

The
Mystery
of
godliness

‘For since the creation of the world
His invisible attributes are clearly seen,
being understood by the things that are made,
even His eternal power and Godhead,
so that they are without excuse.’

Rom 1:20

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Section I

The grace of God that brings salvation

The Father revealed

- During 'the last Passover', Philip said to Jesus, 'Lord, show us the Father.' Joh 14:8. In response, Jesus said, 'Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. *Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me*, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.' Joh 14:10-11.
- Jesus' response revealed that Philip had not received Christ, the Word of God. This was evident because Philip had not received the faith that was necessary to believe and acknowledge what Jesus had revealed through His earthly ministry. Rom 10:17. 2Co 4:13. Philip had retained another belief system which hampered his capacity to hear and receive the ministry of Jesus.
- Consequently, Philip did not understand the essential message that Jesus had proclaimed, which was that He was in the Father, and the

Father was in Him. Christ's message was the revelation of Yahweh. That is, the Son had declared the Father through the capacity given to Him by the Holy Spirit. If Philip had been illuminated to the fellowship of Yahweh, he could have received and understood Yahweh's covenant purpose for him - that he should be called a son of God. 1Jn 3:1.

- Within Their own covenant fellowship, before the heavens and earth were created, Yahweh Father, Son and Holy Spirit determined together to create and bring to glory a multitude of sons of God in Their image and according to Their likeness. Gen 1:26. The sons of God would be born of Their life and would become participants in Their fellowship. This is God's 'Everlasting Covenant'.
- Each Person of the Godhead laid down Their life, by Eternal Spirit, to bring Their covenant purpose to pass. The Son emptied Himself to become the Father's Son, and the Holy Spirit laid down His life to become the Helper of the Father and of the Son. Php 2:6-7. Joh 14:16. The Father laid down His life by giving to the Son the fullness of His own expression as Father. Heb 1:3. Joh 16:15.
- Yahweh Son became the full expression of the Father when He was begotten as the Son of God by the word of the Father, who said, 'You are My Son, *today* I have begotten You.' Heb 1:5. This birthing action was by the Holy Spirit. Heb 3:7. When the Father said, '*Today* I have begotten You', the Holy Spirit, who had laid down His life to reveal the Father as the life of God, brought the Spirit of the Father to the identity of the Son, causing Him to be born anew as the Son of God. Joh 6:63.
- The portion of the Father's Spirit, which the Son received through the Holy Spirit, is the seed and names of every son of God who would ever be brought to birth through the gospel. By this begetting action, the Son became the Word and Seed of the Father. Joh 1:1,14. Furthermore, having received the fullness of the Spirit, the heavenly body of the Son became the heavenly temple, which is composed of living stones. 2Co 6:16. Eph 2:21-22. 1Pe 2:5. These living stones are the sons whom the Father has named in the Son.
- As we will consider later in these notes, the fellowship of Yahweh, and Their Everlasting Covenant, is the focal point of the gospel. Jesus implored Philip to believe this message; or to believe the works that revealed this message. The apostle Paul explained that the work of

creation revealed the Godhead and Their covenant initiative towards man, writing, 'For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.' Rom 1:20. Because of this, no-one has an excuse for not believing and receiving the 'so great salvation' which was first announced by the Lord and confirmed by His witnesses. Heb 2:3.

The creation and fall of the first man

- When Yahweh Son was begotten by the Father as the Son of God, the beginning of the creation was established. Making this point, the apostle John said, 'He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.' Joh 1:2-3. The order of headship through which Yahweh Son was begotten as the Son of God was the order through which the heavens and the earth were created. To this end, we note Paul's teaching. 'There is only one God, the Father, *from whom* are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *by whom* are all things, and we exist through Him.' 1Co 8:6.
- On the sixth day of creation, the Lord God formed man's flesh from the dust of the earth and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils. By this means, man became a *living soul*. Gen 2:7. This was the first stage of man's creation in the image and likeness of God. Gen 1:27. The 'first man' was an eternal identity in a mortal body, but he had not yet received his name as a son of God, which had been predestined for him in the Son, before creation. According to the covenant plan of Yahweh, the sons and daughters of men were to receive their name and life as sons of God through the process of new birth, after the Son became flesh and gave His life for them.
- The capacity to multiply the identities of the sons of men was not possible until God created a helper comparable to Adam. Gen 2:18. The Lord God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep. He removed a rib from Adam's side, and with it He made woman. Gen 2:21-22. From Adam and Eve, through the biological process of procreation, all the identities named by the Father, in the Son, come into being. The identity of a person is from the Father and has its origin in creation, but they are not created as a son of God. Every person must be born again by the word of God to become the son whom the Father predestined them to be. Joh 3:5-7.

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- Mankind fell from this predestination when Adam disobeyed God and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Gen 2:16-17. Gen 3:6. They ate of this fruit, endeavouring to become the source of their own life and expression apart from the fellowship of Yahweh. Gen 3:5-6. Consequently, all of mankind was lost to God. Furthermore, 'the other law' was established in the hearts of Adam and Eve, and in every son and daughter of man who would be born after them. Rom 7:23. They were now dead in trespasses and sins, and were in bondage to Satan through the fear of death. Eph 2:1-3. Heb 2:14-15.
- Inherent in the offering of the Son and the Holy Spirit, within the covenant of Yahweh, was Their desire to recover the sons and daughters of men back to the Father. Luk 19:10. In response to Their offering, the Father sent His only begotten Son into the world so that through Him we might be recovered to the life of sonship that He predestined for us. 1Jn 4:9. 2Co 5:21. Rom 8:29. Joh 3:16-17.
- Through Christ's death on the cross, the whole world was reconciled to God. Now, when a person receives the gospel that is proclaimed from the cross, they are able to be saved by His life through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Rom 5:10. 2Co 3:6. That is, a hearer can be born of God and joined to the fellowship of Yahweh as a member of the body of Christ. Let us now consider the steps of this 'so great salvation'. Heb 2:3.

The message

- The word is the beginning of God's covenant initiative towards us. Notably, the apostle John opened his Gospel account by writing, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. Joh 1:1.
- Christ is the Word of the Father. Joh 1:1. He is, then, the Messenger of God the Father. Mal 3:1. The truth of His message is first made known in the creation. We note, for example, the words of King David who wrote, 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge.' Psa 19:1-2. As we have already noted, Paul also explained that, since the creation, the eternal power of God and the fellowship of Yahweh have been clearly seen, and can be understood, by the things that are made. Rom 1:20.

- Adam was created by God to be lord over creation. As Adam joined the fellowship of Yahweh's offering at the tree of life, each day, he was learning how to multiply the life of God by offering. The creation was then sustained by the life that Adam multiplied and ministered to it through this process. Gen 1:26-28. As Adam participated in this work, he was learning God's covenant purpose.
- The second element of the message that brings salvation is 'the secret of the Lord'. Psa 25:14. This is the Eternal Covenant purpose of the Father for mankind, which He has made known through the Son. God's purpose for the sons and daughters of men is their predestination to be born again of His life, and then to be joined to the fellowship of Yahweh. The nature of Yahweh's fellowship to which man is invited is called, in Scripture, 'the mystery of God'. Col 2:2.
- The mystery of God is revealed and appropriated through the word of the cross. The word of the cross joins a hearer to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, where they can obtain the inheritance of their sonship. This was predestined for them according to the kind intention of God's will. Eph 1:9-11. As we will consider in the next section, the stewardship of this mystery has been committed to messengers whom Christ sends into the world to proclaim the word of the cross.
- The mystery of God is revealed by God's messengers as Christ is publicly portrayed as crucified through their fellowship in His offering and sufferings. Gal 3:1. 2Co 1:3-7. For this reason, Paul testified that he rejoiced in his sufferings for his hearers, and he filled up what was lacking in the afflictions of Christ in order that the mystery of God might be revealed to, and fulfilled in, his hearers. Col 1:24-27.
- The love of God is the motive for this mystery. Revealing this great truth, the apostle John wrote, 'Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!' 1Jn 3:1. By love, and through the word of His grace, the Father draws a hearer near, saying, 'Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.' Jer 31:3. He does this so that they might be born again and become the son whom He predestined them to be.
- The love of God activates the faith that a person receives by hearing the gospel. By this means, they are able to respond in *obedience* to His

call. Gal 5:6. This faith is proclaimed by the messenger as a word. Rom 10:14-17. The word of faith, along with the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, who is sent from heaven and works with the messenger, prepares the ground of a hearer's heart to receive Christ, who is the Seed of the Father. 1Pe 1:12. This is the work of Christ's messengers who are sent before His face in the spirit and power of Elijah.

A messenger sent before Christ's face

- Because of the fall of man, Jesus Christ sends a ministry of restoration before His own face to prepare the hearts of those to whom He comes. He does this so that they are ready to receive Him and His message when He personally makes Himself known to them. Mal 3:1. Isa 40:3-5. Importantly, unless a hearer receives those whom Christ sends to them, they will be unable to receive Christ. Luk 16:31.
- John the Baptist exemplified this messenger ministry. Jesus said of him, 'And if you are willing to receive it, *he is Elijah* who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!' Mat 11:14-15. Of course, John the Baptist was not literally Elijah; nor was he a reincarnation of the prophet. Rather, John ministered 'in the spirit and power of Elijah'. Luk 1:17. By hearing John's message, the hearts of fathers could be *turned* to their children, and the disobedient could be *turned* to the wisdom of the just. Luk 1:17.
- This was a restorative ministry of *repentance* so that the hearts of those with an ear to hear would be prepared to receive Christ, the Messenger. Through His message they would receive the adoption, and be born again as sons of God. Mat 3:2,11. Act 19:4. The messengers who are sent before the face of Christ function by the spirit of grace and supplication. This is, in fact, the capacity of the spirit and power of Elijah! Grace gives to people the capacity to supplicate (to pray) and to find repentance; and to find recovery to God's covenant purpose.
- The grace that is ministered to a hearer through the spirit and power of Elijah is 'prevenient'. It is given by God as a gift *before* the hearer asks for it or recognises their need for it, so that they can repent and find salvation. Tit 2:11. Under the influence of the spirit of grace and supplication, a hearer is relieved of the factors that would otherwise affect their capacity to hear and choose the call of sonship that is contained in the gospel. These influences may include, for example,

the other law, sin, previous experiences, cultures and traditions, addictions, and even demonic oppression. This reprieve is an extension of God's mercy to the hearer.

- In His letters to the seven churches, Jesus likened the ministry of Elijah to 'the morning star'. Rev 2:28. The mandate for this ministry belongs to those followers of Christ who turn and receive the word that is ministered through the ascension gift graces of Christ in the presbytery and in the church. The ministry of this particular message is described in the Scriptures as 'the day of visitation' and 'times of refreshing from the Lord'. 1Pe 2:12. Act 3:19. Receiving this word, and joining the fellowship that it establishes, enables a person to participate in the messenger administration that ministers in the spirit and power that motivated Elijah.
- Jesus foreshadowed this ministry when He sent out the seventy messengers before Him. The Gospel of Luke recorded, 'After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two *before His face* into every city and place where *He Himself was about to go.*' Luk 10:1. Significantly, every person who is born of God and is joined to the fellowship of the presbytery has a participation in the ministry of Elijah, particularly from house to house. Act 2:46-47.
- In this regard, we note that Jesus described John the Baptist as being the greatest man who had been born of a woman, because he had been sent to prepare the way before Christ, who became flesh and dwelt among men. However, Jesus then said, 'But he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.' Mat 11:11. Jesus said this because those who enter the kingdom of heaven are born of God and are joined to the fellowship of His body. From the least to the greatest, the sons of God are able to bear *witness* to Christ as those who themselves have received the inheritance of sonship that only He brings. Heb 8:11.
- A messenger is a witness of the things to which they have been illuminated and have been established in; and of the things that Christ, by the Spirit, continues to reveal to them as the proceeding word of God. Act 1:8. Act 26:16. This is because the messengers of God are established in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. In word and conduct, they exemplify the culture of godliness that is characteristic of the fellowship of Yahweh. For this reason, through their ministry, Christ is publicly portrayed as crucified among their hearers. Gal 3:1.

The fear of the Lord

- Having proclaimed the faith of God that reveals the fellowship of Yahweh and Their covenant purpose, the messengers of God then exhort their hearers to *fear the Lord*. Only a person who fears the Lord is able to confess, by faith, that Jesus is Lord, and to demonstrate true *repentance* which leads to salvation. Rom 10:8-10. 2Co 7:10. Unless a hearer learns the fear of the Lord, they will reject the gospel of sonship; or they will *presume* upon the kindness of God and continue in their sin. In doing so, they will fail to obtain the hidden riches of sonship that belong to 'the secret of the Lord'. Isa 45:3.
- Describing the mystery of God as a 'secret', King David declared, 'The secret of the Lord is with those *who fear Him*, and He will show them His covenant.' Psa 25:14. Accordingly, the messenger exhorts their hearers to fear the Lord as they proclaim to them the judgement of God. That is, the messenger makes known to their hearers God's wrath on account of the rebellion and sin of mankind. We note this content in the words of the believing thief who was crucified with Christ. Rebuking his companion, he said, 'Do you not even *fear God*, seeing you are under the same *condemnation*? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.' Luk 23:40-41.
- We also note, in John the Baptist's message, the proclamation of God's judgement upon the wickedness of mankind. He said to the multitudes who came out to him, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? *Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance*, and do not think to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.' Mat 3:7-10.
- Mankind is held accountable by God for the wickedness that has resulted from the Fall, causing pain and destruction, both in the natural creation and in the society of human relationships. Through the word of the cross, ministered in the spirit and power of Elijah, a hearer is caused to look on Christ whom they have 'pierced' as a consequence of their rebellion and sin. Zec 12:10. Rev 1:7. Their heart is pierced and laid bare before the eyes of the Lord. The messenger

exhorts them to not draw back in unbelief, but to fear God 'who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell'. Mat 10:28. Heb 10:39.

- A person who resists the Holy Spirit at this point does not receive the fear of God, and is unable to believe the word of the messenger. This is because they turn their eyes away from the Lord, drawing back from Him when their heart is pierced by the word and their iniquity is revealed to them. Describing this response, King David wrote, 'There is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes, when he finds out his iniquity and when he hates. The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. He devises wickedness on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not abhor evil.' Psa 36:1-4.
- The disciple Thomas was at risk of failing to obtain the salvation of the Lord. He refused to receive the testimony of his brethren who declared, 'We have seen the Lord.' Joh 20:25. Before Thomas was able to believe the gospel, and then be born from above as a son of God, he needed to learn the fear of the Lord. He learned this fear when Jesus confronted him with the wounds resulting from His crucifixion. Jesus made Thomas touch and look at His pierced hands, and to put his hand in His pierced side, saying, 'Do not be unbelieving, but believing.' Joh 20:27.
- In this encounter, Thomas drew near to the Lord by touching His pierced hands and side. He was able to appreciate the effect of his sin and disbelief on the Lord; as well as the salvation that the Lord Jesus had finished for him. By this means, Thomas learned the fear of the Lord. Furthermore, he was able to believe for resurrection life by the faith that he received as he heard Jesus speak to him. 2Co 4:13. Rom 10:17. Thomas' fear of the Lord was expressed by the confession of faith, '*My Lord* and *my God!*' Joh 20:28. 1Co 12:3.
- The fear of the Lord is the expression of one's deep appreciation and respect for who Yahweh is. It is demonstrated by the confession of His lordship over their life. The fear of the Lord is also a spiritual grace that motivates a person to *press into* the Lord, His word, and fellowship with His messengers when He comes with eyes that are as flames of fire. Isa 11:2. Rev 2:18. As they acknowledge the lordship of Christ, they recognise that they have violated God's word, and are under judgement and wrath. The fear of the Lord constrains them to accept His purifying initiative towards them so that they can be delivered from their sin and self-centredness, and can receive the

word of truth that defines their participation as a son of God in the fellowship of Yahweh.

The freedom of choice

- As we have already noted, the spirit of grace and supplication accompanies the word that is preached by a messenger. Zec 12:10. This spirit establishes a context of fellowship between the hearer and the messenger. This is the fellowship of Yahweh. 1Jn 1:3. Within this fellowship, illumination is made available to a hearer as the love and mercy of God is being poured out upon them.
- Through this prevenient grace, they are granted freedom from the bondage of Satan and sin, enabling them to respond to the word if they choose to receive and believe it. They can choose either to receive the faith and fear of the Lord, and to obey His commandments and live; or to draw back in unbelief from the face of Christ to live according to their own understanding. This latter response leads to judgement and death.

Drawing back

- There are two primary expressions of unbelief in response to the word of the gospel. Some people *stumble*, taking offence at the word of the cross. They will endeavour to stifle this message and to cause injury to Christ's messengers. The Jews who were cut to the heart by the word of the cross as their betrayal and murder of Jesus was revealed to them through the ministry of Stephen exemplified this response. Act 7:51-53. Having been cut to the heart, they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, gnashed their teeth at him; and they killed him. Act 7:54,57-58.
- Others draw back in unbelief by remaining ambivalent to the message of the cross or by viewing it as *foolishness*. 1Co 1:18,23. They malign Christ's messengers as being simple, narrow-minded and even insane. For example, in response to Paul's preaching, Governor Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!' Act 26:24. They reject the word of the cross and choose to live according to their own perception of truth.

Drawing near

- Alternatively, under the influence of grace and supplication, the hearer can *draw near* to receive the word of the messenger which ministers faith, and brings cleansing to them. As they meet Christ eye to eye and heart to heart, fearing the Lord, they become poor in spirit as they are illuminated to see their sin and to accept their accountability for the death of Christ. Mat 5:3.
- The Holy Spirit convicts the hearer so that they can mourn. Joh 16:8-11. They are able to mourn and repent because of the insight and conviction of sin that the Holy Spirit bears witness to within them, making known to them the wickedness of their heart and the evil that comes from the works of their hands. By the Spirit, they are enabled to see what Christ sees as His eyes search their heart and reveal the thoughts and intents of their heart. Heb 4:12-13. Rom 8:26-27. Rev 2:23.
- Consequently, they mourn alone for the desolation of their sonship, as they crucified the Son of God through their sin and rebellion. Zec 12:10-12. They are blessed with comfort as they *mourn* in this manner, because they are able to truly appreciate the kindness of God. Mat 5:4.

The kindness of God has appeared

- Those who fear the Lord, and do not draw back from His gaze, are shown the kindness of God which brings salvation to all men. Tit 2:11. Tit 3:4. They recognise that Christ's fiery eyes also reveal the love and mercy of God as the messenger proclaims to them the forgiveness and reconciliation of God. This is offered to all on account of the propitiatory and redeeming work that Christ accomplished for every person through His offering on the cross. Eph 1:7.
- Rather than presuming on this kindness, a person who has received the kindness of God ministered from His finished offering obeys the instruction to deny ungodliness and worldly desires in order to live soberly, righteously, and in a godly way, seeking for the appearing of Christ Himself. Tit 2:12-13.
- A person's obedience to this instruction demonstrates that they have obtained faith to believe for the treasure of sonship. This is the same faith that Abraham received when the Word of the Lord came to him,

saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield [of faith], your exceedingly great reward.' Gen 15:1. By this faith, Abraham was illuminated to see the promise of sonship, likened by God to 'the stars of heaven'. Moreover, he believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Gen 15:5-6. The apostle James explained that, by receiving this gift of righteousness, Abraham became *the friend of God*. Jas 2:23.

- Likewise, a hearer becomes the friend of God when they receive the free gift of righteousness through faith, which comes by hearing the word of the messenger. Rom 10:17. As the friend of God, they give themselves to receive and obey the commands of Christ. Joh 15:14. That is, they become disciples of Christ who are committed to abiding in His word. Joh 8:31-32.

Present yourself for offering

- As the friend of God, the hearer then receives the messenger's exhortation to present themselves as a living sacrifice in the fellowship of Christ's offering, and to recover their obedience as a son of God. Rom 12:1. The obedience that must be found in the fellowship of Christ's offering, which is essential for salvation, is the obedience of Christ. Through His offering journey from Gethsemane to Calvary, Christ fulfilled the works of sonship that belong to every person. These are the works of priesthood that belong to their name, which was promised to them when, before creation, God predestined everyone to become His sons, in Christ.
- The prophet Elijah demonstrated this aspect of the messenger's ministry when he repaired the altar of the Lord and said to the children of Israel, 'Come near to me.' 1Ki 18:30. As the people received Elijah's words, and joined the fellowship of this offering, they were symbolically washed clean by the water of the word that was poured over the sacrifice and altar which was prepared by Elijah. 1Ki 18:32-35. Furthermore, they were delivered from their idolatry and the unclean spirits in the land which had proliferated under the influence of Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab. 1Ki 18:19.
- Likewise, as a hearer responds to the messenger's call to present themselves as a living sacrifice, they are washed by the water of the word, which the prophet Zechariah described as 'a fountain for sin and uncleanness'. Zec 13:1. Through this action, they are also delivered by the Lord from their idolatry and from the unclean spirits

that are oppressing them or have possessed them. Zec 13:2. Their hearts are ready to receive Christ, the Messenger of the Covenant, who comes to sow the Father's word in their heart.

The Messenger of the covenant

- While the messenger bears witness to the light of the gospel, he is not the light. As the apostle John explained concerning John the Baptist, who ministered in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.' Joh 1:7-8.
- Christ is the Light of the world. Joh 8:12. Only He can give light. This light is the life and name that is given to a person, enabling them to be born again as a son of God. The light of life is the substance that belongs to the new creation.
- A person obtains this substance in four progressive stages when the Spirit of Christ enters their heart: the hearer receives the adoption; their identity is regenerated; the seed containing their life and name as a new creation son of God is germinated through the work of the Holy Spirit; and they join the travail of Christ as a member of His body, to bring forth the fruit of sonship through offering.

The adoption

- Within the fellowship that is established by a messenger who has been sent by Christ as a representative of His face, Christ comes with the Father, sowing the seed of the hearer's name in their hearts. He does this by first proclaiming their sonship to them as *an adoption*. Their adoption as a son of God is the first implication of receiving the Spirit of Christ into their heart.
- As we considered at the beginning of these notes, when Yahweh Son became the Seed of the Father, the names and lives of every son of God were now in Him. The Spirit of Christ is the seed that Jesus referred to in the parable of the sower and the seed. Luk 8:11. It is the seed of a person's name, from which springs their glory, works and expression as a son of God.
- The Son is the expression and image of who they are to become as a son of God. For this reason, He comes into their heart, expressing their name, crying, 'Abba! Father!' Gal 4:6. In this statement, their

sonship is being proclaimed to them. This is the adoption being proclaimed to them. Although He has *come* into their heart, He is yet to *dwell* in their heart. His cry, 'Abba! Father!', will become the expression of their sonship obedience once they are born again by the work of the Holy Spirit.

- The ministry of the adoption is a feature of the prevenient grace of God, which is characteristic of 'wayside ground'. Hence, it was observable under the Old Covenant in the lives of those who received and believed God's word. Consider, for example, the life of Moses. As he journeyed with the children of Israel through the wilderness, to the promised land, the Lord said to him, 'You have *found grace* in My sight, and I *know you by name*.' Exo 33:17.
- Within this dimension of God's prevenient grace, a person who has received the adoption is *entitled to the inheritance* that belongs to a son. This inheritance is the promise of the divine nature, which becomes their possession when they are born of the Spirit. The apostle John marked the distinction between the adoption and obtaining the promise of the divine nature as a son of God, writing, 'But as many as *received Him*, to them He gave *the right to become children of God*, to those who believe in His name.' Joh 1:12. The new birth is the blessing of the New Covenant. In order for this germination to happen, the identity of a hearer needs to be regenerated. This is the second aspect of the ministry of the Spirit of Christ.

Regeneration

- The illumination of one's identity is the next effect of the Spirit of Christ entering their heart. Having been dead in trespasses and sins, their spirit is made alive by the Spirit of Christ; it is regenerated so that they are able to receive the light of life. Eph 2:1. Luk 11:36. The light that is shone into their heart is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God from the face of Jesus. 2Co 4:6. This is the divine nature, which is to become the expression of their name as a son of God.
- They are *born to see* the kingdom because the Spirit of Christ, by the Holy Spirit, regenerates and renews their inner man, restoring their capacity to receive Christ, who is the Light of the world. Tit 3:5. Luk 11:36. The purpose for this regeneration is so that Christ may dwell in their heart through faith. Eph 3:16-17. That is, so that this person may be born again as a new creation son of God.

- Regeneration is the effect of Christ breathing on the hearer. Joh 20:22. We know that man became a living soul when the Son breathed the breath of life into his body. Gen 2:7. Paul noted this point when he addressed the Athenians, proclaiming, 'God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, *since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.*' Act 17:24-25. Through this same breath, the inner man of the hearer, which is otherwise dead, is regenerated.
- The prophet Ezekiel prophesied regarding the effect of regeneration by the Spirit of Christ when the Lord said to him, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, "O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live".' Eze 37:4-5. Once the bodies of the dead were reformed, the Lord directed Ezekiel to say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and *breathe on these slain, that they may live*".' Eze 37:9. The Lord then explained that the regeneration of these identities was the effect of His Spirit within them, enabling them to live, and to receive the inheritance of the adoption. This inheritance was described as 'their place in the land' which, in the New Covenant, refers to the divine nature of sonship. Eze 37:14.

Wayside ground

- Jesus summarised this prevenient phase of salvation as 'wayside ground'. Wayside ground describes a person who has received and responded to the prevenient grace of God that brings salvation. Tit 2:11. The mystery of God, which is the word of the cross, is proclaimed by messengers who minister in the spirit and power of Elijah. Through this ministry of grace and supplication, the word pierces the heart of a hearer, granting to them the opportunity for repentance and for the forgiveness of their sins. When they respond in this manner to the ministry of messengers, their heart is ready to receive Christ Himself.
- Christ, who is the Messenger of the Covenant, then comes into their heart as the seed of their sonship. He first proclaims to them their adoption as sons. This is still under the prevenient grace of God. The Spirit of Christ, through His word, then regenerates their spirit by the washing of the water of the word so that Christ, who has come into

their heart can dwell in their heart through faith. Eph 3:17. However, at this point, they have not yet been born to enter the kingdom of heaven, for the seed has yet to germinate within their heart.

- *Obtaining understanding* is the crisis of wayside ground. Mat 13:19. A person fails to proceed beyond this phase of salvation when, at some point, they resist the grace of God through which they can be delivered from their own understanding of themselves, of God, and of the gospel. Consequently, they are unable to receive Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Joh 14:6. The wicked one snatches away the seed that is sown in their heart, because they harden their heart in relation to one or more of the steps in this phase of salvation. For example, they may hold on to former gospel traditions; they may fail to receive the fear of the Lord; they may reject the invitation to present themselves for offering on the ground of the presbytery; or they may resist Christ Himself when He comes to speak to them.
- Fear, disappointment, depression and anger in relation to one's Christian experience are common indicators that a person has not progressed from wayside ground. 'Germination' requires them to receive understanding through a word from outside themselves. By faith, they are to ask, seek and knock for understanding as they present themselves for fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ. Luk 11:9-13. In this regard, they receive the word that calls them to join the offering of Christ, rather than simply living by the prevenient grace that they initially experience.
- As they hear this word, they begin to see that the treasure of their calling as a son of God is buried in the ground of fellowship with the presbytery, which is fellowship with the Father and the Son. 1Jn 1:3. To obtain this treasure, they must sell all that they have to buy *the field*. Mat 13:44. They sell their most prized article, which is their own understanding of the gospel and the way to life.
- As they present themselves in this manner, they need to diligently apply themselves to beating away 'the birds of the air' that endeavour to rob them of their inheritance by offering alternatives to obtaining life through patient endurance. This is essential to waiting for understanding in the fellowship in the offering of Christ. King David testified that the Lord answered him when he sought the Lord in this manner, writing, 'I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,

out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps.' Psa 40:1-2.

- A believer is 'brought up out of the darkness of the pit' when they are joined to the burnt offering of Christ, which He revealed when He was established by the Father on the ground of new creation. Their feet are set upon the rock, which is the fellowship of Christ; and their steps are established as they walk in the light of the word that proceeds from a lamp presbytery. As the psalmist wrote, 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path'. Psa 119:105.
- This word is also 'a fiery sword' in the hand of the presbytery. The effect of its ministry is that the hearer is delivered from walking according to the sight of their own eyes, and they are freed to receive the word which becomes the expression of their life. As David further testified, 'He has put a new song in my mouth - praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord.' Psa 40:3. This describes the joy of a person who has received the treasures of darkness that are hidden in the field which they have sold all to obtain. As the Lord promised, 'I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the Lord, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel.' Isa 45:3.
- Let us now consider how this treasure, which is the inheritance that belongs to a son of God, becomes our possession through new birth, and fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

Section 2

New creation

The germination of the seed

- As we noted earlier, the Son, who is the Word of God, is the expression and image of every person's sonship. He is the seed of who they are to become as a son of God. As they confess with their mouth that Christ is their Lord, and believe and receive His word, He comes into their heart proclaiming to them the expression of who they are to become as a son of the Father.
- When He comes into their heart, Christ brings with Him the Holy Spirit. He then says to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' Joh 20:22. The Holy Spirit then births in their spirit the name and divine nature life of God which were in the seed that entered their heart, and are specific to their identity. This process of germination causes the believer to be born again as a new creation son of God.
- Explaining the process of germination, the apostle Peter said that a person is born again 'not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, *through* the word of God which *lives and abides* forever'. 1Pe 1:23. In this statement, Peter made a notable distinction between the word of God and the seed. This distinction reveals how Christ's life, which is from the Father, becomes the life of a son of God. Christ is the Word

of God, and dwells in the heart of a believer; and the Holy Spirit is the seed of the new birth, because it is *the Spirit who gives life*. Eph 3:17. 2Co 3:5-6. The Holy Spirit is the life of God that causes an identity to be recreated in the likeness of the Son, who is the express image of the Father. The Spirit takes the sonship name and life of the believer, which are in the Son, from the Father, and causes the believer to become a new creation through birth.

- Jesus described this work of the Holy Spirit, when He said to His disciples, 'He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.' Joh 16:14-15. Through birth, by the Spirit, Christ becomes their life, and they are able to live this life by the faith of the Son of God. Gal 2:20.
- Because Christ has become their life by the Holy Spirit, *the believer* now cries out, 'Abba! Father!' Rom 8:15. The word of the Son, 'Abba! Father!', has now become the word in their mouth as they call upon God who is their Father. 1Pe 1:17. 2Ti 2:22. They proclaim their faith obedience as His children. A believer's cry of 'Abba! Father!' reveals that they have been born of God, because the life of the Son has germinated within them by the Holy Spirit. Rom 8:15. They have received the inheritance of the divine nature promised to them in the adoption.
- Paul described the seed of the divine nature as a 'firstfruits', or 'earnest', of a believer's eternal inheritance as a son of God. Rom 8:23. Writing to the Ephesians, Paul said, 'Having *believed* [the Word of God, who is Christ], you were *sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise* [given to them by the Son], who is the *guarantee* [earnest, or down payment] *of our inheritance* until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.' Eph 1:13-14. This is the inheritance of eternal life that belongs to a son of God.
- Once a believer has been born of God, their body becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit. 1Co 6:19. He bears witness with their spirit that they are a son and heir of God, on the *condition* that they suffer with Christ. Rom 8:16-17. However, as a temple for the Holy Spirit, their body is also the expression of the Holy Spirit. We note that, in the same way that the Holy Spirit is symbolised in the Scriptures as 'the stars of heaven', the sons of God are likened by the Lord to the stars of heaven. Gen 15:5. Furthermore, describing the glory of the resurrection bodies of the sons of God, Paul said, 'There is one glory

of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.' 1Co 15:41.

Baptism

- A person who has been born as a son of God, by receiving the Holy Spirit, will request baptism into the name of Jesus Christ. Act 8:36. Because Christ now abides in their heart, they will desire to abide in Him as a member of His body. Joh 15:4. The Holy Spirit urges and enables this connection to the body of Christ. Explaining this point, Paul wrote, 'For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit'. 1Co 12:13. Through baptism into Christ, a son of God has access, by one Spirit, to the Father, who places them in the body as He desires. Eph 2:18. 1Co 12:18. This becomes the relational context for their life.
- A son of God is joined to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus through baptism. Jesus taught that this is essential, otherwise the newly born son of God would '*die*' *again*. Mat 10:38-39. Although Christ has come into the believer, they must *come into Christ* in order to live as a new creation son of God. 2Co 5:17. Addressing this implication of baptism, Paul said, 'For you died, and your life [*zoe*] is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life [*zoe*] appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.' Col 3:3-4.
- By this, Paul meant that the believer's *new creation identity* died when they were baptised into Christ. Their *zoe* life from the Father, which belongs to their name as a son of God, is hidden with Christ in God. As they continue to live as a member of Christ's body, they will progressively obtain the sonship that He finished for them through His offering, and they will appear with Him in glory at His second coming. The apostle John made the same point, writing, 'Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is'. 1Jn 3:2.
- Note that it is the sonship life of a believer that is hidden with Christ in God through baptism. They are assured of salvation because Christ has already perfected and fulfilled their sonship through His offering on the cross. Heb 10:14. Once a son of God has been illuminated to this great truth, they resign from their preoccupation with the expression of their own sonship. Instead, they concern themselves

with revealing Christ through offering. Practically, this means laying down their life to reveal their brethren in the body of Christ.

- The works through which Christ is revealed by the members of His body are according to the will of the Father. They are the works that belong to the sonship of each member in particular. Furthermore, through their fellowship in the sufferings of Christ, the Father chastens every son whom He receives. This is necessary for their maturity and fruitfulness. Heb 12:7-11. For this reason, they *gladly* go forth outside the camp, bearing the reproaches of Christ as members of His body. Heb 13:12-16.
- By asking for baptism, a believer acknowledges the necessity for their fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ. In this regard, Paul reminds us, 'As many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death. Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.' Rom 6:3-4. In the fellowship of Christ's death and resurrection, 'the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness'. Rom 8:10. What does this mean for a son of God?

Conformed to His death

- The Son of Man joined us in our death when the Father made 'Him who knew no sin to be sin for us'. 2Co 5:21. Jesus Christ became the *full embodiment of sin* when the Father made Adam, and all who proceeded from him through natural birth, to be members of the body of Christ. This happened when Jesus drank the cup that the Father gave to Him in the garden of Gethsemane. Rom 5:14. 1Co 15:22,45. Luk 22:42. By this means, Christ's death became the death that is experienced by every person. Heb 2:9.
- As He journeyed from Gethsemane to Calvary, Jesus suffered in His physical body under the judgement of God, because of our sin. The judgement of God was a *curse on sin and death*. As Jesus was being progressively cursed and cut off from God, sin and death were being destroyed in His flesh and in our flesh. In other words, sin and death were being ended as He was dying. Significantly, the whole of the old creation, including all the sons and daughters of Adam, were going out with Him into the sea of God's forgetfulness.

- At the same time, Christ was pioneering the pathway of every person's salvation, and was fulfilling the works of their sonship. Heb 5:8. Isa 26:12. On this journey, Christ's physical blood was shed through the wounds that He suffered. By the resurrection life of the Father that was in Christ's blood, He was progressively being made alive from the death of sin as the Head of a *corporate* new creation. Heb 13:20. Furthermore, His life was being multiplied and given to be the life of those who would receive His word and accept their participation in the fellowship of His offering.
- At the conclusion of His offering journey, Jesus was the full revelation of God's curse on the sin and death of all mankind. He was, equally, the full revelation of the corporate new creation to which every person has been predestined by God according to the Everlasting Covenant. In the prophetic Scriptures, this dual implication of Christ's crucifixion is described as 'a banner' that has been lifted up to the whole earth, to which every person is drawn. Isa 5:26. Isa 11:10. The blessing of eternal sonship as a member of the body of Christ is the implication of obeying the word of the cross; while cursing and eternal death is the implication of rejecting the word of the cross.
- This banner, in relation to the curse of God, was revealed to the prophet Zechariah as a flying scroll that was twenty cubits in length and ten cubits wide. Zec 5:2. Notably, these are the same dimensions as the sanctuary of Moses' tabernacle. This point highlights that the curse is the implication of rejecting the word that otherwise births a person from above, and establishes them in fellowship with Him as part of a lampstand church.
- Explaining the flying scroll, the Lord said to Zechariah, 'This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth: "Every thief shall be expelled," according to this side of the scroll; and, "Every perjurer [liar] shall be expelled," according to that side of it. "I will send out the curse," says the Lord of hosts; "it shall enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by My name. It shall remain in the midst of his house and consume it, with its timber and stones".' Zec 5:3-4.
- The message that Jesus proclaims from the cross is, 'God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.' 1Jn 1:5. Those who walk in the light of His word have fellowship with Him, and they also love their brethren in the body of Christ. 1Jn 1:7. 1Jn 3:14. As the friends of Christ, they

have no fellowship with those who are engaged in 'the unfruitful works of darkness'. Eph 5:11. Walking in the light, they are joined to the process through which the blood of Christ cleanses them from all sin. 1Jn 1:7.

- However, if a person rejects the ministry of a presbytery, they are unable to discern Christ and His body. This is because these messengers bear witness to Christ, who is the Light of the world. Joh 1:8-9. Those who are unwilling to walk in the light of this word assert, by implication, that they have no sin. The apostle John said that they are *deceived*, and the *truth is not in them*. 1Jn 1:8. In other words, they are unable to *discern* the body, and are subject to the curse that the Lord sends into the houses of those who are thieves and liars.
- Describing the impact of this curse upon those who presume to participate in the *agape* meal, while failing to discern the Lord's body, Paul said, 'For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.' 1Co 11:29-30. Unless they humble themselves, mourn, and 'bear fruits worthy of repentance', this curse will destroy them and their household. Mat 3:8.
- The only way to eternal life is by receiving the word of the cross and walking in the light of the word. The first implication of this fellowship, through which the cleansing blood of Jesus is effective in a person's life, is being *conformed to His death*. Php 3:10. Gal 2:20. In this fellowship, they experience Christ's sufferings in their mortal body. By this means, the sin that was destroyed in His body is destroyed in them.
- At the point of this death, the Spirit is giving to them the resurrection life that flowed as Christ's blood was shed, and He was brought back from the death of our sin. Heb 13:20. By this life, they are being brought back from the death of sin with Him. Their mortal body is being quickened with life, enabling them to fulfil the works of their sonship, which Christ has already finished for them.
- Paul described this process as 'the circumcision of Christ', writing, 'In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead'. Col 2:11-12.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

- Receiving the Holy Spirit, through which a person is born of the life of God, is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Although the disciples had received the Holy Spirit when they were born again through the word of the Son, they were not baptised with the Holy Spirit until the Day of Pentecost. Act 2:1-4. Jesus explained to the disciples that when they were baptised with the Spirit they would receive power to bear witness to Christ. Act 1:8. That is, a person who is baptised with the Spirit is able to reveal Christ through their unique fellowship in His offering and sufferings as a member of His body.
- Christ baptises a person in the Holy Spirit. Mat 3:11. Through this baptism, the Holy Spirit becomes the context for their life. They live *in* the Spirit, and they live *by* the Spirit. Having been filled with the Holy Spirit, a son of God is enabled by the Spirit to join the prayer meeting of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Rom 8:26-27.
- Participation in this prayer meeting is essential to the daily pilgrimage of a son of God, in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Rom 8:26-28. This is their participation in the travail of the Son, through which they can grow to fruitful maturity as a son of God. Eph 4:13,15. Since the fall of mankind, the creation itself groans and travails with labour pains, waiting for the perfection of the sons of God. At this time, the creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption to which it was subjected because of Adam's disobedience. Rom 8:19-22.
- In the fellowship of Christ's travail, a son of God receives from the Holy Spirit the same capacity of Eternal Spirit by which Jesus 'priested' Himself as a living sacrifice, as He journeyed from Gethsemane to Calvary. They are able to priest themselves in the fellowship of this offering by the Holy Spirit, who has become the power and expression of their name as a son of God. This is their reasonable service of worship as one who is able to worship the Father in Spirit and in truth; and is the means by which they are able to fulfil the will of God in Christ Jesus. Rom 12:1. Joh 4:24. Joh 16:13.
- Sons of God serve the Father as priests in His temple, which is the body of Christ. Through offering in the context of this fellowship, they multiply the life of God. This is the work of sons of God, whom the Son has made 'kings and priests to His God and Father'. Rev 1:6. Serving God as priests will be the work of sons of God for eternity. In

the new heavens and earth, the context for this service is the fellowship of the Father and the Son, by the Holy Spirit. As John observed in his vision of the bride city, 'But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty [the Father] and the Lamb are its temple.' Rev 21:22.

- Before the Fall, Adam was taught this principle of offering as he multiplied the life of God to creation, from the fellowship that he had with God at the tree of life. So, also, through the ministry of priesthood to the Father, the sons of God, now designated as Christ's church, the bride of Christ, will facilitate the bringing forth of multitudes of sons of God in the New Jerusalem, the bride city.

A temple of God

- The Holy Spirit makes our whole being – body, soul and spirit – a temple of God through Eternal Spirit. 1Co 3:16. This is the final statement of our eternal life, and is the focus of Christ's prayer to the Father, when He said, 'And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.' Joh 17:22-23.
- When we become a temple of God, our whole being becomes a temple for the *agape* expression and fellowship of Yahweh. We note the words of Jesus to the church in Laodicea, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.' Rev 3:20. Paul described this reality as 'the *high calling* of God in Christ Jesus'. Php 3:14. This high calling is to participate in the fellowship of the mystery of God, by which an innumerable company of sons of God will then be brought to birth through the travailing church, which is the bride and wife of Christ.

Travail for fruitfulness

- As we have already noted, entering the kingdom of God is a pilgrimage that involves *travail*. Through this process, the initial joy of salvation, which accompanies the germination of the seed within a believer, remains in them and is made full; that is, the believer is able to bear the fruit of sonship. Mat 13:20. Joh 15:11. 1Jn 1:4. This travail,

through which the joy of the Lord is made full in a person, is fellowship in the word of God. 1Jn 1:3-4.

- Messengers who are part of a presbytery travail in prayer and in the ministry of the word of God so that Christ is properly formed within their hearers, lest those who are malformed, or lame, are turned out of the way, and fail to obtain the promise of eternal sonship that the Father predestined for them in Christ. Heb 12:13. Testifying as a presbyter regarding this travailing ministry, Paul wrote, 'Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labour [travail], striving according to His working which works in me mightily.' Col 1:28-29.
- It is most important to recognise the distinction between the conception of a son of God, and the travail that is necessary to bring them forth to maturity. This distinction is readily observable in nature, where a child is conceived in the womb of a mother, but is born, or brought forth, through a season of labour, or travail.
- In His parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus described the distinction between the conception of a son of God and their birth, by distinguishing the germination of the seed, indicated by the emergence of a new shoot, from a fruiting plant. He noted that to come to fruitfulness, the newly conceived son of God, or 'shoot', needs to negotiate the issues of 'stony ground' and 'thorny ground'. These are the implications of being 'born of water and the Spirit' to enter the kingdom of God. Joh 3:5.

Stony ground

- The travail that is associated with stony ground, which is the crisis of being born of water to enter the kingdom of God, requires a son of God to *accept* their fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ. Jesus described these sufferings as 'tribulations' and 'persecutions' that arise *because of the word*. Mat 13:21. Receiving these sufferings as a fellowship in Christ's sufferings is an implication of being baptised into Christ's death and resurrection. In this fellowship, the other law within a son of God is being removed from their heart, and they are being raised with Christ to live His life by the faith that they receive in the proceeding word of God. Gal 2:20. Rom 10:17.

- A son of God who does not despise the chastening of the Lord is able to 'strengthen their hands which hang down'. Heb 12:12. This means that they lift up their hands in sanctified submission to Christ, their Lord, and give themselves to fulfilling the works of obedience that belong to their sonship. Furthermore, they are able to 'strengthen their feeble knees' by putting off their self-righteous and self-preserving attitudes and behaviours which undermine their pilgrimage in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as a member of His body.
- Having been delivered from these sources of lameness, they are able to be 'rooted and grounded in love' as part of the fellowship of the body of Christ where the Father has placed them. Eph 3:17. By this means, they are 'able to comprehend with all the saints the love of Christ which passes knowledge', and they are 'filled with all the fullness of God'. Eph 3:18-19. Their fruit is demonstrated as they fervently love their brethren with a pure heart, by laying down their lives for them through offering. 1Pe 1:22.

Thorny ground

- The travail that is associated with thorny ground is the crisis of being born of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. A believer enters the kingdom by embracing the headship of Christ. We recall that, in the course of Christ's offering journey, a crown of *thorns* was placed on His *head*. Joh 19:2. These were the thorns of the curse resulting from mankind's rejection of His headship. Gen 3:17-18. As Jesus received this fifth wound, He suffered the effects of the curse that are experienced by every person. Heb 2:9. Through this suffering, the pride of mankind, motivating them to reject Christ's headship, was circumcised from Him.
- The curse, represented by the crown of thorns on the head of Christ, was gathered up to the cross when Jesus was crucified. In this regard, we note the words of Paul: 'Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, *having become a curse for us* (for it is written: "*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, *that we might receive the promise of the Spirit* through faith.' Gal 3:13-14.
- Obtaining the promise of the Spirit, which means being born of the Spirit and entering Christ's rest, requires the ongoing *connection* of a son of God, to Christ, whose head is adorned with a crown of thorns.

The word that proceeds from Christ, through the ministry of an *aggelos* presbytery in His right hand, pierces their heart and equips them with faith for their fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ. Rom 10:17. By this faith, they confess that they have been '*crucified with Christ*'. The believer no longer lives by their life; nor presumes to have life through their own strength, through the pursuit of riches, through the desires for other things, or through pleasure. Rather, Christ is their life, and they live His life by His faith. Gal 2:20.

- The first evidence of obtaining this faith is their ongoing presentation of themselves, by the Holy Spirit, for fellowship with the presbytery, which is the fellowship of the Father and the Son. 1Jn 1:3. Instead of abusing those who are part of the presbytery, and disregarding their authority, they submit to them and allow the word of the cross which they preach to pierce their heart. They join the culture of fellowship that the presbyters themselves are exemplifying. 1Jn 1:1-3. A person presenting themselves in this manner, from faith to faith, demonstrates that they are submitted to the headship of Christ and are obtaining the authority that belongs to their own name and works.

Walking blameless before the Lord

- By the Spirit, a son of God is then walking each day in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. By the anointing of the Spirit, they know how to walk in the light of the word that they have heard. 1Jn 2:27. They are accepting that the thorns which they encounter in the context of their work are part of their fellowship in the circumcision of Christ; they are for their good.
- Through the circumcision of Christ, they are being delivered from living by the principle of the flesh, and Christ's blood is sprinkling their heart clean from the seven aspects of an evil conscience. Heb 10:22. Importantly, they are fulfilling the works of sonship that belong to their name, and for which they are zealous. Tit 2:14. Their service, in this regard, is evident through their sincere and fervent love of the brethren, in Christ. 1Pe 1:22.
- This is what it means to 'walk blameless' before the Lord. We recall that it was the initiative of the Holy Spirit to call and enable Abraham and Sarah to walk blameless before the Lord. Gen 17:1. Through His initiative, they received new names, and received circumcision as a sign of walking by faith, each day, in the fellowship of Christ's

finished offering and sufferings. If we do not walk in this manner, Christ swears in His wrath that we will not inherit our sonship. Heb 4:1-3.

- A firstfruits believer is a son of God who is bearing the fruits of the Spirit as they walk blameless before the Lord. A notable fruit of this pilgrimage is '*godliness with contentment*'. 1Ti 6:6. As it did with Paul, the secret of the Lord that was first preached to them has become the context and expression of their life. They are able to say, 'I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.' Php 4:11-13.
- Those who walk in this manner are not only bringing forth the fruit of sonship, but are also able to join others to the fellowship of which they are part. The word of faith is in their heart and in their mouth, which they share through their testimony that accompanies their conduct in their house, in the church, and in the world. Rom 10:8. Mat 5:14-16.

Section 3

The mind set on the Spirit

Introduction

- In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul contrasted the mind that is set on the flesh with the mind that is set on the Spirit. He explained that 'those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit'. Rom 8:5. He identified that the outcome for those who set their mind on the flesh is *death*. In contrast to this, the outcome for those who set their mind on the things of the Spirit is 'life and peace'. Rom 8:6.
- In Romans Chapter 7, using his own experience, Paul described the carnal problem for a Christian. Even though we may delight in the word of God when it is proclaimed to us, we have another law in our heart which keeps bringing us into bondage to the law of sin. Rom 7:22-23. When we recognise this problem, which is common to us all, we need to choose which prayer meeting we are going to join in our search for a remedy! The apostle Paul described two distinct prayer meetings. He described the carnal prayer meeting in Romans Chapter 7, and the spiritual prayer meeting in Romans Chapter 8.

- The central feature of the carnal prayer meeting is a perpetual cry to God for *deliverance* from the body of death. Rom 7:24. If we continually seek the Lord for deliverance in this way, we will often be looking to others for deliverance as well. This may include our spouse, other family members, friends, health practitioners, and religious leaders. However, rather than continually crying out for deliverance, we need to recognise that if we have been born of the Spirit, we can, and must, set our mind on the things of the Spirit by joining a completely different prayer meeting!
- The apostle Paul highlighted the major point when he declared, 'Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.' Rom 8:8-9. As sons of God, we are *free to choose* whether we will set our mind on the things of the flesh or on the things of the Spirit. We received this freedom as soon as we were born of the Spirit. It is important to recognise the accountability that we have all received, as sons of God, to join the spiritual prayer meeting. Ultimately, if we continue to participate in the carnal prayer meeting, it is because we have chosen to do so, and it leads only to damnation. Rom 8:13.
- As sons of God, we will be delivered from 'the body of death'. However, our deliverance is not the outcome of the carnal prayer meeting, our self-motivated repentance, or lengthy pastoral discussion. Our deliverance is the outcome of our ongoing participation in the spiritual prayer meeting! In the flesh, we do not have the capacity to join this prayer meeting. However, as we choose to set our mind on the things of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit helps our weaknesses by making intercession for us with groanings too deep for words. Rom 8:26. In contrast to our own carnal cry for deliverance, the Holy Spirit converts the groanings that we all experience in this fallen world into prayer in the Spirit.
- Jesus Christ responds to the intercession of the Holy Spirit by searching our hearts with His eyes which are 'like a flame of fire'. Rom 8:27. This is not a mysterious experience. It is the word of the cross which is proclaimed by the presbytery in His right hand that pierces our heart. When we turn in response to the word that is preached to us, we meet Christ eye to eye. The fear of the Lord that we receive in this relational interaction compels us to draw near to God through Christ. As we draw near to God, we know that Jesus

Christ is making intercession for us according to the will of God.
Heb 7:25.

- The intercession of Jesus Christ joins us to *the travail of His entire offering journey* from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, so that the will of God is accomplished in our life. In the fellowship of Christ's offering, the Father is working all things together for our good. Rom 8:28. He is circumcising the other law from our heart. The love of God is also being poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Furthermore, as we continue to walk by the Spirit in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, our mind is also being renewed. Notably, it is only when we choose to set our mind on the things of the Spirit, by joining the new prayer meeting, that our mind can be renewed in the fellowship of that prayer meeting!
- The fruit which shows that our mind is being renewed is that we are no longer preoccupied with finding our own name or revealing our own sonship. We recognise that if we have been born as a son of God and been baptised into Christ, we have died with Him, and our sonship is 'hidden with Christ in God'. Col 3:3. We know that Jesus Christ has completed the works of our sonship and taken His seat at the right hand of God. Col 3:1. Our hope is already in heaven. Heb 6:18-20. Our inheritance as sons of God is guaranteed if we continue to set our mind on the things of the Spirit. We know that 'when Christ who is our life appears, then [we] will also appear with Him in glory'. Col 3:4.
- In a similar way, the apostle John declared, 'Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' 1Jn 3:2. As our mind is being renewed in the fellowship of Christ's offering, we are learning to relinquish control of our life to the Holy Spirit. He has been given to us to be the expression of our name as both a son of God and a member of the body of Christ. When we are led by the Holy Spirit as a son of God, our preoccupation is not to reveal our own sonship. Rom 8:14. Rather, our preoccupation is to reveal Jesus Christ by revealing the members of His body.
- The apostle Paul rejoiced that the mind that is set on the Spirit is 'life and peace'. Rom 8:6. It is 'life' because we receive the resurrection life of God in the fellowship of Christ's offering. Even though our outer

man is perishing, our inner man is being renewed, day by day. 2Co 4:16. This includes the renewing of our mind. Further to this, Paul declared that the mind that is set on the Spirit is 'peace', because it is our participation in the spiritual prayer meeting that enables us to enter 'the rest' of Christ. We know that Christ has already perfected our sonship. Rather than striving to fulfil the works of our sonship, we turn our attention to the simplicity of revealing our brethren, in the fellowship of the body of Christ.

- We will now consider the distinction between the carnal prayer meeting and the spiritual prayer meeting in more detail.

The wretched condition

- In the first section of Romans Chapter 7, the apostle Paul explained that we have died to the Law through the crucified body of Christ. Rom 7:4. Having died with Christ, we have been delivered from the Law and its condemnation. Paul identified that we have been delivered from the Law so that *we can serve in the newness of the Spirit*, and not in the oldness of the letter. Rom 7:6.
- From the perspective of his own life and testimony, Paul then helpfully explained that, even though we have died to the Law with Christ, if we set our mind on the things of the flesh when the word of God is proclaimed to us, it will bring us back into captivity to the law of sin and death. He said, 'I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.' Rom 7:9.
- It is helpful to remember that when Paul referred to 'the commandment', it has a much broader application than the commandments that belonged to the Law Covenant. The coming of the commandment equally applies to the proclamation of the word of faith that belongs to the New Covenant. Rom 10:8. We must obey the word of faith that is proclaimed to us. However, it is only possible to obey the word of God by setting our mind on the things of the Spirit so that we are receiving the resurrection life of God in the fellowship of Christ's offering. Setting our mind on the Spirit is *believing*. It is the work of faith.
- Paul described the operation of the carnal mind that leads to death by saying that, when the word of God is proclaimed to us, it gives the law of sin the opportunity to deceive us into laying hold of the word in the flesh. Rom 7:8. That is, it provokes us to *covet the word as a*

resource that will facilitate our religious aspirations and projections. This is great deception because, as soon as we lay hold of the word of God as a resource, we immediately come under its judgement. Laying hold of the word in this manner is not an action of faith.

- It is our disobedience to the word of God that brings us under its judgement. Paul highlighted the reality that the person with a carnal mind is well able *to delight* in the Law of God, but they have no capacity to serve or obey it. Rom 7:22. Recognising that ‘motive governs mind’, a person may simply be motivated by the law of sin to delight in the Law of God if they perceive it to be beneficial for them to do so. We note that there is a difference between setting our mind on the Law and setting our mind on the Spirit.
- Equally, a believer may genuinely delight in the word of God because they have received spiritual illumination. However, Paul testified that regardless of his agreement with the word, and even his will to obey the word, he did not have the capacity for obedience in his flesh. Rom 7:15. He came to understand that he had *another law* in his heart which warred against any decision in his mind to be obedient, because it demanded that he remain in control of the parameters of his life. He recognised that this unyielding desire for control in his heart led him back into bondage to the law of sin and under the judgement of God. Rom 7:23.

The body of death

- Having been illuminated to see the wretchedness of his condition, Paul cried out, ‘O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?’ Rom 7:24. When Paul used the term ‘body of death’, he was using it to refer to the principle of death that is operative within *the whole person*, including the spirit, the soul, and the physical body. In relation to these three aspects of the whole person, we can identify three elements to the body of death.
- The first element of the body of death is *the other law* that was fathered in the hearts of Adam and Eve by the lie of Satan. It resides in the heart of every fallen human being. The other law is our desire to be ‘like God’; that is, to be in control of our life as the source of our own name and works. The operation of our evil conscience, bearing witness to our own knowledge of good and evil, is the major indication of another law in our heart. Rom 2:15.

- The second element of the body of death is *the law of sin* that is at work in all of our faculties (including our mind, our will, and our emotions) whenever we listen to the word of Satan. The law of sin is 'the spirit of Satan' that deceives us and distorts all of our faculties and senses. Eph 2:2. It causes us to covet *what does not belong to us*, in the mistaken belief that this will help us to find life and to escape death. We note that the fear of death, in all of its various manifestations, is the primary symptom of the law of sin at work in us. Heb 2:15.
- The third element of the body of death is *our mortal body* that is dying because of sin. Of course, a major symptom of a person's mortality is the pain and suffering that they will invariably experience in their physical body, which includes the degeneration of the body as part of the ageing process.
- The apostle Paul rejoiced that there is deliverance from the body of death, by saying, 'I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord.' Rom 7:25. When Paul made this statement, he was referring to more than a single watershed moment or time of miraculous deliverance. Rather, he thanked God because he had been born as a son of God. He knew that, as a son of God, he was free to set his mind on the things of the Spirit and to find deliverance from the body of death through his ongoing fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ.
- Paul appreciated that his deliverance from the other law in his heart was a lifelong process as he continued to participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Furthermore, he understood that he would not be delivered from the pain and suffering that was associated with his mortality until the end of his earthly pilgrimage. Paul embraced the reality of his mortality as his participation in Christ's sufferings. However, he also looked forward to the day when his mortality would be wholly swallowed up by the resurrection life of God, as his final deliverance from the body of death. 2Co 5:1-5.

Our new reality

- As a son of God who was walking in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, Paul explained, '*So then, with the mind I myself serve the Law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.*' Rom 7:25. He rejoiced that he had found the capacity to serve in the newness of the Spirit. Rom 7:6. We know that Paul was referring to having 'a spiritual mind', because his mind was in subjection to, *and*

able to serve, the Law of God. In contrast to this, he explained that 'the carnal mind is enmity against God; for *it is not subject to the Law of God*, nor indeed can be'. Rom 8:7.

- Even though he was setting his mind on the things of the Spirit, Paul recognised that his flesh still served the law of sin. Rom 7:25. This means that he still had the other law in his heart; he still experienced the emotions of sin; and he was still subject to the constraints of death in his physical body. Nevertheless, Paul understood that he was no longer condemned because of his wretchedness, providing he continued to walk by the Spirit in the fellowship of Christ's offering.
- Paul declared, 'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.' Rom 8:1. When Paul used the term 'condemnation', he was not referring to an emotion that a person experiences when their conscience condemns their poor attitudes or behaviours. He was referring to the situation where a person has been tried in a court of law, the sentence has been passed, and the judgement is ready to be executed.
- We are not living under condemnation, because the law of the Spirit of life, in the fellowship of Christ's offering, has set us free from the law of sin and death. Rom 8:2. We have the Spirit of life when Jesus Christ comes into our heart and then gives us the Holy Spirit so that we are born of the Spirit. Rom 8:15. The apostle Paul proclaimed that if the Holy Spirit dwells within us, we are not in the flesh, but *in the Spirit*. Rom 8:9. We are a son of God who possesses the firstfruits of the Spirit in our mortal body.
- As a son of God who is not in bondage to the law of sin and death, we are free and accountable to choose whether we will set our mind on the things of the Spirit or on the things of the flesh. Rom 8:12. We set our mind on the things of the Spirit by continuing to embrace our unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. In the fellowship of Christ's offering, the resurrection life of God that was in the blood of Christ is becoming our life through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

The Spirit is life because of righteousness

- Paul continued by saying, 'If Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.' Rom 8:10. When

Paul said, 'because of righteousness', he was referring to the righteous offering of Christ. We read earlier in the book of Romans that 'through *one Man's righteous act*, the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life'. Rom 5:18. 'Justification of life' means that the resurrection life of Christ gives every son of God the capacity to live a justified life.

- Our participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings is the remedy to the carnal dilemma that Paul described in Romans Chapter 7. In the fellowship of the wounding events that Christ experienced from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, the other law is being circumcised from our heart; and the love of God is being poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Rom 5:5. The love of God is our *new motivation*, which replaces the emotions of sin. It is also the capacity for our obedience to the word of God that has been proclaimed to us.
- Further to this, as he embraced his unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's wounding events, Paul rejoiced that he was also receiving, in his mortal body, the grace of the resurrection life of God. He declared, 'If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.' Rom 8:11. It is the resurrection life of God in our mortality that enables us to reveal Christ each day, by fulfilling the works that have been authored for us by Christ on the cross.
- If we are receiving the resurrection life of God in our mortal body, we are no longer 'debtors to the flesh'. Rom 8:12. That is, we are not obliged to live by the principles of the flesh in an endeavour to fulfil the will of God. Paul clearly explained that living this way leads only to death. It leads to condemnation, which is eternal judgement in the lake of fire. Rom 8:13. In contrast to this, Paul said that we will live if, *by the Spirit*, we are putting to death the deeds of the body. We find grace, in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, to put off the deeds of the flesh.
- The spiritual prayer meeting must become our daily reality. It encompasses the full breadth of our Christian pilgrimage, including the recognition of the reality of our human condition; the nature of our prayer in the Holy Spirit; the way that we receive the word from the messengers of Christ; and the way that we interface with the circumstances of our life. It is important for us to understand how we

choose to set our mind on the things of the flesh or on the Spirit, in relation to all these various elements that belong to the spiritual prayer meeting.

Our weakness

- The prerequisite for our joining the spiritual prayer meeting is our awareness and acknowledgment of our own weaknesses. Rom 8:26. That is, rather than believing in the veracity of our own religious idealism or projections, we are connected to the reality of our weakness as one who is bankrupt in spirit. Mat 5:3. A person who is spiritually-minded will not be eccentric or disconnected from the reality of their fallen human condition or from their mortality. On the contrary, one of the primary hallmarks of a spiritually-minded person will be their connection to reality.
- The first element of our weakness is our inability to fulfil the will of God in the flesh. As we have already considered, the other law in our heart is the reason why we cannot obey the word of God, even when we delight in the word and want to obey it. Further to this, regardless of how fervently we endeavour to repent and to align our attitudes and behaviours to the word that we have heard, we do not have the capacity to circumcise our own heart. We do not have the capacity to perform 'a heart operation' on ourselves!
- The second element of our weakness is the limits and constraints, along with the pain and suffering, that we experience in our mortal body. Even though we have the Holy Spirit as the firstfruits of our inheritance as a son of God, we still groan within ourselves because of our mortality. We also groan because we live in a world that is in bondage to corruption and has been subjected to futility. Rom 8:19-23. We groan within ourselves because we are waiting expectantly for the fulfilment of the adoption, which is the redemption of our body.
- The third element of our weakness is that we do not know the will of God in relation to our sonship. Paul referred to the revelation of our sonship, including the redemption of our body, as our 'hope'. Rom 8:24-25. Our hope is in heaven because Jesus Christ has already learned our obedience and has completed the works of our sonship. Remarkably, He has completed the works of sonship that God has prepared for us to do, in this lifetime and for the age to come. We know that Jesus Christ has authored each day of our life by fulfilling

the will of God for us. Psa 139:16. However, when we wake up in the morning, we do not yet know the will of God for us that day.

- This leads us to the fourth element of our weakness. If we do not know what the will of God is for each day, we also do not know what to pray for. Paul specifically identified the nature of our weakness by saying, 'For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought.' Rom 8:26. Paul was referring to our inability to pray according to the will of God. However, more than this, he was identifying our incapacity to join the fellowship of the prayer meeting with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our incapacity to join the fellowship of this prayer meeting, without the help of the Holy Spirit, is the most fundamental and foundational element of our weakness.

The Holy Spirit helps our weakness

- Paul declared that the Holy Spirit helps our weakness by making intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered, because they are too deep for words. Rom 8:26. The Holy Spirit converts the groaning that we experience because of our weakness, to *prayer in the Spirit*. As we persevere by praying in other tongues, in cooperation with the leadership and burden of the Holy Spirit, we are strengthened with the capacity of Eternal Spirit to pray more earnestly. Our prayer in the Holy Spirit becomes like a river of tongues, or languages, that is flowing from the innermost part of our being. Joh 7:38.
- In contrast to this, we are setting our mind on the things of the flesh when our prayer is an expression of our own will. When we pray this way, we are often motivated by anxiety concerning our own life or by anxiety concerning the lives of others. Php 4:6. When the Scripture instructs us to cast our anxiety upon the Lord, this does not mean that, when we are worried about something, we need to pray about it so that we find some sense of relief from our anxiety. 1Pe 5:7. This mode of prayer is nothing more than a fleshly, cathartic exercise. It does not lead to life and peace.
- Our natural inclination to become anxious when we are confronted by certain situations is part of our weakness. We cast our anxiety upon the Lord by relinquishing control of our prayer to the Holy Spirit. As we continue to pray in the Holy Spirit, we are being delivered from the 'mind chatter' that consumes our thinking when we are preoccupied with our own circumstances. We are building ourselves

up 'in our most holy faith' which we have received from Christ as a gift. Jud 1:20. In contrast to the fear of death, which compels us to draw back, the faith of Christ motivates us to draw near to lay hold of our unique participation in the fellowship of His offering.

- Paul continued to explain the new prayer meeting by saying, 'Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.' Rom 8:27. Jesus Christ hears the prayer of the Holy Spirit through us, and knows what *the mind of the Spirit* is. The mind of the Holy Spirit describes His focus and preoccupation. We know that the Holy Spirit does not reveal Himself. His focus is the revelation of the Father and the Son. Joh 16:13-15. The Scripture often likens the Holy Spirit to 'a consuming fire', because He is jealous over the holy ground of the fellowship of Yahweh.
- With this goal in view, the preoccupation of the Holy Spirit is our sanctification as sons of God and members of the body of Christ. The apostle James emphasised that 'the Spirit who dwells within us yearns jealously'. Jas 4:5. The Father has given us the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, to be the expression of our name as sons of God and members of the body of Christ. As we have already considered, when we are being led by the Holy Spirit as sons of God, our preoccupation will be to reveal Jesus Christ by revealing the members of His body.

Jesus Christ searches our heart

- When we pray in the Holy Spirit, we are inviting Jesus Christ to search our heart and our mind. When the apostle John saw Jesus Christ seated in the middle of the seven lampstand churches, he identified that He has *eyes like a flame of fire*. Rev 1:14. Jesus introduced Himself as the One who has eyes like a flame of fire when He admonished the presbytery and lampstand church in Thyatira. Rev 2:18. The eyes of Christ reveal His jealous love for our sanctification as a son of God. However, we must recognise that this jealous love is also *His wrath* upon our sin and uncleanness.
- The important point is that Jesus Christ does not primarily reveal the condition of our heart to us while we pray. Rather, when we pray in the Spirit, and invite Him to search our heart, He answers our prayer by proclaiming His word to us through the presbytery that is in His right hand. A presbytery in the right hand of Christ is also likened to

the seven lamps upon a lampstand church that shine before the face of Jesus Christ. As messengers of Christ, they are sent before His face to proclaim the word of the cross to us.

- It is the word of the cross that is proclaimed to us by the messengers of Christ that has the *capacity* to pierce the depths of our heart. The apostle Paul proclaimed that the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces even to the division of soul and spirit and is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of our heart. Significantly, when the word of the cross is proclaimed to us, it is accompanied by the spirit of grace and supplication that enables us to turn to meet Christ eye to eye.
- It is this relational interaction with Christ Himself, in response to the word, that reveals the true condition of our heart. Having identified that the word of the cross pierces our heart, Paul continued by saying, 'And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and *open to the eyes of Him* to whom we must give account.' Heb 4:13. The fruit of meeting Christ eye to eye is 'the fear of the Lord'. We understand that His wrath abides on us because of our sin. The fear of the Lord compels us to flee to Him for refuge. We are saved from His wrath as we mourn for our sin with godly sorrow and then demonstrate the fruit of repentance in our life. Mat 3:8. 2Co 7:10.
- When the word of Christ is proclaimed to us, the Holy Spirit convicts us of the necessity to hear and respond to the word by turning to meet Christ eye to eye. It is the Holy Spirit who says to us, through His convicting work in our heart, 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.' Heb 3:7-8. The Scriptural meaning of 'today' is the time or season when the Lord is speaking to us through the messengers whom He sends to us. This is also called 'the day' or 'the season of our visitation'. Luk 19:44. When Jesus Christ speaks to us, the word is always accompanied with the spirit of grace and supplication which gives us the freedom and capacity to respond to the word.
- If we have a spiritual mind, we will recognise the imperative of responding to the word of the Lord in a timely manner. At the same time, we also recognise that we cannot change all of the various issues in our life that *He is not speaking to us about*. As a son of God, we know that Jesus Christ has already learned our obedience, completed the works of our sonship, and authored every day of our

life for us, through His offering on the cross. Heb 5:8. The circumcising work that the Father needs to do in our heart has already been finished in the offering of Christ. We do not need to anxiously preempt the circumcising hand of the Father in our life. Rather, we are confident that the Father who has begun a good work in us will complete the work according to His own sovereign timing. Php 1:6.

Fleshly alternatives to meeting Christ

- Many Christians have not yet found the simplicity of turning to meet Christ in response to His word and to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. This is the evidence that their mind is still set on the things of the flesh. When this is the case, a believer may turn aside to various alternatives in their pursuit to find spiritual wisdom and direction. For example, they may rigidly hold on to past doctrines and practices, when the Lord is calling them to move forward in repentance and faith. 2Co 3:15-16. Equally, instead of joining the fellowship of the word that has been publicly proclaimed to them, they may preference their own personal interpretation of the Scriptures and its implication for their life. 2Pe 1:19-21.
- Another common alternative to meeting Christ, in response to the word and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, is to become preoccupied with our own self-analysis and self-diagnosis. The Scripture is clear that this is a futile and unfruitful exercise. It is not possible to know the condition of our heart through self-examination. Jer 17:9. The fruit of self-examination may be a form of sorrow in relation to our own perceived failures or shortcomings. However, it is only the godly sorrow that is the fruit of meeting Christ eye to eye that leads to genuine repentance without regret.
- Many Christians also set their mind on the things of the flesh by trying to interpret the events and circumstances of their life as though they are *signs* from the Lord. For example, on the assumption that their circumstances will be favourable when the Lord approves of their direction in life, a person may assume that adverse and difficult circumstances are a *sign* from the Lord that they are going the wrong way. Equally, a person may jump to the conclusion that the Lord is addressing a certain issue in their life because of the circumstances that they are encountering. It is important to recognise that the Lord is not relying on our own subjective interpretation of our

circumstances to communicate with us. Rather, it is the word that is preached to us that is 'a lamp to our feet and a light to our path'. Psa 119:105.

- When the word of faith is proclaimed to us, we receive illumination through the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in our heart. Joh 16:8-11. Rom 8:16. We then receive further illumination when we present ourselves to discuss the word that we have received in the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Luk 24:29-31. The apostle Paul tells us that we are to examine ourselves in the fellowship of the *agape* meal. 1Co 11:28. However, this is not an exercise of self-analysis or a subjective reflection on our present circumstances. We examine ourselves, by the Spirit, in the light of the word that we have received. In this fellowship with our brethren in the *agape* meal, we are being delivered from every other futile method of trying to interpret what the Lord is saying to us.

The Father works all things together for our good

- When we are rightly connected to our brethren in the fellowship of the *agape* meal, we know that Jesus Christ Himself is making intercession for us to the Father. The apostle Paul proclaimed that 'He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because *He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God*'. Rom 8:27. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus Christ prayed that the will of God would be accomplished for every son of God through His one offering. Luk 22:42-44. Having been strengthened by the Spirit, Christ's prayer became *a deep travail* that continued for His entire offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross.
- The will of God is accomplished in our lives in the fellowship of Christ's offering journey. The apostle Paul declared, 'And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.' Rom 8:28. When we consider this verse, it is important to recognise that God *is not the cause of our suffering*. We know that all the pain and suffering in the world is the result of mankind's rejection of the fatherhood of God. We also know that Jesus Christ did not come to deliver us from this suffering. Rather, by the grace of God, on His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, He fully joined us in our fallen human condition by becoming *the body of sin*, and then by *tasting death* for every person. Heb 2:9.

- Jesus Christ died our death, on His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, while, at the same time, the resurrection life of God that was in His blood brought Him back from the death of our sin. Heb 13:20. For this reason, each wounding event that He suffered became a circumcising action upon Him, which was removing the body of sin from Him. Col 2:11. The apostle Peter described the offering of Christ by saying, 'When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.' 1Pe 2:23. In this way, the death that Christ died, *He died to sin*, once, for all men. Rom 6:10.
- With the unique journey of Jesus Christ from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross clearly in view, Peter declared to every Christian, 'To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.' 1Pe 2:21. When Jesus Christ, with His eyes like a flame of fire, reveals the iniquity that is in our heart, we 'flee for refuge' to the cross to lay hold of our unique participation in the wounding events of Christ. Heb 6:18. This is how we obtain mercy. As we are being conformed to His death, we are dying, with Him, to our own sin, so that we might live for righteousness as a son of God. 1Pe 2:24. In the fellowship of Christ's wounding events, the resurrection life of God in His blood is healing us from the malignant disease of sin in our life.
- The suffering that we now experience as a son of God in this world is our participation in the circumcision of Christ. It is the necessary 'heart operation' that is *saving our life*, because the other law is being removed from our heart and we are ceasing from sin. Col 2:11. Furthermore, as we have said, in our mortality, we are receiving the resurrection life of God, which is our capacity to live as a son of God. For this reason, if we are setting our mind on the things of the Spirit, we will not be viewing ourselves as the victim of our difficult or painful circumstances. Alternatively, if we have a victim mindset, it is one of the most obvious indicators that we are setting our mind on the things of the flesh.
- The apostle Peter further addressed this issue by saying, 'Since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also *with the same mind*, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.' 1Pe 4:2. When Peter instructed us to be *armed, or equipped*, with the mind of Christ in relation to this matter,

it is evident that there is a significant degree of spiritual warfare around this issue. The victim mindset is a common form of uncleanness that causes a person to become oppressed by unclean spirits.

To those who love God

- In contrast to the victim mindset, which is an attitude that is completely self-absorbed, Paul explained that the first outcome of God working all things together for our good is that we are enabled to *love God*. Rom 8:28. We receive the love of God as a gift when we are joined to the fellowship of Christ's wounding events. As we have noted already, these wounding events are circumcising the other law from our heart. At the same time, the love of God is being poured into our heart. Significantly, Paul explained, earlier in his letter to the Romans, that both of these actions – the circumcision of the other law and the love of God being poured into our heart – are *through the Holy Spirit*. Rom 2:29. Rom 5:5.
- In the same way that the love of God in the heart of Christ was the motivation and the capacity for His obedience to the Father, the love of God that is poured into our heart is the motivation and capacity for our obedience as a son of God. Joh 15:10. The fruit of the love of God being poured into our heart will be our obedience to the doctrine of our baptism. Having explained the reality of our baptism into the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, the apostle Paul proclaimed, 'But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you *obeyed from the heart* that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.' Rom 6:17.
- In a similar way, Paul explained to the Corinthians, 'For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.' 2Co 5:14-15. This is a helpful verse because it highlights that it is the love of Christ that compels or constrains us to a change of mindset. Recalling that 'motive governs mind', it is our changing motivation, as the love of God is being poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit, that is foundational to the renewing of our mind.

To those who are called according to His purpose

- Significantly, when our preoccupation is to reveal others in the fellowship of the body of Christ, we are also obtaining our sanctification as those who are 'called according to His purpose'. Rom 8:28. Paul expanded this statement concerning the purpose of God when he described it as being 'the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord'. Eph 3:11. The Father has accomplished His *eternal purpose* for every son of God in the offering of Jesus Christ from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. Jesus Christ has learned our obedience and has accomplished the works of our sonship for this age and the age to come.
- Remarkably, Jesus Christ learned our obedience and fulfilled the works of our sonship while He was in the lowest parts of the earth. Psa 139:15-16. He descended to the lowest parts of the earth from 12pm to 3pm on the day of His crucifixion, when darkness covered the whole earth. During those three hours, Jesus Christ tasted the fullness of our eternal death while, at the same time, He worked miracles for the dead. Psa 88:5-7,10-12. He authored each day of our life for us as a son of God. If we continue to walk with Him in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, we will inherit the full glory of our eternal inheritance, on the day of resurrection.
- Paul explained how we obtain our sanctification by saying, 'For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be *conformed* to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.' Rom 8:29. We are conformed to the image of the Son because, if we are united with Him in the likeness of His death, we are also united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. Paul further summarised what has already been accomplished for every son of God in the offering of Christ by saying, 'Whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.' Rom 8:30.

What shall we say then?

- The apostle Paul explained how we set our mind on the things of the Spirit by joining the new prayer meeting with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He then immediately turned his attention to the need for us to make a response to the proposition that he had so clearly explained to us. He was provoking us to consider whether our mindset is consistent with the mind that is set on the Spirit. He began

by saying, 'What then shall we say to these things?' Rom 8:31. He was effectively saying, 'What is our response?' Having asked this initial question, he then helpfully proceeded to ask several follow-up questions to direct our consideration.

- The first follow-up question that Paul asked was, 'If God is for us, who can be against us?' Rom 8:31. When Paul asked this question, he was not referring to the misguided notion that God is our greatest 'supporter' when we decide to take our own self-righteous, religious initiatives. We know that, if we are walking after the flesh, the Holy Spirit will be our greatest adversary. Gal 5:17. Rather, Paul was directing our attention to the full provision of God that has been freely given to us in Christ's offering. Paul continued, 'He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' Rom 8:32. This is the first element of our renewed mind. We believe that God has given us 'all things that pertain to life and godliness', in the fellowship of Christ's offering. 2Pe 1:3.
- Paul then asked, 'Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?' Rom 8:33. This is a significant question which is foundational to what it means to walk blamelessly before the Lord. In the early part of his letter to the Romans, Paul spent a considerable amount of time establishing that we are all 'without excuse' and 'blameworthy'. We are fully accountable for our iniquity and rebellion. Rom 1:20. However, when Christ was delivered up because of our offences, He was also raised because of our justification. Rom 4:25. The physical resurrection of Christ is the guarantee that He has learned our obedience and has perfected our sonship.
- Paul was drawing our attention to the finished work of Christ when He declared, 'It is God who justifies.' Rom 8:33. We are walking blamelessly as we continue to walk in the light of the word that Christ proclaims to us from His finished position, where He is seated at the right hand of God. We are part of God's elect if we are walking in the fellowship of Christ's offering, in obedience to the truth, so that our heart is being purified for a sincere love of the brethren. 1Pe 1:22. We are overcoming Satan, who stands to continually accuse us before the throne of God, as we are learning to love one another from the heart. Rev 12:11.
- Paul's next question was, 'Who is he who condemns?' Rom 8:34. As we have considered, the apostle Paul taught that there is now no

condemnation, which means 'damnation', for those who are in Jesus Christ, and are setting their mind on the things of the Spirit. If we are embracing our fellowship in Christ's offering and sufferings, the law of the Spirit of life that is in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death. Rom 8:2. We are under no obligation to the flesh. There is no reason for us to revert to the carnal prayer meeting that Paul described in Romans Chapter 7.

- Rather, we choose to set our mind on the things of the Spirit by presenting ourselves for participation in the new prayer meeting that Paul described in Romans Chapter 8. We present ourselves to God for obedience as those who are alive from the dead. Rom 6:13. As we continue to present ourselves in this manner, we know that God is working all things together for our good, because Jesus Christ is making intercession for us according to the will of God. Paul drew our attention to this specific point by continuing, 'It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, *who also makes intercession for us.*' Rom 8:34.
- Paul's final question was, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?' Rom 8:35. We may experience many of these things in the fellowship of the wounding events that Christ experienced from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. We have been called to 'go outside the camp' with Christ to bear His reproach. Heb 13:13. Paul continued to say, 'As it is written: "For your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter".' Rom 8:36. However, if we are being conformed to the death of Christ, we know that no-one can take our life from us. Joh 10:18.
- The apostle Paul continued, 'Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.' Rom 8:37. He highlighted the fact that, if we are joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, *we are never the victim of our circumstances*. We are more than conquerors because our participation in the wounding events of Christ is the context in which we are receiving the resurrection life of God that was in the blood of Christ. 2Co 2:14. If we continue in the faith of His word, so that we are not moved away from the hope of this gospel, we rejoice that Jesus Christ will present us to the Father at the end of our lifetime as those who are holy, blameless and above reproach, in His sight. Col 1:22-23.

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

- Paul concluded with the confession of his own faith by saying, 'I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is Christ Jesus our Lord.' Rom 8:38-39.