhaps withdrawing from conversing with someone who is a different age or gender from them. They are not free in the expression of their sonship; they are in bondage to fear. They might feel a certain level of nervousness about 'getting it right'. They may even have felt like a bit of a fool in the past when they did have a go! The growth of the divine nature within us means that we become less concerned about how we are perceived by others, and we grow in confidence to express ourselves by faith. It is in these basic realities of relating that our progressive transformation into the image of the Son will be evident. 2Co 3:18.

God performs this work of transformation as we cherish and care for the life of God that is growing within us. Our focus is on receiving the word of God and then obeying the direction of the Holy Spirit, who is leading us through the circumstances of each day. Col 3:16. Our carnal attitudes and our immaturities don't change merely because we are aware of them, but they certainly will change as we walk according to the Spirit. Walking according to the Spirit means embracing our unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and suffering journey for us. We walk confidently each day, believing that God is regenerating our spirit and is transforming us through the renewing of our mind. Rom 12:1-2.

## Conclusion

Our ongoing participation in the waypoints of salvation is an entirely *personal* experience. God is acutely interested in you as an individual. His complete offering for you and His detailed care extended to you through the gospel is the manifestation of His great love for you. It is also the

evidence of His commitment to ensuring that you arrive at the full expression of your predestined sonship.

While we rejoice that the gospel is a personal experience, we also appreciate that this does not mean that God intends for us to become *self-absorbed*. In fact, the outcome of growing into the name and expression of our own sanctification is that our attention is directed toward the sanctification and edification of others.

God's love toward us and within us enables us to participate in the gospel of sonship being outworked in our family; from house to house in our local congregation; and also in the world as we interact with our neighbours and friends. This is a wonderful and joyful participation that we have with the Lord as we continue on the pathway of salvation!



## Article 3

# Our maturing participation in *agape* fellowship as we overcome

*Richie Kaa*

Every individual and household who are permitted to enter the Father's *agape* meal will have begun their journey with a 'worthy' response. A person and a household demonstrate that they are worthy of the kingdom by their hospitable reception to the messengers of Christ and to their message, demonstrated by their obedience and ongoing desire for fellowship. However, it is helpful to acknowledge a distinction between worthy and firstfruits houses, noting that firstfruit houses emerge from worthy homes.

Firstfruits homes are established in their *sanctification*. Not only have they overcome the spirit of the world and its influence but, also, they have been set apart to their works of ministry, and have matured in their expression. As such, firstfruits households are those which exemplify the

sanctified culture of the kingdom of God, and who also foster and promote this culture. This is precisely how a presbytery is established. Every presbyter will first be found as a worthy householder who then grows up to become a firstfruits believer. Their authority and capacity to care for the flock as part of the fellowship of the presbytery is according to this mature and proven new-creation reality. Accordingly, the most fundamental trait of a presbyter is that of '*firstfruits*'. This means that the culture of the kingdom, which is revealed through the gospel, is evident in their life and in their family, and as they meet others in a house-to-house context.

'Firstfruits' also describes those who are numbered among 'the 144 000', who we can think of as being the *early figs* (i.e. *firstfruits*) in the time of the end. Rev 14:1,3. They are the generation of worthy homes who become the firstfruits of the true Israel of God who will carry the first phase of the evangelistic mandate to gather the great harvest from every nation. The simple point is that those who are prepared to serve the Lord in the time of the end (i.e. both the presbytery and the 144 000) will be overcomers and firstfruits believers who have matured in their specific expression and works according to their sanctification.

According to this pattern, every son of God can choose to proceed from expressing a worthy response to demonstrating an age-appropriate firstfruits expression as they apply themselves to mature in their participation in each season of life. This article is, then, focused on the young adult season of life and the growing burden to be established in their sanctified participation.

There are particular waypoints in each season of life for a son of God. In his first epistle, the apostle John identified three cohorts and addressed them relative to their season-appropriate preoccupation. He first addressed '*children*' (new converts) who are rightly focused on forgiveness of their sins because of Jesus and then on knowing the Father as His new-born sons. He then addressed *fathers* who, appropriate to their maturity, are characterised by a deeper knowing of Him who is from the beginning (acknowledging that His identity pre-existed His birth). Concerning young men, he noted three defining features: 'You are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one'. 1Jn 2:14. Importantly, John was not making an aspirational statement but, rather, proclaimed an established reality concerning young believers who had come of age.

To 'overcome the wicked one' is part of a worthy response in the young adult season of life. In fact, Jesus said that access to the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God is contingent upon a person being an overcomer. In this respect, a worthy home is an overcoming home. And the evidence of overcoming is a worthy, or sanctified, participation in *agape* fellowship. A person will grow and mature in their effective and authentic expression only as they abide in *agape* fellowship as an overcomer. Rev 2:7. Being established to accountably participate in all four dimensions of *agape* fellowship, as well as fostering and guarding fellowship, is central to the work of the church, the bride of Christ. The four dimensions of *agape* fellowship, which we shall consider later in this article, are the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers.

As a young person enters the adult season of life, they will first choose to put off the self-absorbed mindset of a child, or an immature one. Paul lamented the carnality of the Corinthians as it prevented him from feeding them solid food. 1Co 3:1-2. However, as a young adult chooses to mature, they will be renewed in relation to how they speak, understand, and think, and, like Jacob in the midst of his wrestle, they will begin to enquire of the Lord and ask, 'What is Your name?' Gen 32:29. An overcomer will learn to lose their life for the sake of Christ and will thus find their life. That is, they will learn to prefer their brethren, and will grow in their accountability to contribute as a member of the bride as their primary motivation. As such, they will be focused upon bringing forth and nurturing the sons of God by their unique and sanctified participation.

### **'You are strong'**

Before we consider the three distinct elements of overcoming as recorded in Revelation Chapter 12, we will first consider the related characteristics of the overcoming young man. The term '*strong*' conveys a military sense, referencing the necessary conflict that must be engaged with a real enemy if victory is to be claimed. That is, they understand the need to contend, or to wage warfare, against the evil one and the spirit of the world – a key weapon in the Devil's arsenal. When Joshua addressed the captains of the men at war during their miraculous defeat of the five opposing kings, he addressed their demeanour, saying, 'Do not be fearful or discouraged, but be strong and courageous, for thus the Lord will do to all your enemies who you fight.' Jos 10:25. He was affirming the certain victory that God's people can know when they put off fear and are

obedient to His word, including the need to stand firm despite the tribulation and persecution that the word may invite.

It's unlikely that John employed the word 'strong' as an obvious reference to the natural season in which one would expect to be in their physical, intellectual and emotional prime. In fact, the opposite is true. John conveyed the reality that a son of God must move from confidence in their natural strength or capacity, to be entirely converted to the strength that God supplies. 1Pe 4:11. Isaiah recorded that 'youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall' while ever they refuse to understand how to be properly strengthened. Isa 40:30. 'But those who wait on the Lord [or look eagerly to Him] shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up [arise or ascend] with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.' Isa 40:31. Isaiah confirmed that 'He gives power to the weak [the fatigued and exhausted], and to *those who have* no might, He increases strength'. Isa 40:29. Those who are 'without might' are described as being a non-entity, as if they do not exist; bereft of substance or expression. However, as a son of God learns to wait upon the Lord, they will know the equipping by the anointing of the sevenfold Spirit of God to be strengthened in the power of His might, so that they are confident to contend according to their sanctified expression.

The apostle Paul reminded Timothy of the effect of God's anointing, noting that God had not given him 'a spirit of fear or timidity but of power, love and a sound mind'. 2Ti 1:7. This is the demeanour that Jude stirred among his brethren when he rallied them to 'contend earnestly for the faith'. Jud 1:3. It's what Paul provoked when he instructed the brethren in Ephesus to 'be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, putting on the whole armour of God'. Eph 6:10-20. 1Ti 6:12.

### **'The word of God abides in you'**

The second characteristic of overcoming is *the word of God abiding in them*. Every aspect concerning our sanctification, which is the will of God for us, is achieved only when we abide in Christ, and His word abides in us. From this basis, Jesus instructed us regarding how we should make our requests, declaring, 'If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you [granting to us faith for our obedience], then you will ask what you desire [we will be joined to Their covenant purpose], and it shall be done for you.' Joh 15:7. *Faith* is the secret of our strength and the source of our victory. Jude confirmed this, writing, 'encouraging the beloved to build



themselves up in their most holy faith by praying in the Holy Spirit'.  
Jud 1:20.

There is another kind of 'asking' that is described by the apostle James who wrote, 'You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures'. Jas 4:3. Those who remain carnal will never overcome, because their friendship with the world makes them an enemy of God. However, when we abide in Christ and His word abides in us, His desire (to make man in Their image and according to Their likeness) becomes our desire, which becomes our personal prayer and key to how we overcome the evil one and the temptation of the world. In this regard, the apostle John wrote, 'If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we already possess what we have asked of Him.' 1Jn 5:14-15. By this means, the Father is glorified, because our requests are according to our sanctification, which leads to the bearing of much fruit; the demonstration that we are His disciples. Joh 5:6-14.

We overcome because we are strong, and we are strong because we have received faith for our obedience because the word of God is abiding in our heart. While ever we trust in the Lord and not in ourselves, we will continue to know victory (overcoming) throughout this life until the final victory is proclaimed.

## Overcoming the love of the world

A household that is found to be 'worthy' isn't only being set apart from the world but is, also, being set apart to their sanctified ministry and care toward other houses. This is because they have overcome all that is under the rulership of Satan, both in their own lives and in their household, and also in the church. As we stand strong (no longer fearful, but willing to contend) and enabled by faith (which John nominated as being the victory that has overcome the world), then our faith to overcome will be expressed as a threefold participation - by the blood of the Lamb; by the word of their testimony; and by not loving their lives to the death. Rev 12:11.

### *1. By the blood of the Lamb*

'Overcoming by the blood of the Lamb' refers to the specific application of each of the seven wounding events of Christ's offering journey to a person's life, both individually and as a household. A worthy household has an ongoing participation in the offering journey of Christ,

learning the lessons that belong to each wounding event as it circumcises and regenerates our heart from all carnality (addressing both the stony and thorny ground). We are being trained as we receive faith to embrace our circumstances, no longer despising the chastening which is delivering us from every other propensity and reflex to source life another way for ourself.

## 2. *By the word of their testimony*

‘Overcoming by the word of their testimony’ describes the response of those who have acquired oil for their lamp (illumination) and oil for their vessel (obedience). They are no longer satisfied with only the illumination that comes from the word of present truth but, also, are compelled to know how they must *act upon the word in obedience*. This is evident, first, by their turning in *repentance* from their former ways, and then *walking in faith obedience* to the new way, producing substantial change. As they receive faith for their obedience, they are delivered from the ‘valleys’ (i.e. the limitations and inhibitions that they have placed upon themselves), as well as the ‘mountains’ (i.e. the projections and overstatements) that belong to their fallen self-image.

## 3. *Laying down their lives to the death*

‘Overcoming by laying our lives down to the death’ refers to the nature of a person’s offering in relation to their service and ministry as an individual member of the body of Christ, and as *families* who are part of the bride of Christ. This will incorporate a vast array of activities that remain fundamentally focused upon our serving the needs of our brethren.

A worthy, overcoming young adult who is emerging as *firstfruits* is able to facilitate and to promote this *agape* meal as a cultural expression in the community of the church. The elements that belong to the love feast of the Father’s house are readily apparent in the Scriptures. Identifying these foundations, Luke wrote, ‘And they continued steadfastly in the *apostles’ doctrine* and *fellowship*, in the *breaking of bread*, and in *prayers*’. Act 2:42. Let us now briefly summarise these elements.

## Four dimensions of *agape* fellowship

### *The apostles' doctrine*

Every young adult receives the apostles' doctrine as they receive the word of present truth that is preached from the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit through messengers who belong to the fellowship of a presbytery. Importantly, it is their response to the word that is key. A worthy response to the word is demonstrated as the Spirit illuminates them to the conviction of sin, righteousness and judgement. As they turn in repentance, and receive faith for their obedience, they continue on the journey of reformation in their own life, marriage (or marriageability) and family. They will also be motivated by the Spirit to reveal and multiply this word through their unique expression as a son of God and a member of the body of Christ. This may be through a specific ministry initiative; by speaking 'edification, exhortation and comfort'; or by sharing testimony. 1Co 14:3.

### *Fellowship*

Every young adult will also grow in their awareness of the needs in the church and in their faith initiative to meet these needs. These will become evident as they abide in 'fellowship as a foundation of the *agape* meal'. This is the demonstration of worship and is the opportunity to make offering in the community of the church, and from house to house. We are not scripted to these works; neither are we compelled by some unspoken expectation but, in freedom, we can initiate. Rather than using our freedom (and our free time) as an opportunity to be fleshly, we are instead *exhorted 'to serve one another in love'*. Gal 5:13. This service is fundamental to our worshipping the Father 'in Spirit and in truth'. Joh 4:23-24. This serving will include the opportunity to practically pour out ourselves upon the sacrifice and service of others, so that their offering will ascend as a pleasing aroma before the Lord, from house to house. Php 2:17-18.

### *Breaking of bread*

Every young adult can also grow in 'the breaking of bread' as expressed through hospitality. The sharing of a meal together is sanctified as our participation in the love feast of the Father, *by the word of God and prayer*. 1Ti 4:5. This is an opportunity to testify and share with one another from the word of present truth, refreshing one another and encouraging each other to love and good works. Heb 10:24. We have a

participation together in this meal because we have been born of God, and are placed in the community of the church by being made a member of the body of Christ.

Our prayer to the Father is 'Give us this day our daily bread.' Mat 6:11. This is the word of Christ revealing to us our participation in the will of God, which Jesus has already finished for us. Joh 4:34. Jesus is the Bread which came down from heaven, and He gives to us 'His flesh to eat' and 'His blood to drink'. Joh 6:51,56. This is the fruit of the tree of life that has been given to us from the Father for our *agape* meal. As we receive and walk in this word, we are not only 'the bread and the cup' to one another; also, we are able to feed one another from the fruit that we bear in Christ. This is what it means to be 'called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified'. Isa 61:3.

### *Prayer*

Every young adult must grow to understand that the primary purpose of prayer is to join the conversation within the fellowship of Yahweh *Elohim* concerning Their covenant purpose (i.e. to make man in Their image and according to Their likeness). The Holy Spirit is the source and capacity of prayer, and enables us to join this intercession and travail. In this respect, our reference point of prayer must not be ourselves but, rather, must be the Spirit. Accordingly, any other approach to prayer is not prayer at all. Thankfully, 'the Spirit helps in our weaknesses, for we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes *intercession* for us with *groanings* [i.e. travail] which cannot be uttered'. Rom 8:26.

At this time, we are learning that our first point of participation in the intercession and travail of prayer, by the Spirit, is in 'the secret place of the ladder', which is a corporate expression. Gen 28:17. Psalms 27:4-5. Song 2:14. This expression belongs to those who are being built on Christ as part of His body, the church, by hearing, receiving, and walking in the light of the word that proceeds from His face through the ministry of His *aggelos* messengers. If this corporate fellowship of prayer is not our first orientation and participation, our individual prayer will be ineffectual.

## Article 4

# Your vessel under pressure – the normal Christian life

Tim Maurice

*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. 2Co 4:7-12.*

Here is the apostle Paul's description of the normal Christian life. Paul uses two elements to describe who we are – the treasure of the divine nature, and the earthen vessel of our humanity. These, he tells us, are brought under the pressures of life as part of our chastening as sons of God. This chastening comes from our heavenly Father so that we can bear fruit.

The pressure can produce fruit in us because of the miracle of the offering of Christ. When a person is joined in fellowship with Jesus (to the finished work of His offering), the suffering and pressure that they experience as a son of man will cause the seed of the divine nature to bear fruit for God. Instead of destroying them, this pressure results in life. The person finds life because they have willingly chosen to be joined to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is the forerunner of our total life experience, and He has walked out all of our days fruitfully.

Therefore, we are not to be discouraged when we encounter the trials of life. Discouragement takes place within our soul, which is the seat of our emotions and intellect. When we are discouraged, it is because our soul is responding adversely to the pressure that our vessel is experiencing. Our soul responds in this way when we allow it to 'cleave to the dust' instead of setting our mind upon the things above. Psa 119:25. Col 3:2.

Unless we exercise faith, our default is to cleave to the dust, because this is our 'natural' state. Gen 3:19. It is natural, but unhelpful, for us to ask why we are suffering, and to look for a quick way out. This is what every person does before they know that they can call upon the name of the Lord. However, we do know that we can call upon the name of the Lord! As such, we need to be encouraged not to draw back in unbelief when trials come, and to accept the chastening hand of the Father upon our lives.

### **Do not despise the chastening of the Lord**

What do we mean by this? In the book of Hebrews we are commanded not to *despise* the chastening of the Lord. This command is essential if we are to enter God's rest for our soul. That is to say, we can only find rest for our soul as we embrace *obedience* under the pressure that chastening brings to our vessel. Our obedience is His yoke. It is the obedience He learned for us. He gives us His peace, as we obey. Over time, we also find a peace and rest, which is the fruit of regeneration.

*Regeneration* is the ministry of recovery to our whole person – body, soul and spirit – which we receive as we choose to walk by the Spirit. In practice, this means that Christ is our life: if we set our minds on His obedience, He gives us His faith. It is helpful to learn that *we should not try hard to work out our own obedience*. This is very self-focused. *Instead, we set our minds on the obedience of Christ; on His finished work*. We consider *Him*.

As we receive the faith He then ministers to us, we can be strengthened daily by the life that is in His blood. His blood contains the *zoe* life of God, and it is made available to us as we abide in fellowship with Jesus under the pressure of our personal chastening as sons. His blood is sprinkled on us, as we join Him in His wounding. The life in His blood is renewing us. So we need to be very clear and comfortable with the fact that our vessel, our 'dirt', the whole structure of who we are, is going to come under pressure; and, moreover, that this pressure is allowed by the Father.

For instance, we are going to be 'hard-pressed on every side'. This sounds very uncomfortable, and I'm sure we can all relate to feeling pressure from every side of life. The temptation when we are hard-pressed is to conclude that we are being 'crushed' by our what is happening. When we feel this way, we need to look at Jesus who was also hard-pressed on His offering journey, but was never crushed by it. And in fact, He experienced this particular pressure personally, for you, without being crushed by it. Not a single bone of His was broken. We can therefore also endure as He teaches us how to walk through this particular pressure.

We will be 'perplexed' because we simply don't know why something is happening, or because we are under a degree of mental and emotional stress. The apostle Paul himself was perplexed by the backsliding of the Galatians; and this sense of 'not knowing' must have come upon him many times. Being perplexed is normal, but we must resist the temptation to slide into despair. Despair comes upon us when we let go of Christ as the hope of our sonship. In so doing, we also push away the Holy Spirit who has already given us the *guarantee of this hope*. So when we are perplexed, we must learn to rest in hope like Jesus.

We will also be 'persecuted' – often by our own mind, but also by people who oppose us, sometimes by those closest to us, and certainly by Satan. The temptation when this happens is to become pathetic – to retreat into an imagined victimhood, in which we inhabit the central role of some grand conspiracy against us. To add to this problem, we are often not immediately conscious of the fact that we are thinking like a victim.

In such cases, we use words like 'nobody' and 'everybody' in relation to our circumstances ('nobody cares, and everybody is against me') and we declare ourselves to be *forsaken*. Which means of course, that 'everybody' includes the Lord, who clearly has it in for us! We must not do this. These thoughts are not *the truth*. We must learn to turn things around. The truth is that nobody wants to hear your complaint.

Furthermore, everybody is actually for you. We all need to cut out the 'forsaken' routine.

We will be struck down by all manner of forces in life – illness, disability, shocks, enemies, disappointments, and so on. These too are normal. What shouldn't become normal is declaring in such moments that we are being 'destroyed' by what is happening. On the contrary, the only things being destroyed are those which can be shaken; in other words, those which are built upon sand. Heb 12:27-28. Mat 7:26-27. When we are struck down, we are being taught to be built upon Christ, the Rock. He is our sure foundation.

We must also remember that this chastening is for our good. The Father's intention in chastening us is that we would be conformed to the image of His Son. As we have mentioned already, the means that He uses is the *life* that is in Christ's blood, which is able to quicken our body and regenerate our mind and heart. He does this as we believe His word, which commands us to lay down our life *with Christ*. As we obey this command by faith, and abide in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, the blood that fell on Christ is falling on us, and we are aided and strengthened by the Holy Spirit to stand up alive from the dead.

### Not despising our birthright

As we learn not to despise the Lord's chastening, we are also learning not to despise our birthright – the right to become a son of God. This is a right that we have by faith. The apostle John described our birthright in the following way.

*'He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.'*  
Joh 1:10-13.

We have the right to become a specific, specially named, son of the Father. However, the *right* to become a son is not the same as *actually becoming one*. It is possible to despise or disregard this amazing privilege. We can see what this looks like in the life of Esau. Esau despised his birthright and gave it away. It meant nothing to him until he realised, too late, that it had lasting value. You have been born of God, and *your sonship is now your birthright*.



This leads us back to the issue of chastening, because your birthright as a son can only be made *legitimate* through receiving the Father's discipline. We despise the birthright of sonship when we despise the loving actions of our heavenly Father toward us. When the Father treats us as a son, it can be tempting for us to complain about His treatment of us. This is how we can despise the Father's chastening, and even accuse Him of not loving us.

*'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.'* Heb 12:5-8.

Let's unpack this. Christ was chastened on our behalf through His seven wounding experiences. He did not require chastening because of sin. He had no sin! However, it was necessary for Him to endure chastening *for us*, so that we could become partakers of His faith and overcomers. He learned obedience through the things that He suffered, gaining the knowledge of our sanctification so that He could justify each of us.

We certainly require chastening. But let's be clear: chastening is not punishment for our sin. The punishment for our sin was laid upon Christ as the scapegoat. It is finished. The chastening of the Father is now toward the *new creation* life in us. If chastening were simply punishment, we would fear the Lord without reverence or love. We would simply be terrified of Him. However, there is no fear of punishment in *agape* love. Perfect (*agape*) love casts out fear. 1Jn 4:18. Chastening is not punishment for missing the mark. Chastening is *training*. We are being trained as we join Christ's travail for us and abide by faith with and in Him.

## The conditions of sonship

God has placed *conditions* upon our eternal participation as sons in Zion, the heavenly city. These conditions are summed up by Jesus in His analogy of a king with an army of ten thousand men, who is opposed by another king backed by a force twice that size. If he is wise, the king with the smaller army will ask his more powerful adversary the conditions of peace. These conditions are simple: forsake everything to serve the more powerful king. Luke 14:31-33. This is the bottom line of our surrender to Christ. He is our King.

Esau is an example of someone who could not accept that there ought to be any such conditions. This was because he had his own understanding of what justice meant for him, and he was unwilling to have his justice taken from him. Act 8:33. Justice for him meant, in the final analysis, that he should be given what he wanted. What he wanted was the reinstatement of the birthright that he had given away, as well as receiving the blessing of the firstborn that was stolen from him. He wanted all of this, without first finding repentance. Esau sought status for the sake of an image projection which he refused to relinquish.

Esau refused to be accountable for despising his birthright. He did not see that he should be held responsible for his own choice. He believed that other people were to blame for his depression and rage. Esau fell prey to a doctrine of 'unconditional love'. He believed that he should receive God's favour without coming to any personal accountability.

Every false gospel has 'unconditional love' as an essential doctrine or part of its culture. For example, a Calvinist believes that only those whom God chooses will inherit salvation. Independently of any fruit which they may or may not bear in their lives, Calvinists believe that a person can be part of the elect unconditionally.

Another more popular view is that God's love in Christ is so 'great' that He is very tolerant of sin and transgression. According to this view, so long as people make some attempt to attend church or 'to be a Christian' of some sort, then God's 'unconditional love' will ensure that they are saved. In fact, even if people make no attempt to be a Christian, unconditional love finds a way to offer them forgiveness on God's behalf, extending even to absolution and salvation.

Unconditional love is a doctrine of Satan's devising. It takes hold of a wonderful truth, – the great love of God – and turns it into an implacable tyrant. Satan attempts to enslave whole congregations to the service of unconditional love. The spirit of Jezebel, for example, is fuelled by unconditional love. Every offended person believes that they deserve unconditional love; and every person who feels that they have been treated unjustly believes in unconditional love. At its base level, unconditional love opposes all forms of suffering, and insists that human empathy is a higher form of love than *agape*.

Unconditional love creates *entitlement* and *victimhood*. People feel *entitled* to receive unconditional acceptance of every form of corruption on their own terms. They become *victims* when their projections are not

well received. Such people become like Cain who, at the crucial point of being rejected, had the opportunity to overcome his sense of entitlement. He could have done so by heeding the voice of the Lord and obeying it. This is a lesson which we must all learn when we face disappointment. We do not have to be like Cain. Even when sin is crouched at the door of our heart, the Lord has given us the means to master it.

### Putting off complaint

The point of all of this is that the strongest attacks that come against you are those which cause you to become discouraged, downcast in spirit, judgemental about yourself or others. In other words, when you become sad, angry, and are carrying a grievance. This is when you will be most vulnerable to Satan's temptation.

When we are like this, the first thing we are tempted to do is to complain. We need to understand complaint, because the Lord rates it very highly among the things that He hates. The Lord slew a whole generation of Israelites in the wilderness because of their complaining! He said of this generation that He 'loathed' them or was 'disgusted with' them. And of Esau, He said, 'Esau I have hated.' Rom 9:13.

God hates complaint because it is a rejection of His love. A person who complains, places themselves above God and everyone else, believing that the demand of their downcast soul should be answered as a matter of everyone else's priority. In doing so, they place themselves beyond the reach of Christ's finished work at Calvary, like the thief upon the cross who abused Jesus. Their complaint is an accusation against God's justice. They do not see that they must give an account to the Lord. On the contrary, they are convinced that others (including God) must render an account to *them*!

The choice to accept the chastening of the Lord involves an additional choice, which is to despise the shame of the cross. The cross is *the testimony of our Lord*. We must exercise ourselves not to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. 2 Ti 1:8. We encounter His testimony when we choose, at the point of suffering, to abide in the fellowship of *His* offering and sufferings.

The carnal man, by contrast, is ashamed of the necessity of joining this experience, and complains about it. Like the thief on the cross, the carnal man accuses Jesus, for putting him in a painful and shameful situation.

He also demands to be relieved of the pressure and indignity of his condition, while also casting doubt upon Jesus' testimony about Himself.

This is how Satan works against us. He attempts to provoke *shame* in the sons of God through *accusation*. He casts doubt upon our authenticity as sons of God and then asks us to prove otherwise by taking some kind of action. This is a temptation which we must all resist. Jesus Himself showed us how. When Satan said, 'If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread', Jesus did not accept the presumption which was built into the temptation. Mat 4:3-4.

The presumption that Satan attempts to normalise is that, when we are suffering, *there is something outside of the Father's provision for us that we should be able to do* to improve our circumstances. Satan tries to rob our faith, and to stop us from resting in hope. He presents himself as a false comforter, saying, 'You have a need. If you were a good son of God, and if the Father were a good father, then you would feel happier than you do. So why don't you do something about it? Take hold of the situation. You can't really trust what God has said to you.'

This, of course, is a monstrous *lie*. Mercifully, Jesus Christ has already overcome Satan. We can resist the false comfort of unconditional love and learn instead not to despise the Father's chastening. We can love our birthright and rest in fellowship with Jesus our High Priest. When our vessel is under pressure, we can be confident that He will minister life to us as we abide with Him in His baptism. We now overcome Satan through all *patience*, as we learn to rest in hope. James 5:11.

## Article 5

# Obtaining understanding

*Tim Maurice*

The book of Proverbs encourages us to obtain wisdom. But it says that we must do more than that. In the getting of wisdom, we must also get *understanding*. Pro 4:5-7. Col 1:9. Understanding is what differentiates the fool and the wise man; the wicked and the righteous; the one who inherits salvation and the one who does not.

Now, understanding is more than *illumination*. When we hear the word proclaimed, we are (or we should be) illuminated because 'the entrance of Your word [the word of the Lord] brings light'. Psa 119:130. As sons of God, we can easily be fooled into believing that our enthusiastic hearing of the word equates to understanding.

However, the difference between illumination and understanding is very significant. As necessary as illumination is, the experience of it does not establish godly character within us. What it does do, is to *light us up in our spirit*. It helps us to *see* what we previously could not see; it lights our path so that we can proceed in faith; it causes us to see with clarity what our repentance is; and so on.

Understanding is established in us through travail. What do we mean by this?

The word that illuminates our spirit always comes with a command, and that command is always to lay down our life with Christ. In other words, the word of our obedience is only active when it takes us on the journey of a seed. It is not enough to *receive* precious seed into our heart (illumination): our heart (with the seed in it) must undergo a process of death, burial and resurrection. This is travail. A seed cannot become a plant unless it is – well, *planted*. A plant grows because its seed first went into the ground to die.

The fruit of our travail is the peaceable fruit of righteousness (the peace that Christ won for us through *His* chastening). Heb 12:11. Christ was the first new creation son of God to be trained by the Father's chastening love. It was not only Christ's Spirit which underwent this training – it was His whole Person – body, soul and Spirit. Jesus was subjected to the extremity of physical and emotional pressure on His offering journey.

The miracle of His overcoming is that He was able, as a mortal man, to bring forth the peaceable fruit of God's righteousness under this extreme pressure. He was able to do this through the fellowship of Eternal Spirit and by the capacity of *exanastasis*, such that He suffered no broken bones nor any damage to His inner man (to His soul and Spirit). Heb 9:14. Joh 19:36. On the contrary, He came to full fruit. As such, He is able to sympathise with us as we face the pressures of our life, while also ministering to us the life in His blood by which we are regenerated and recovered to the image of God, just as He was, having been made sin for us.

We all need to know how to join the offering of Christ so that we too, can be regenerated. The sign of Jonah is seen in a person who has gone on the journey of a seed through death, burial and resurrection. The phase which we often overlook is *burial*. This is the time – three days and three nights – that the Son of Man spent 'in the heart of the earth'. The point here, is that the death of Christ is both the pressure of suffering and the experience of burial. We can think of burial as the testing of our faith through a defined period of time (a season), before we see fruitfulness. It is through joining Christ in His burial that that a son of God learns to *rest in hope*. Psa 16:9. Act 2:26.

By way of practical example, we might be experiencing a very difficult situation with our health or in our workplace. We have received a word,

for example, that we must be patient or that we must be kind, which runs against the grain of our desire. As we give ourselves to continuing to believe the Lord that He is with us and cry out to Him for the thing He wants to teach us – patience, kindness – He also teaches us how to respond, in *particular* situations during the period of trial. We are learning His obedience – His response. He gives us His capacity. And the comfort of His fellowship.

When we have begun to live this way, we will also begin to obtain understanding. This is not only because we have received spiritual insight. It is also because godly character is being established in us. Godly character grows in us as we are delivered from our own understanding – our darkness – and are increasingly able to walk in the light with our brethren. In this way, the love of God is multiplied in us and through us.

### Delivered from our own understanding

Our own understanding is formed from our private perceptions of life. From the youngest age, we are trained to judge the world through our *senses*. The wisdom that we obtain about the world in this way is called ‘earthly’ and ‘sensual’ in the Scriptures. Jas 3:15. Earthly wisdom gives us information when we are children such as what things are harmful to touch or what tastes pleasant. As we grow older, the nature of this ‘wisdom’ changes. We apply it to learning how to make friends, in how we aim for success, the rewards that we seek and the painful experiences that we avoid, what we value, and the development of our social coping mechanisms.

As a result, you can see that unless our senses become *servants* of our sonship obedience, they will eventually usurp the wisdom of God. As a result, our soul will cleave to the dust. Psa 119:25. The ‘dust’ is the dirt and ground of our own understanding and emotions. As a result, we will learn the habit of judging only by what our natural eyes see. As a result, we will grow spiritually blind.

Fortunately, we are able to escape living this way. In the scripture which follows on immediately from the one above, Isaiah said this about Jesus:

‘His delight is in the fear of the LORD,  
And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes,  
*Nor decide by the hearing of His ears.*’ Isa 11:3.

When Christ is our life, we do not need to judge *anything* by the sight of our eyes. There are many, many things about which we do not need to have an opinion or view. We learn that true understanding comes as we continue to obey the Lord. Our obedience is demonstrated by our maturity, in that we choose to stay connected in fellowship with Jesus, on the offering journey that He experienced for us, and now walks out with us. This is where we are, by degrees, being glorified with Him. This glorification is recognised through the sign of Jonah. At the end of the age, there will be an in-flesh manifestation of *zoe* life among a company of sons of God. That is amazing! Rom 8:17-22.

A spiritual man or woman does not judge themselves, or other people, events or the word, by the sight of their own eyes. Instead, they delight in the fear of the Lord. There is much to be understood in this simple statement. The context of this scripture is that the Son of Man will delight Himself in the fear of the Lord because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him. It is the same for us. We cannot simply *think* fearfully or reverently about God. We must receive the *anointing* of the sevenfold Spirit of the Lord. Luk 4:18.

We receive this anointing in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings – in seven wounds. This fellowship is the travail which is our chastening as a son of God. As we accept this chastening, we learn the obedience of Christ; we gain the knowledge by which Christ justified us. In this way, righteousness is credited to us, and we understand the way that we should live as a son of God.

One of the reasons Jesus came, was to give us understanding:

'And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.' 1Jn 5:20.

This understanding is the knowledge of Him who is true – Jesus Christ. This is an echo of the apostle Paul's expression 'that I may know Him, the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings'. Php 3:10. Knowing Christ is the basis of our understanding.

This is very helpful, because it delivers us from the pressure of the carnal tendency of trying very hard to comprehend the word that we hear. We understand the 'word', as we come to know Him who is the Word. His words are spirit and life. The interpretation of words does not lead us any closer to knowing our Lord. *It is only by having fellowship with Him –*



in prayer, in serving, in loving our brethren, in believing His word – that we can come to know Him.

## The defaults of cynicism and naivety

The book of Proverbs describes two default carnal tendencies of the human heart that war against true understanding. Both of these are very unhelpful. These are *cynicism* and *naivety*.

The *naive* person embraces what their eyes see as reality – or ‘all that there is’. They assume that their personal reality is ‘what reality is’. They are lazy, and they take no steps to understand the world around them in a meaningful way.

The *cynical* person sees the folly of this position and presumes to stand outside ‘what is going on’. They place themselves above the naive person, believing in the superiority of their mind.

In both cases, the result is that people end up ‘leaning on their own understanding’.

When we lean upon our own understanding, we are captive to the darkness that is in our own heart. And as if that were not bad enough, we have another default within us. Without illumination, we will go on loving the darkness. *That is to say, we fall in love with our own deception.* We believe that our darkness is light and understanding.

This is one of the lessons of the apostle Peter. Jesus tried to tell him that he was deceived, but Peter really believed in the way he saw the world. He thought that what his own perceptions told him was true. We are accustomed to living like this until we have learned what it means to be chastened by the Father.

Without a point of deliverance like Peter’s, we will continue to value and lean upon *our own understanding*. This is not just a problem because it is wrong – it is a problem because our own understanding *deceives* us. If the spiritual life were as simple as knowing what was wrong, and then making the appropriate adjustment, our own understanding would not pose such a great threat to us. All we would ever need would be clear explanations of the word.

But this is not the issue. The impact of the Fall is that men believe the lie that was fathered in them by Satan; they believe in their ability to comprehend life and the world around them. This is actually a form

of madness. We are seeing in the world at large that the disconnect from God does not merely produce more sin; its end point is total folly and madness. The light of God is going to shine all the more brightly in contrast to the darkness around us. You are a light who can shine in this wicked generation.

As we receive the capacity of Eternal Spirit under the pressure of suffering, we are granted the ability to comprehend ourselves and our circumstances. When we talk about Eternal Spirit, we are referring to the sevenfold Spirit of the Lord.

'There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,  
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,  
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The Spirit of counsel and might,  
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.' Isa 11:1-2.

The same Spirit which rested upon Christ can rest upon us! We do not become wiser by piling up more information: we become wiser as we are trained as a sons, in the offering of Christ. So learn how to walk in the light of Christ's understanding with your brethren!

### The proving of the word

The Scriptures teach us that 'the entrance of Your word brings light'. Psa 119:130. In other words, it is not hard to receive illumination if one is listening to the word and believing it. But this on its own is not understanding. *The word must test a person.* This is what the psalmist wrote about Joseph. The prophetic word concerning Joseph had to bring him under the necessary pressure for that word to be proven true in him.

'He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food;  
and he sent a man before them—  
Joseph, sold as a slave.  
They bruised his feet with shackles,  
his neck was put in irons,  
till what he foretold came to pass,  
till the word of the LORD proved him true.  
The king sent and released him,  
the ruler of peoples set him free.  
He made him master of his household,

ruler over all he possessed,  
to instruct his princes as he pleased  
and teach his elders wisdom.’ Psa 105:16-22.

Joseph could not rule over Pharaoh’s dominions, instruct princes and teach elders wisdom until the word of the Lord had brought forth its fruit, which is *understanding*. Understanding is not only a form of insight: it is also the evidence of the Father’s chastening and the fruit of godly character.

A son of God obtains wisdom because the truth is no longer a *concept* which they believe: it has become *substantial* in them. The peaceable fruit of righteousness is made manifest through understanding.

Like Christ, Joseph had to go ‘into the heart of the earth’. Mat 12:40. In the first instance, this was a literal hole in the ground where he was left to die. After that, he was thrown into an Egyptian prison, from which he could have had no expectation of ever being released. He was ‘dead’. And yet, through this experience, the word of the Lord proved him true! Not only was Joseph released from bondage, he became the most powerful man in Egypt after the Pharaoh. In this way, *Joseph demonstrates to us what it means to rest in hope*. Psa 16:9. In so doing, he became a sign and a wonder to all the nations.

This is going to be true for each one of us. *We must learn how to enter the rest of Christ while we are under pressure*. Every person in the world experiences what is generally called ‘pressure’. This takes place principally in a person’s soul. Each of us needs to find rest for our soul if we are to experience the ministry of oil to our vessel. When a person finds rest for their soul, it is evident that they are receiving grace from the Lord toward the works of their sonship. To say it another way, we find rest when we believe the word of our obedience as a son.

As such, we can rest in hope, even if we are stuck in a hole in the ground like Joseph – suffering under an unreasonable boss at work or suffering some other kind of difficulty. This is how we come to terms with being buried like a seed. This is worth mentioning as we finish.

Most of us are happy to contemplate dying some kind of ‘death’, if it means that we get to experience the benefit of resurrection life. The pay-off seems to be worth the pain. However, where we all run into trouble is in participating in the experience of being *buried* with Him, *and then having to wait*. Remember that this is an essential part of the journey of the seed. It must go into the ground and die if it is to

bear fruit. This 'going into the ground' part of things sounds rather unpleasant; and who knows how long you will have to spend 'buried'?

Well, the answer is - 'three days and three nights'. This was Jesus' description of His burial, something that He shared in common with the prophet Jonah. For Jonah, the time of his 'burial' was literally three days and three nights; for Joseph, it was a period of years.

The Son of Man not only suffered the pains of eternal death; He also gave up His soul to death. He had to wait for the resurrection. Of course, Jesus was confident of the outcome. How could He not be? But what about you? Are you confident that the Lord will be faithful to complete His word in you, after the measured time of your suffering? Php 1:6. 1Pe 5:10.

This is the lesson that we are all learning in this season. As it was with Joseph, there are seasons of the word coming to pass in our lives. We must learn to endure between the declaration of the word - at a point of illumination - and that word coming to fruition. And even when we have seen fruit come, the Lord will always prune us back again in preparation for the next season. Remember, He has the long game in view - your full adoption as a son of God. Can you also keep that in view, even if for a little while you have to go through trials which are difficult? The answer is - yes you can, by the grace of God!

## Article 6

# Positive identity verification

*Lachlan Perrin*

### Jesus Christ is in you

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers with great earnestness and excitement, reminding them that they had been *born* of the life of God and that Christ was alive and dwelling within them. He said, 'Examine yourselves! Or do you not recognise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ *is in you?*' 2Co 13:5. Even as you begin reading this article, pause, and be reminded that you have the eternal life of God dwelling within your mortal body! Elsewhere, Paul summarised the very gospel of God as 'Christ in you, the hope of glory'. Col 1:27. And his personal testimony was, 'I have been crucified with Christ; and *it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.' Gal 2:20.

As a born-again, new-creation son of God, our earthly pilgrimage is like Paul's, a daily fellowship in Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Through this participation, our human nature is being regenerated and made compatible with the divine nature that we have received. Our carnality is cursed and put to death with Christ, while our identity lives

on in fellowship with Christ and *by* Christ's life. In this way, our perspectives, responses and initiatives in life are progressively becoming motivated by Christ's resurrection life within us, not by the impulses of our flesh or by our carnal Christian efforts.

### Positive identity verification

Throughout the young adult season, it is vitally important for every Christian disciple to learn *how* to meet and know the Lord, personally. This is because knowing Christ is the basis for learning who God has named *you* to be. Joh 17:3. As you meet Christ eye to eye, the true image of your name is reflected to you from His face. 2Co 4:6. The first evidence that we are living by the initiative of Christ's life within us will be our desire to know the Lord; not a wanton desire to 'discover myself'. Unless we meet Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings each day, the carnal desire to 'find myself' will become a tormenting lifetime pursuit.

To alleviate this pressure, many Christians – both young and old – aberrate from the pathway of sonship that Christ has pioneered for them. They aberrate by pursuing the verification of their identity *apart* from fellowship with Christ. We have often referred to this kind of fleshly 'identity verification' in the negative. This is because initiatives of this nature have an eroding effect on a person's identity. Jer 2:5. They are not edifying at all. Carnal endeavours that a person might pursue to try to learn who they are can include:

- comparing themselves to others (copying or competing with)
- looking into the face of others ('marketing' projections to garner affirmation)
- 'cuddling' lameness and pleading disadvantage (if God *did* heal and regenerate me, I don't know who I would be)
- discovering self through excessive talking (Ecc 10:13-14)
- proving their own 'goodness' through counselling others or extending charity
- resisting help and, instead, being a benefactor
- fantasy, escapism
- immorality.

In this article, we are considering a *program of fellowship with Christ* that *does* enable a disciple to know the Lord and to know themselves. To that end, our goal is to answer King Solomon's question, 'Man's steps are ordained by the Lord, *how then can man understand his way?*' Pro 20:24. Wonderfully, there *is* positive identity verification that secures us in our predestined name and place of participation that God has prepared for us in the body of Christ. We *can* know whether we are living by the flesh or by the faith of the Son. We can prove that Christ is in us!

In relation to building ourselves up through positive identity verification, Paul wrote to the Colossians, saying, 'Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being *built up in Him* and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.' Col 2:6-7. Paul was saying that, having received the life of Christ, we ought to persevere and continue in fellowship with Him; pressing in to know Him and to be built up and established in our faith. He then continued by contrasting this participation with Christ, with negative identity verification. 'See to it that no-one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to *the traditions of men*, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.' Col 2:8.

We will now consider three dimensions of participation in fellowship with Christ: prayer, *agape* fellowship, and offering. Our accountable decision to participate in this 'program of identity verification' will enable us to continue to be *built up* and established in the knowledge of our name and sonship.

## Building ourselves up in prayer

Concerning prayer, we read in the book of Jude, 'But you, beloved, *building yourselves up on your most holy faith*, praying in the Holy Spirit'. Jud 1:20. Our 'most holy faith' is the faith of God the Father that we receive from the Son, through the ministry of the messengers whom He sends to proclaim His word. We journey from faith to faith, each day, by the capacity of the Holy Spirit. He dwells within us and convicts us concerning our faith obedience to the word of the Father that Christ ministers through the presbytery.

With this in mind, we recognise that prayer is not our opportunity to beseech God with 'vain repetitions' and the 'many words' of our mind-chatter. We are not communicating our ideas about who God is and what He is (or should be) doing; nor are we informing Him of our needs

(as though He doesn't know them). Mat 6:7. Importantly, if we are not enabled by the Holy Spirit to intercede and travail, our prayer will simply be a discharging of the matters that are troubling us. Instead, we demonstrate that we have received faith in the commandments of Christ by humbling ourselves and accountably choosing to pray in the Holy Spirit. We then travail in prayer regarding the knowledge of our sonship that Christ has ministered to us, about which the Holy Spirit has convicted us.

When we pray, we bring our mind into subjection to the Holy Spirit by persevering with 'groanings too deep for words'. Rom 8:26. By praying in the Holy Spirit, we take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. As we do so, we meet the Father face to face, through the Son. As we join Their prayer meeting, our most holy faith is confirmed to us by the Father, as we bear witness to the secret counsel of His will for our life. Psa 25:14. That is, we are built up in the knowledge of our name and in His will for our participation in the kingdom of God. We believe and see the daily works that Christ has already fulfilled for us, and we are built up in our most holy faith.

In this season, the Lord is speaking to us about our culture of personal prayer. We are being reminded of His commandment to *watch and pray with Him*. Mat 26:40-41. He is asking us, every morning, to 'seek *first* the kingdom of God [by praying *before* we become distracted with the practical demands of the day] and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you'. Mat 6:33. To 'seek His righteousness' is to travail in prayer until we appreciate the works that Christ has prepared and finished for us each day.

Wonderfully, by building ourself up in prayer, we learn what we are being sanctified *to* each day. As we are illuminated *to* our sanctification, we are delivered from a culture of prayer that is preoccupied with the fears and anxieties associated with our failing to remain sanctified. The focus of our mind shifts to the will of God, and to fulfilling it by the enabling of Christ's life within us.

### **Building ourselves up in fellowship**

The second dimension of fellowship with Christ to consider is our participation in *agape* fellowship. There is a positive confirmation of our name and works that is afforded to us by our brethren as they commend us to our obedience in Christ. This is not a character assessment or commendation based on our skills and capacities. Rather, it is a



commendation to the slavehood of our service and function, according to name, within the body of Christ. The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica about edifying one another in this way, saying, 'Therefore encourage one another and *build up one another*, just as you also are doing.' 1Th 5:11.

In the first case, Christ has appointed ascension-gift ministry graces within the presbytery 'for the *equipping of the saints* for the work of service, to the *building up* of the body of Christ'. Eph 4:12. Recognising the shepherding authority of a presbytery to call 'sheep' in their charge by name, Paul wrote to the Hebrews, 'Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.' Heb 13:17. Every disciple must learn how to present themselves for dialogue with those who are shepherding the church, entreating their commendation concerning the obedience of their sonship. Not heeding this instruction is 'unprofitable' because they deny Christ's messengers the opportunity to call them by name.

We observe this dimension of commendation to name, identity and works in the appointment of Barnabas and Saul, described in Acts Chapter 13. Barnabas and Saul were in the church at Antioch where there were *prophets and teachers*. Act 13:1. As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Act 13:2. 'Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.' Act 13:3. Through fellowship, Barnabas and Saul were commended to the works of their sonship.

Importantly, presenting ourselves for fellowship is our initiative to share and testify of the faith that we have received in the word. We are entreating confirmation and commendation, not asking for definition and prescription. In other words, we do not come with an empty 'identity wheelbarrow', asking someone to fill it with revelations about our name, prophecies about our place in the body of Christ, and a task-list of jobs that we can do around the church! We firstly present ourselves to the *word* of the presbytery. Then, in faith, we meet and speak with our brethren, trusting that fellowship will confirm our pathway forward in the Lord.

The grace of sonship life is also ministered and multiplied within every worthy household through the order of headship. Entreating *fellowship* for the edification of a young adult's identity begins in the home as they

ask their Christian parents for input and reflection regarding their name and works in Christ. The evidence that a young adult is growing in maturity will be their readiness to seek fellowship with their parents concerning the nature of their obedience to Christ. Eph 6:1-3.

Finally, *house to house* fellowship also provides an opportunity for young adults to 'lift their voice for understanding' and 'cry out for discernment' of their name. Pro 2:3. House to house *agape* fellowship can be a corporate mirror, reflecting, confirming and focusing the mind of Christ. We are reminded of Paul's words to the Ephesians, 'Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word as is good for edification* according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear'. Eph 4:29.

### Building ourselves up in offering

The third area of fellowship with Christ that we will consider is our participation in the fellowship of offering. With regard to learning and confirming our name, Jesus, Himself, said, 'Each tree is *known* by its own fruit.' Luk 6:44. This kind of 'knowing' was exemplified by the *practical* offering of Stephanas. Paul wrote to the Corinthians saying, 'Now I urge you, brethren (*you know* the household of Stephanas, that they were the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for *ministry to the saints*).' 1Co 16:15. Evidently, the practical areas of service and care offered by Stephanas and his household enabled the congregation in that region to bear witness to who God had named and called them to be within the body of Christ.

Over the recent season, the Lord has renewed our understanding of baptism. The first dimension of baptism involves God the Father, who has 'set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased'. 1Co 12:18. The key point to note is that every new-creation son of God has been appointed a *tangible* place within the body of Christ. God has carefully planted each member as He desired so that they can lay down their life, in offering, to bless and reveal the sonship of their brethren *in that place*.

Picking up this point, Paul reminded the Corinthians that every member of their congregation had a unique contribution to offer within the relational sphere of the church. The specific location where the Father had planted them was to be their altar of fellowship for offering. He said, 'When you assemble, *each one has* a psalm, has a teaching, has a

revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. *Let all things be done for edification.* 1Co 14:26.

Our participation in the fellowship of offering may involve vocal gifts like these; or our unique multiplication of the word through testimony; or our practical function within the service teams and administrations that facilitate the program of church meetings. Importantly, as we participate in the fellowship of offering, we can invite adjustment to the nature of our offering so that it is an acceptable expression of our name. We note that all offerings are laid down within a corporate priesthood. Lev 1:2-8.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, 'The whole body, being fitted and held together by what *every joint* supplies, according to the proper working of each *individual* part, causes the growth of the body for the *building up of itself in love*'. Eph 4:14. Note the difference between a 'joint' and an 'individual part'. Paul was highlighting how the fellowship of offering, which is motivated by the love of God, causes the edification of the body. The confluence of offering from *two* members (that is, a *joint*), through the acceptable offering of each individual, is a blessing that reveals and confirms the unique function of every member of Christ's body. Working alongside our brethren in a fellowship of offering is an 'iron sharpening iron' context where we grow in our understanding and appreciation of our name and the names of our brethren.

## Conclusion

We began this article with Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians. 'Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test?' 2Co 13:5. The apostle Paul was addressing this question to a community of believers who had terrible mixture and carnality within their congregation. Yet, despite these issues, Paul was reassuring the believers in Corinth that they *could know* and be *assured* that Christ was in them!

Perhaps the word has come to you in seasons past and you have been left feeling as though you still need to 'pass the test'. Be encouraged. The Lord is ministering faith to you in His word in this season so that you *can* recognise this about yourself – that Jesus Christ is in you! And, through a conscious and deliberate choice to participate in fellowship with Christ – through prayer, *agape* fellowship and offering – you can learn and confirm the knowledge of your name and works.



## Article 7

# Making disciples through baptism

*Joshua Hay*

### One baptism

Concluding his gospel account, Matthew recorded the words of Jesus as He commissioned His disciples for their ministry to the world. Having withdrawn to a particular mountain in Galilee, Jesus spoke to His disciples, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Mat 28:18-20.

Notably, Jesus instructed His followers to make disciples of all nations *through baptism*. As one who had himself received this commission, the apostle Peter described baptism as the process that saves us. He wrote, 'There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God),

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ'. 1Pe 3:21. This is a most significant statement. A person is saved as they participate in the baptism of Christ, which was made available to us through His resurrection from the dead. This resurrection is the hope in which we are saved. Paul established this point when he wrote concerning the redemption of our physical body. In his letter to the Romans, he declared, 'We also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope.' Rom 8:23-24.

Referring to the baptism 'which now saves us', Paul wrote, 'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.' Eph 4:4-6. We are understanding in this season that, although there is only one baptism, there are three distinct aspects, or dimensions, of baptism. It is through connection to these three dimensions of 'one baptism' that establishes a person as a disciple of Christ. These three dimensions are:

1. **Baptism by the Father** - This first aspect of baptism is associated with new birth and membership of the body of Christ. Through this dimension of baptism, a person is connected to the implication of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. In this regard, Paul declared, 'Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death?' Rom 6:3. This is before water baptism, and refers to a person who acknowledges that, though they were not one of God's people, they have become a son of God through the Father's initiative toward them in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. In this first dimension of baptism, a believer is baptised 'into Christ' *by the Father*, making them a member of Christ's body.
2. **Baptism into the regeneration work of Christ** - This dimension of baptism, which is by water, joins us to the pathway of salvation. This is baptism into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in order to 'walk in newness of life'. Rom 6:4. Paul referred to this dimension of baptism as the circumcision of Christ through which the 'body of the sins of the flesh' is put off. Col 2:11. Through this fellowship, a believer is connected to the regenerating work of Christ and is enabled to live by Christ's life within them. Jesus described this personal fellowship with Him by saying, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and

follow Me.' Luk 9:23. Through a believer's daily connection to Christ's offering journey, their inner man is being renewed, and they are being changed, from one degree of glory to another, into the image of Christ. 2Co 4:16. 2Co 3:18. Rom 8:29.

3. **Baptism in the Holy Spirit** – When a believer is baptised into the Holy Spirit by Christ, the Spirit Himself fills a believer full of the sevenfold Spirit of God. This immersion is indicated by the capacity to speak in tongues. The seven Spirits of God is the power to enable a person's journey on the pathway of salvation. Journeying with and in Christ, they are able to be His witness in the world. Act 1:8. That is, through the seven Spirits of God, they are able to proclaim the gospel and to support those who are responding to the gospel so that they are brought to birth as sons of God. Noting this implication of baptism by the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' Joh 7:38. It is the seven Spirits of God that flows out of the innermost being of a son of God as a river of living water.'

In summary, a person is first born of the divine nature as a son of God and then placed by the Father into the body of Christ, which is the church. 1Co 12:18. Col 1:24. Then, through baptism by water, a son of God is joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, where they are being progressively saved through regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. Tit 3:5. Through baptism by the Holy Spirit, a son of God is established as a witness of Christ as they continue to abide in the process through which they are being made into the image and likeness of God.

## Love your enemies

Love is the defining expression of Jesus' life. Joh 15:13-14. Highlighting this point, Jesus said, 'By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.' Joh 13:35. With this in view, our capacity to love others as Christ has loved us will be central to how we reveal Him as His witnesses. The apostle John emphasised the practical nature of our love for one another, writing, 'By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.' 1Jn 3:16-18. This practical expression of love towards our brothers and sisters in Christ is the evidence that we have been made

alive from the death of sin and have been born of the divine nature. In other words, 'we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren'. 1Jn 3:14. It is encouraging to realise that our efficacy as Christ's witnesses is not based upon the accuracy of our doctrine, or our proficiency in articulating theological concepts. Instead, as we simply abide in Christ, as a branch on the Vine, the love that God has for the whole world will be revealed in and through us. Joh 15:5.

Foreshadowing the great commission, Jesus taught His followers that they were not to simply love those who loved them. During His Sermon on the Mount, He declared, 'But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you ... For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?' Mat 5:44,46-47. Significantly, Jesus used the word *agapate* (the plural form of *agape*) to define how we are to relate to our enemies.

This raises the questions, 'Who are our enemies?' and 'How do we love them?' Paul identified 'enemies' as all those who are separated from God and who are dead in their trespasses and sins. Rom 5:10. Of course, in the first instance, this describes the entire human race on account of the Fall, for 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'. Rom 3:23. Paul further emphasised this point by comparing Adam's transgression with Christ's obedience. He wrote, 'Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and *thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*'. Rom 5:12.

It is as sinners and aliens from the life of God that we first encounter His love. Col 1:21. In this regard, Paul explained, 'For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' Rom 5:6-8. In this unassailable truth we can be confident, for 'if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.' Rom 5:10-11.

To understand how we love our enemies, it is helpful to consider that *agape* love is the *expression of the life of God* of which we were born



when we responded to the call of the gospel. Establishing this point, John wrote, 'Beloved, let us love one another, *for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God...* And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love.' 1Jn 4:7,16. In light of this, disciples of Christ are able to love (*agape*) their enemies because, as they abide in Christ, the life they are living is from the Father, in the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. This life is multiplied to, and from, them as they are 'carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus'. 2Co 4:10. In this regard, we understand that the fruit that we bear as branches on the Vine is not for ourselves but for others. Joh 15:5.

The love of God is expressed towards those around us by a capacity for care, kindness and compassion. It is notable that one of the primary criticisms of Jesus, by the religious elite, was that He was the 'friend of sinners'. Luk 7:34. In response to this criticism, Jesus said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.' Mat 9:12-13.

In addition to His command concerning love for our enemies, Jesus instructed His followers to 'pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you'. Mat 5:44. This statement focuses our attention on prayer as an essential element of the evangelistic work of a disciple. In the following section, we will consider the role of prayer in establishing others as disciples of Christ.

## The fellowship of prayer

The baptism of the Holy Spirit grants to us the capacity to pray, and to testify as a son of God. Through this initiative of Christ towards us, we are able to set our mind on the Spirit, and to be led by the Spirit in every setting of our life. Jesus was clear that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was 'power from on high' to be His witnesses. Act 1:8. To this end, those who are born again, baptised into the body of Christ, and joined to the fellowship of His regenerating work each day, are able, as part of a community of believers, to be fellow-workers with Christ.

As we have noted, our orientation as part of the community of Christ, which is the church, is to be His witnesses. Praying 'at all times in the Holy Spirit', we can be led in every circumstance to reveal the life of Christ as a testimony to others. Eph 6:18. When we are established as worthy, firstfruits Christians, our houses can be a context where others can be established in the way of salvation through the 'one baptism' that

we ourselves are walking in. That is, as disciples of Christ, we are able to establish others as His disciples, 'baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' Mat 28:19.

The fellowship of prayer is fundamental to our ministry as co-workers with Christ. We are approaching the time for the sons of God to receive and possess the kingdom of God on Earth. At this time, the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed in every place, and there will be a time of great revival that will sweep across the whole world. With this in view, the Lord is calling us to move beyond our familiar understanding of prayer, which has been largely self-focussed, and to be established in the conversation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit concerning Their will for every son of God. We join this conversation of prayer by the Holy Spirit. Rom 8:26.

In the publication *The Pathway of Our Pilgrimage*, we appreciated that the prayer of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit involved 'intercession and travail'. It is through these two dimensions of prayer that God's covenant purpose is accomplished. We have understood in recent years that the covenant purpose of the Father, Son and Spirit is that we would be born of Their life and brought to glory as a 'man' in Their image and according to Their likeness. Gen 1:26. It is remarkable to consider that when we pray in the Holy Spirit, we are participating in God's purpose being realised on Earth; we are connected to His work of bringing 'many sons to glory'. Heb 2:10. It has been confronting to realise that any prayer that is not connected to the intercession and travail of Yahweh *Elohim*, by the Holy Spirit, is not prayer at all.

### *Intercession*

Intercession is a *conversation* in prayer. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit's intercession articulates Their deep love, which is communicated in Their desire to make man in Their image and according to Their likeness. Gen 1:26. The word by which we are born again, and then brought to glory as a son of God, proceeds from this intercession. The apostle John exhorted us to understand, by illumination, the deep love that God expressed toward us by calling us to sonship in Christ. He wrote, 'Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!' 1Jn 3:1.

The love of God is the means by which we were brought forth, and by which we come to maturity through fellowship with Him. As disciples of Christ, we must be illuminated to understand how we participate in the

expression of His intercession through prayer, so that others might hear the call to sonship through the preaching of the gospel of God. This gospel is 'the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes'. Rom 1:16.

### *Travail*

In this season, we are rejoicing in the illumination of the Spirit concerning the travail of Christ through which the specific seed of each person's name and life as a son of God was brought forth. Importantly, this specific dimension of the Son's travail commenced in the garden of Gethsemane when He prayed, 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Your will be done.' Luk 22:42. Christ's entire journey was then an ongoing *travail in prayer* as He endured the seven wounding events of the cross by the power of Eternal Spirit from the Holy Spirit. Through this travail in prayer, the Father brought forth the name of every person's sonship as multiplied seed from Christ, who was falling into the ground and dying in each wounding event.

Through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, disciples receive the capacity to travail with Christ in prayer so that others can hear the word of the gospel and proceed forward to be born again as a son of God. Importantly, this capacity belongs to those who are part of the bride of Christ. This company of believers is able to travail in prayer, through fellowship in the seven wounds of Christ, to bring forth sons of God. This includes both godly children who are born in covenant houses, and people in the world who are born again through the ministry of a network of 'worthy houses'. The key point is that we do not fulfil the mandate to 'make disciples of all nations' through independent, self-defined ministry initiatives. To do so would be to deny the first implication of our baptism, which makes us members, in particular, of Christ's body, which is the church. The bride of Christ, which is an evangelistic community, emerges from the body of Christ as we continue to embrace the cleansing and purifying initiative of Christ towards us as individuals, families, and whole church communities. In this way, our evangelistic work as disciples of Christ is expressed as part of a community of worthy houses. Illustrating this point, Jesus taught, 'No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light.' Luk 11:33.



## Article 8

# Establishing Christian foundations for a worthy house

*Andrew Hay*

### Introduction

In this present season, the Lord is restoring ‘the ministry of Elijah’ to the presbyteries of lampstand churches so that each local congregation can be established as a network of worthy, firstfruits ‘houses’, or households. These churches are described in the Scriptures as ‘*elect ladies*’ because they are an expression of the bride city. 2Jn 1:1. Christ’s bride is the vessel of multiplication that brings forth spiritual children. These children include the godly sons and daughters who are born within covenant ‘houses’, as well as people from the world who are *born again* through the evangelistic ministry of these same houses.

This initiative from the Lord is a call to *sanctification*. The word of the Elijah ministry is coming to every person and every house, beseeching them to ‘walk worthy of their calling’. Eph 4:1. This message is imbued with the grace of Christ to enable each individual and household

to repent, turn and sanctify themselves to be a fruitful expression of the bride of Christ.

Regarding this message of sanctification, we have recently noted the example of Joshua, who was called as a messenger to 'Get up, sanctify the people, and say, "Sanctify yourselves".' Jos 7:13. Joshua's call to sanctification was reiterated when God gathered Israel together at Shechem to renew His covenant with them. Significantly, we note that even though Joshua was the one charged by God to bring the message, he was also the first to respond to it, declaring, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' Jos 24:15.

Unfortunately, the rest of Israel did not register the urgency of this day of visitation. They believed that they would continue to receive the Lord's favour simply because of their religious history. 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for the Lord our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed.' Jos 24:16-17.

Clearly, they failed to recognise that while the Lord had shepherded and protected them under the leadership of Joshua and Moses, He was now calling every individual house to be accountable to walk in covenant with Him. Rather than responding in mourning and repentance, the people determined to remain loyal to their religious ways and idolatrous practices.

Joshua rebuked Israel for their foolishness. 'You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good.' Jos 24:19.

Like Israel, the foolish virgins believed that their own supply was sufficient to keep their lamps burning. Evidently, they also dismissed their friends' repentant responses to purchase a double portion of oil for the bridegroom's arrival. Soberly, we recall that the master shut the door to the wedding feast and declared that he did not know the foolish virgins. Mat 25:12.

As we turn to the Lord in this season, let us consider three spiritual foundations upon which worthy houses are built.

## Headship

Joshua's declaration that he and his house would serve the Lord highlights the foremost foundation of Christian marriage – headship. In relation to the order of headship, Paul wrote that 'I want you to know that the Head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is man, and the Head of Christ is God'. 1Co 11:3. Paul was not saying that men are the heads of women. Rather, the apostle was identifying that Christ is the Head of *one woman*, the church.

This means that Christ is the Head of every worthy household. A Christian husband and wife are redefined through marriage and by grace to live and offer in one Spirit to the glory of God. As heirs together of the grace of life, their desire is to see the will of God done in their home so that His love becomes the expression of their fellowship together. Of course, a husband and wife do not cease to be individual sons when they marry. Rather, their personal prayer to the Father now includes a focus toward their marriage and house.

This was Abraham and Sarah's faith. Paul wrote, 'By faith he [Abraham] lived as a stranger in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking to the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.' Heb 11:9-11.

The example of Abraham and Sarah highlights the different expressions of a husband and wife in the order of headship. Through Christ's headship, Abraham received grace to teach his family to obey God's word and to live according to the culture of the heavenly city. Sarah, through faith, found grace to establish the community of Abraham's house. She conceived in old age and bore Isaac as the first son of God's promise to Abraham. Gen 13:16. Gen 15:5. Furthermore, Sarah brought peace and sanctification to her home when she, led by the Holy Spirit, entreated Abraham to cast out the bondwoman and her son.

So, we see that God intended that the agenda of a household would be given to the husband from Christ. Christ speaks to a household through the ministry of the word of present truth. The man 'opens the door' to Christ so that the word of the Lord defines the agenda, priority and conversation within his family. In this, he understands that the definition

of each person's expression as a son of God and a member of Christ comes to them from the Father, through the word of Christ, by the Spirit.

In the same way in which the church is Christ's bride and forms the community of His house, a godly wife is to be the community of her husband's house. Connected to, and drawn from, her husband, through marriage, the woman and the children she brings forth are a community that is able to express the unique culture of godliness that belongs to their home. As she remains joined to her husband in one Spirit, she is able to nurture and guide her children in the wisdom of motherhood that comes to her from Christ. Because she is the community of her husband's house, she does not lay claim to her husband's role as head by presuming to control or define the parameters of the family. A woman who is submitted to the lordship of Christ, and is enabled by the Spirit to be a comparable helper to her husband, 'calls her husband "lord" ' when she looks to him for the agenda of their house.

## Prayer

The members of a house that is established in the order of headship will fellowship with the Lord in prayer. In this, we are reminded that the Lord declared, 'I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.' Isa 56:7.

Meeting the Lord in His house of prayer will include each person's individual fellowship in the *inner room* with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; prayer together as husband and wife at the tree of life; prayer as a family unit if the house includes children; and corporate prayer as congregations gather each Friday morning and at the *agape* meal.

In this regard, we have recently understood that the first point of participation in the intercession and travail of prayer is in 'the secret place', which the Scriptures identify as being the tabernacle of God. This is 'the secret place of the ladder', which Jacob described as 'the house of God'. Gen 28:17. Psa 27:4-5. Son 2:14. Our corporate expression in prayer belongs to those who are being built on Christ as part of His body by hearing, receiving and walking in the light of the word that proceeds from Christ through His messengers. If this corporate fellowship of prayer is not our first priority and place of participation, our individual prayer will be ineffectual.



The individual relationship that a husband and wife have with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in personal prayer enables them to serve within their home in sanctification. The *inner room* is where a person learns the secret counsel of Yahweh *Elohim* concerning their daily works. Mat 6:6. This is also the context where faith to meet our spouse by offering is built up. Jude described this prayer, writing, 'But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life'. Jud 1:20-21.

Through the capacity of Their sevenfold Spirit, God tangibly enables the husband and wife to live in one Spirit together. As they meet in prayer at the tree of life, Christ enables the man to love and honour his wife, while the woman receives capacity to submit to her husband *as to Christ*. The apostle Peter wrote of this fellowship, noting that Sarah was enabled to obey Abraham, calling him 'lord'. 1Pe 3:6. He continued, writing, 'Husbands, likewise [in the same Spirit with their wife], dwell with them with understanding, giving honour to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, as heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered'. 1Pe 3:6-7. Significantly, we note that if husbands and wives do not meet and pray together, the reverse will be true. They will not find grace to live together in the order of headship life and, instead, will default to carnal mechanisms of trading and control.

## Hospitality and fellowship

The Scriptures teach that a worthy household is committed to fellowshiping with other households to receive and multiply the ministry of the word. This fellowship includes the *agape* meal and the myriad of interactions that we share from house to house. In this regard, Peter wrote, 'Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.' 1Pe 4:9-10.

The capacity for hospitality and fellowship is the fruit of love that flows from a worthy house. In this, we understand that the focus of Christian hospitality is not firstly in the physical meal but, rather, is in breaking the bread of life with one another. For a covenant house, hospitality skills are more aligned with practising open-hearted conversations of testimony and faith than with one's cooking abilities. As the wise man explained, 'Better a small serving of vegetables with love than a fattened calf with enmity.' Pro 15:17. Having said that, it is also important to honour one

another and the Lord in our care and preparation toward the meals we share.

Importantly, we also understand that true fellowship is possible only in the Holy Spirit. As we receive the word of life ministered by Christ through His messengers, the Spirit pours the love of God into our heart so that we can obey the word and lay down our life to reveal one another without comparison or partiality. Rom 5:5. We are enabled to be one Spirit with the Lord and with each other. 1Co 6:17. 1Co 12:13. When we presume to live as a Christian without a commitment to Christ's word, we are not 'discerning the body of Christ', and are in danger of forfeiting salvation itself. 1Co 11:29-30. 1Ti 1:19.

In relation to this, Jude explained that some within churches are *spots* on the *agape* meal because of their open rejection of the authority of the messenger word. Jud 1:12. Referring to these ones, Paul wrote, 'For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?' 2Co 6:14. The apostle's point is a simple one. It is impossible to fellowship with a person who is rejecting the faith and grace of the gospel because they are an unbeliever. Any interactions around the word will inevitably lead to reaction and argument, and Christ will be 'trampled'. Paul explained that an appropriate response is to separate ourselves from such as these. 2Co 6:17. In the first place, this will not be a provocative action. King David suggested that it is wise to keep silent in the presence of wicked people, while the apostle Paul suggested that believers simply avoid ones who are contentious. Psa 39:1. Rom 16:17.

Finally, on the subject of hospitality, we note that the book of Hebrews urges believers to 'show hospitality to strangers'. Heb 13:2. In fact, the book of Leviticus includes direct instruction from the Lord regarding His perspective toward the 'strangers' who are among us.

'The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.' Lev 19:34.

Clearly, the Lord is not calling us to start soup kitchens and food banks. Rather, Paul explained that a 'stranger' is one who is an 'alien' from God and from the covenant of promise. Many of our neighbours and friends with whom we work or study are strangers to the Lord. The cheerful hospitality of a worthy house is the evangelistic context in which God has chosen to reveal His love to the world.

## Conclusion

We understand that those who begin Christian courtship do so with more in view than their marriage. As ones who individually possess a remnant of the Spirit, their perspective will extend beyond themselves to their future 'house' within the bride city.

As sons of the Father, they are looking to God's capacity for them to be established in Christian marriage and to be built together as a unique household that is a blessing within the congregation of faith. In this, we remember the call of God to His people, 'Where is the house that you will build Me?' Isa 66:1.

A Christian man who is approaching marriage will propose such a house. He identifies that his house will be built upon Christ, and will ask for the woman's response. As he testifies to his mandate from the Lord, and testifies toward a cultural mode for their future, he invites the woman to join him in Christian marriage. The clarity of his proposal will enable the woman to make a final confession of submission, and to participate by faith, declaring, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' Psa 118:26.

On a couple's wedding day, the Lord makes them *one* as a new household and heirs together of the grace of life. In this joyful capacity of faith, they receive grace and understanding to establish the Christian foundations of their new household.