

Future Worship in the Present Day

Reflective Meditations of the Book of
Revelation!

Discover Now! how to live the life of future worship
In your life!

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Dedicated to the memory of Jack and Sylvia Hardy my mother and Father who now enjoy the life of the future in the presence of our heavenly Father, and to Grandma Morton a true woman of God.

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1. Worship Scenes in the Apocalypse

If I were John the Apostle, chained, and manacled on the Felons Isle of Patmos –
a prisoner of Roman justice, I do not know what I would have done?

For sure I would have prayed. I hope that I would have remained faithful. Better still that many of my fellow prisoners would have come to know of my faith in Jesus. But to meet the risen Lord face to face - what would that have been like [see on Revelation 1:17]? What would I have done? Fallen at his feet? Prostrated myself in complete humility? Become as a dead man as John did? Yes surely that would have been my response. Would it not be any Christian's preferred position? I have often pictured myself falling at Jesus' feet. I'm not sure there is much else I could do.

When we meet Lord Jesus face to face our worship will not be rendered as a duty - It will be a necessity. It will arise from a real sense of admiration for him, a deep feeling of unworthiness, or worse a dread of judgment to come.

When we meet him it will be with nothing hidden, but all revealed. Every secret of our hearts will be known, and the cry of my heart will be "Lord save me." Or, "Lord I worship you as the only one worthy of my praise." No one can meet Jesus without

something deep and profound happening inside.

As we will consider, John came to some sublime insights into Jesus on that special day. Whether he was taking a rest from forced labour, or whether he was too old to really do anything of use in the Roman mines of Patmos, we will not know until we meet him in heaven. What we do know is that John's heart was tuned into the God frequency, and on that day he received the greatest revelation ever given to humankind.

The apocalypse is a love letter from Christ through his apostle to his church on earth. Some of the pictures may seem hard. Lakes of fire, beasts and dragons etc, but they are the language of love. Love is always realistic. God wants his people to be prepared for what they will face in the battle between good and evil.

Any study of the Revelation has to wrestle with its code language, because code was the only way to successfully get the messages of the book safely to its destination. The church was under siege through the brutal emperor Domitian. Our present study will be considering the theme of worship which is at the core of apocalyptic truth. And that message has to be delivered and understood [Revelation 1:3].

The word "apocalypse" is important to comprehend. It originally comes from the Greek word "APOKALUPTOS" which has the meaning of "a revealing", or "an uncovering of

that which was mysterious and unknown until it was disclosed". [1]

The portrayals of the apocalypse are God's way of giving us a glimpse of the worship due to Him in the future age. It is pictured as radically different to that of this present age. As we acquaint ourselves with it we will find that it challenges the reader to re-evaluate his life. As believers' we are called to live with an awareness of the life of the future in the present.

With this in mind let us begin with a brief survey of key passages. You may wish to read each of them in full as we progress.

1. A Vision of Christ - Revelation 1:9 - 20

John sees Christ in his exalted form. His response is to be totally overcome.

All revelation is an uncovering of the majestic person of Christ. Worship begins by seeing ourselves for what we are in comparison to Jesus. This results in total devastation because of the encounter. It is at this point that we will know that our perception of God is far too small.

In the Old Testament we read about the prophet Isaiah's response to a vision he had of God, when he saw him in all his glory. He said:

“Woe is me! For I Am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” [Isaiah 9:5 RSV].

However, God never leaves us on the floor grovelling, although this is the place that we may begin. Rather he gives us the strength and confidence to stand up and walk in the presence of his smile of grace [see on Isaiah 9:6 and Revelation 1:17,18]. In order for a patient with cancer to be treated she needs to accept the diagnosis given to her by her doctor. The doctor cannot operate without her cooperation. It is the same with us, we need to know that we are sinners, who if left to ourselves without divine surgery we will be lost to eternal life in God's presence forever. John and Isaiah needed to know their need of help and that God was the only being in the universe who could offer it!

2. Worship that is due to the Father - Revelation 4:1 - 11

John is transported from his earthly surroundings into the very presence of God. He experiences the worship which is given “to the one who sits upon the throne”

[Revelation 4:2].

It fits the chain of revelation that the worshipper discovers Father God through His glory shining in the face of Christ [2 Corinthians 4:1-5]. John is not ready to enter into the presence of the Creator until he first prostrates his being in submission to the Saviour [Revelation 1:17]. And this self prostration is a process, not just a single event. Jesus is the way, truth and life [John 14:6]. His journey led to a cross, and it was a journey marked by many challenges. To know Jesus is to know that we are not worthy, that we are sinners in need of a Saviour. Once we have joined ourselves to Jesus by accepting forgiveness by what he did on the cross then we can be raised to newness of life by Christ, we can then start to enter God's courts with thanksgiving in our hearts [Revelation 1:17].

I had a good friend whom I met through his wife who worshipped at one of my churches. We often played Badminton together. He was not a believer, and when he became one later it didn't happen over night. Although in the end he formed a relationship with Jesus to my great pleasure, it was after a journey which required friendship with people who loved Jesus so that he could find the reality of Jesus in their lives, and want it for himself. So often we want to rush people to Christ. We are so impatient. We almost demand a quick conversion, and a rapid progress, which as it were, sets up the expectation that new Christians should mature to the point that they

can easily overcome all their problems. Let us remember that John had this vision, in which he was transported into the throne room of God, at the end of his long Christian life. He was about 90 years old when he had these wonderful experiences. Christian life is not based on living with continuous highs, it has peaks and troughs. This was a great peak in John's experience. But it came after many years of ups and downs. And the most wonderful thing is that John was humble enough to still accept that he needed God's help every step of the way; his prostration at the feet of Jesus demonstrates his self estimation after many years of doing the Lord's will [see on Revelation 1:17 - 18].

Some Christians want to see God do great and exciting things [perhaps we all do - I've got my tongue in my cheek]. Not just now and then, but frequently. They may be termed as thrill seekers. They can be easily identified. They are never happy in one church, or one job, or one place for too long. They have to keep on moving on, looking for the next high, like drug addicts seek their next fix. What are they addicted to? God or the goodies? Yes it is true that we should look to God to achieve what we find impossible for ourselves, but motives count. What about when God plans a garden of Gethsemane for us, where we have to say "Not my will but yours be done" [Luke 22:42]. We all want to find ourselves before God's wonderful throne, but at times being before it means sorrow not joy, because it can mean giving something up, rather than getting a goodie bag.

In John's long life he had often suffered. In fact it is recorded that the Apostles were beaten for their faith among many other experiences. One early tradition suggests that John was thrown into a vat of boiling oil by the emperor Domitian. John had learnt that worshipping Jesus with his total being meant taking up his cross daily and following him. It meant pain as much as it meant pleasure to serve God. But John had learnt to be in God's presence through good and bad, just as the apostle Paul had. Listen to Paul's words which sum up the lessons he had learnt:

“Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content.” [Phil. 4:11 RSV].

3. Worship due to the Son - Revelation 5:1 - 14

Jesus is highlighted as the only one worthy of our worship. Only he is to be permitted to open the mystic seals found in his Father's hand. These seals uncover the mysteries of God's plan for our world. Without Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary there would be no unveiling of the future for man.

Moreover, by this means, the key to our view of the worship due to God in the future age is manifested. Without him we will never be able to gain access to God. Every other being in the universe clearly is unworthy of worship, only Christ, as one of the eternal three, is able to open the hidden glimpses of that which he offers to us as a gift

of grace. He does this for our guidance and protection.

Alexander [called the Great by many], saw himself as a man of destiny. He considered that his life was mapped out for him by the hand of God. He achieved with a few thousand men what no other man had ever done in war. In one battle against the Persian king Darius III he defeated half a million soldiers with 40 or 50 thousand men. Odds of about 12 to 1. Why did he do this? Because he was a man of destiny or because he believed it? Probably because of his belief. Yet he died at 30 years of age. From military glory to the ashes of death. So it is with all humanly generated destinies, but not so with God.

The Apocalypse shows us that if we believe God's great destiny for us then we will overcome even death itself, becoming dwellers in God's eternal presence [Revelation 2:11]. We will become a physical part of God's kingdom which will never end, and we will never know any more pain or war or suffering or death [Revelation 21]. Now that really is a destiny, and it is 100% yours and mine.

4. Worship as prayer and pain - Revelation 6:9 - 11

In this passage we find ourselves listening to the petition of the souls of martyrs in the time of the opening of the fifth seal.

It is under the pains of this revelation that a prayer of intense human suffering is screamed out to the Creator. Real worship has to come from the depths of intimate communion with God. Only when we are honest with him concerning our deepest pain, and suffering, can a depth relationship evolve. It is as the Son becomes incarnate in our world of misery, joy and pain [and all the bits in between], that we can know that he really empathizes with us at the deepest of all human levels of anguish and exhilaration. He alone is able to transform our present experiences to new perceptions about God and the quality of life found in him. We cannot know Jesus' love unless we let Him heal our deepest wounds - and transform the complete spectrum of human reality into a new story built on the God theme.

There is a certain brand of Christian belief about worship which teaches people that real worship means good emotional highs. This is worship for some, and this is what they expect on a Sunday morning. However real worship is not just this. It is rather the whole spectrum of human responses to God in every emotional state we find ourselves in; as we react to what life throws at us. Real worship is when we put God in the highest place whether we are in pain or an ecstatic seventh heaven. The Devil can use false unilateral definitions of worship experience to dupe us into thinking that we are failing to worship God properly a lot of the time. And this is because none of us can ever be on a continual high. We must be realistic. God is in the highs and the lows.

Christian leaders need to teach their congregations to recognise that worship is not an emotional state, but an attitude of mind, which sets God in the highest place in every aspect of human daily life; with the result that the people of God learn to exercise faith in God whatever their circumstances. We need to be equipped to offer God our worship even when we feel intensely conflicted.

My Mother, Sylvia Hardy, had it often said of her suffering [she was severely disabled with rheumatoid arthritis, and in constant pain], that her ability to cope with life with a smile gave others courage to cope with lesser problems. What many did not immediately realise was that it was her deep relationship with Jesus that had given her the strength to go on. Because he had suffered she found strength in him to suffer with real courage. It is not those who go through life getting it all easy that capture our attention, but it is those who get through against the odds. People who face the challenges of life with courage are the ones who win our admiration.

My mother's voice may well at times have joined the cry of the souls of the suffering under God's symbolic altar. She probably asked "why me?" But even if she did ask such things, I know that she had also found the answer that it was all for the sake of Jesus her Lord who himself had suffered on a cross of unbearable suffering the sins of the whole world. The cross is the complete means in getting us on the road to our

destiny, and the resurrection is God's guarantee that all suffering will end with eternal life in God's heaven.

5. Worship that has gone wrong - Revelation 6:12 - 17

As Jesus opens the sixth seal we see a large body of people who run to hide from him.

Those who conceal themselves from the eternal three, do so because they have never known the true intimacy of God's love. Any worship which is derived from fear of punishment is characterised by what happens during the time of the sixth seal. It is not based on praise, or thanksgiving, but on concealment, and fear of intimacy. Those who do not know God in his unconditional love cannot really worship him.

Stating this in the positive John writes in another of his epistles:

“In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, But perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.” [1 John 4:17,18 RSV].

Those who really know Jesus need not have one single fear about their future with him; it is 100% secure. And this is because he bore the penalty not for some of our sins, but all of our sins.

6. God knows all of his worshippers - Revelation 7:9 - 17

Next there is a picture of the redeemed who stand before the Lord of the universe giving glory and thanks to him.

Those who worship in the future age began with a knowledge of it in the present eon. God knows those who will make it to heaven through adversity and trouble. He is able to do this in advance of the event because he is the Alpha and Omega [Revelation 1:8]. There is a promise here, that we will make it, with his almighty aid through the tribulations and challenges as we face them [7:13,14]. It is like John was saying to us "I saw that journey's end is secure."

7. Not by might, nor by power but by the Spirit - Revelation 11:1 - 19

So often Revelation 11 has been studied without its' great Zechariah background in proper focus. The picture of the lamp stand, and the two olive trees depict the greatest

truth of all, that it is not by the might of man that we will enter into the life of the future, but it is by the gentle persuasion of the Holy Spirit [Zechariah 4:6]. The seven branched lamp stand of God's temple burns with the power of God's Spirit. It is only those who are filled with him who will cry out:

We give thanks to thee, Lord God

Almighty, who art and who

Wast,

That thou hast taken thy great power

And begun to reign. [Revelation 11:17 - RSV].

8. False worship and true worship contrasted - Revelation 13:1 - 18

The Beast, and Anti - lamb, of Revelation 13 are contrasted with the true Lamb of Revelation 14. John the Apostle declares that only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, produced before the world began, will be able to resist worshipping the Devil, through the manipulations of his unholy trinity of the beast, anti - lamb and image [Revelation 13:8]. The followers of the Lamb proceed wherever he leads. They do so not because of their own might or power, but because the Lord has known them in advance. They belong to him, and know that they do - because he has chosen them, and given them the guarantee of their belonging by filling them with his

presence through the Holy Spirit's inner confirmation of their complete security

[Romans 8:16].

9. The intimacy of those who live the life of the future in the present - Revelation 14:1

- 5

The mystic 144,000 follow the Lamb [Jesus] as naturally as the sun's course is directed in its' solar path. They are eternally redeemed, totally secure in his presence [Revelation 14:3]. So often this passage is made to apply beyond the termination of the eschaton, but the revelator intends us to know, through his use of the word "redeemed", that the followers of the Lamb are those who were foreknown for eternal salvation from before the world's foundation. We are to take from this passage that our place in this special select company is assured; and it needs to be stressed that the use of the number 144,000 does not indicate a literal number because after mentioning this symbolic number the next scene comprehends an unnumbered throng of people [See on Revelation chapter 7] After all Christians already belong to Jesus; this depiction is of the life of the future that is to be realised in our present consciousness [See on Ephesians 2:6]. Not as an elitist nose in the air self estimation which Christians use to look down on others who are not yet followers of Jesus "for the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men." God shows no partiality based on a believers' estimation of others because of their present location outside of Christ [Titus

2:11 RSV]. As with all scripture it has been written for our encouragement as we traverse life's paths, not as a means of self glorification [2 Timothy 3:16,17].

However, having considered the dangers of elite self perceptions we must take courage in the position God has assigned to us as his children. Over against the terrors of the Beast's enforced worship [Revelation 13:11 - 18] the believer is given the guarantee that his, or her, name is secure in the books of eternity [Revelation 13:8]. This gives us courage to realise we can never be snatched from our Lord's hand [John 10:27 - 29].

Real worshippers of the Lamb will follow him wherever he leads, however hard it may seem. This is the essence of all authentic Christian worship. It is a daily commitment to take up our crosses, deny our selves and follow him [Matthew 16:24]; so often people want to have exciting encounters with God, which give them a high, like a drug might. This expectation needs to be balanced over against the hum drum of daily life which is mostly anything but exhilarating. Christian's have been called to live normal lives, with normal worries. They are not different in this way from any one else. But what needs to be different is the way they handle things. Perhaps the only way that we can claim to differ is that we will know more temptation than non-Christians. Of course, I can almost hear you saying "we've got a lot more to look forward to as well!" That is true, I agree.

10. All worship comes from an experience of knowing God to be just and merciful -

Revelation 15:1 - 4 & 16:5 - 7

The Beast is overcome only as we put our trust in God. We need to know that God is just, as well as merciful. He is not slow about keeping his promise to bring this sad world to an end as some count slowness, but he is willing to wait until everyone has had a chance to repent [2 Peter 3:9]. Repentance comes from the Greek word meaning “to change one’s mind”. God wants to give everyone a chance to make an informed decision about their future. This will involve some important “changes” in the way we see things. When the end does come we will then be enabled to affirm that the judgments of God against sin, and its’ perpetrators, are just and good. This sort of worship is only possible when we are absolutely sure about God. This develops on the level of a daily relationship with him.

11. The truest type of worship is living intimately in the presence of God - Revelation

19:1 - 9

Those who have intimacy with God now will continue in that condition until the so called marriage supper of the Lamb. Both partners enter into this state with mutual commitment. It is the deepest type of relational life that we can have on a human level.

Listen to the words of the joyous throng:

“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God

The Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and

Give him the glory,

For the marriage of the Lamb has come,

And his bride has made herself ready;

It was granted her to be clothed

With fine linen, bright and pure.” [Revelation 19:7 & 8

RSV]

The redeemed, you and I, are the bride. Jesus is the husband. Only those who are in love enter into the romance of marriage. It is a romance which defies Holly Woods one night stands, and passionate bedroom scenes. Rather, it is the type of love which knows and accepts the other warts and all. It is the love which commits itself to the spouse despite the wear and tear of the years. It is the love which nurses the sick, which turns a blind eye to many failings, because loves nature is to cover a multitude of sins [1 Peter 4:8].

Those who love God in the depths of their hearts will be able to enter into the most intimate depths of God’s agape family [2]. This type of worship goes beyond liturgical

forms and words sung in beautifully crafted services. It penetrates to the very root of who we are.

A real Christian has had the depths of his, or her, heart plumbed, and by this process is transformed by the Lord's Holy Spirit into a new mystic creature, a real son, or daughter, of apocalyptic mysticism.

12. God is the Temple - Face to Face with Christ my Saviour - Revelation 21:22 -

22:5

In the future age people will see God face to face. No more churches, no more temples, but as we are known so shall we know [1 Corinthians 13:12]. Our intimacy will be built upon a complete and open faced relationship with the living God.

Nothing will be hidden, all will be open [Matthew 10:26]. We are invited to start to partake of this life now. When we are with him in the future's not yet then we will live in the house of the Lord forevermore [Psalm 23:6].

13. Misplaced Worship - Revelation 19:10 & 22:8 & 9

Even great hearted Christians, such as John the Apostle, can worship the wrong things. In John's case he succumbed to Angel adoration, which twice led to a sharp reminder that he should worship God alone. We may magnify TV, our jobs, our qualifications, our homes or our cars. We are reminded to worship the one who gave us these things, rather than the things themselves.

Conclusion

This completes our brief survey of the major passages that will form the compass of the human journey as we follow Jesus. We will have recourse to dig deeply to uncover the rare and beautiful treasures concealed behind metaphor and symbolism in our studies to follow. The Holy Spirit must be our constant guide. It will also be important for us to remember what John recorded elsewhere in his gospel and letters. The complete understanding of his conception of worship is conveyed by all that the Lord revealed to him.

Revelation, and the other Johannine writings are like glove and hand; both are needed in order to protect us from the cold outside world of incorrect interpretation. To often

the apocalypse has been divorced from its rich existential roots in the rest of the gospel story as told by John; to do so seems unfounded and unwise.

John came to know Jesus in an intimate walk whilst here in bodily form. Some have said that of all the Apostles John was the closest to his master. His pictures of Jesus certainly show God's deep interest in a personal relationship with individuals. The other gospels tend toward a depiction of Christ's work with the multitudes, only John sees things otherwise.

We will also find ourselves considering other Old and New Testament passages in our journey; especially those that relate to a better understanding of Christian worship. The apocalypse may be compared to the nerve centre of an organism. All neural pathways begin and end in the great book of final eschatological uncovering. May the Lord Jesus be with us as we progress in our study together.

Personal Worship File

We all have encounters with God. These may take diverse forms.

I will always remember a significant event with him. I was seriously ill, after having a long viral infection. I felt deeply depressed, unable to do anything other than rest. I had

no interest in food, reading, TV, or anything, or anybody else. I was full of anxiety - would I ever get through this? That was the primary question!

I was sitting in the lounge of my wife's parents' home having tea. The TV was not on. I sat quietly whilst the chatter went interminably on. My despair had reached near breaking point.

I suddenly felt a strong desire to turn the TV on. I asked my wife to do so. It was inconvenient as no one else was interested in it, but I guess everyone felt obliged.

As the screen flashed into life a Songs of Praise programme was on. A pastor was sharing a story about a woman whose experience was the same as mine in every important particular. What was significant was the timing of this programme - you will understand, I'm sure, I did not know it was on. I had not planned to watch it. God's timing is always just right. The minister told how this woman had felt very low, but that he had encouraged her that with time she would get better. And after a few months she made a full recovery.

God spoke to me in that. He told me, prophetically, I believe, that what had happened to this woman would happen to me.

This was a great miracle. I didn't jump up immediately and proclaim my recovery, but

the message was clear - with time I would. Just as Jesus put his hand on the prostrate John and told him to arise [Revelation 1:17] so he did to me. God does not always heal us all at once, but neither does he leave us without comfort. I knew I was not alone, and I have ever since known that God is really there to help me.

Your Response

What about you? How has God spoken to you? In what ways has he laid his hand on you? Can you point to instances when he has given you his encouragement and help? What do you want to ask him now? What do you want to say to him?

End Notes

[1] See on W. Barclay, The Daily Study Bible, The Revelation of John, Volume 1, The Saint Andrew's Press, Edinburgh, Pages 21 - 23. This will give you a simple study of this word in the context of Revelation chapter 1.

[2] "AGAPE" is the New Testament Greek word used to describe the sort of love which is true of God. It primarily refers to his self-sacrificial nature. See on G. Kittel [Editor], Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Eerdmans, USA, 1969. Pages 44 - 55.

2. The life of the future in the present

Before John can receive the mysteries of the apocalypse he must come into the presence of Christ. This is because the Saviour is the catalyst of all divine revelation. Likewise before heavenly realities can be disclosed to the seven churches [of the Revelation] they must hear the message of the Lord. There are barriers which are hindering some, others need strengthening in what they are doing right [see on Revelation chapters 2 & 3].

In a later chapter we will see that Ephesus needed Christ-like love restoring in its' fellowship in order to be ready for a loving heaven. Smyrna had to lay itself on the altar of willing sacrifice. Pergamum had to learn to tolerate only those practices and beliefs which were in harmony with the Word of God. Thyatira had to leave moral and theological relativism behind - accepting only the absolutes of the Christian faith. Sardis needed to awake to its true spiritual condition. Philadelphia needed to walk in an awareness of the doors of opportunity God was opening to it. And Laodicea had to invite Christ into the very heart of its lukewarm fellowship taking a firm stand on the side of the truth of Christ. All of these churches were being released into a new awareness of the grounds of entering into the intimacy of the fellowship of the Kingdom of God [See on Revelation 2 & 3].

These churches could only be ready for the worship of the future age if they had learnt the lessons of the present age. John is called to enter heavenly places only when the church, universal, represented by the seven churches, had been addressed. The whole church in all ages, right up until today, is being spoken to by Christ in the symbolism of these seven Asian fellowships. Seven is the number of completeness within Jewish and Judeo Christian thought. So the complete church is being addressed by the living Christ who is above all rule and authority seated in heavenly places [Ephesians 1:20]. The churches of Revelation had real difficulties in terms of their understanding of their position in Christ; As Paul reminds the Ephesians some time before the apocalypse was written that they were to realise that they themselves should consider that they were “raised up with him, and made...[to] sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus [Ephesians 2:6 RSV]. However, Ephesus which had started out well ended up losing the vital aspect of the principle of Christ’s love in its midst. Indeed each of the churches addressed needed to recognise that they were not to be shaped by the world views of paganism and humanism around them, but rather to model their corporate life style on their position with Christ above all rule and authority. It is still the same today we forget our position in Christ who has called us out of the dark ethos of this present world, to live with a new perception of ourselves as already having eternal life, having “passed over from death to life” [John 5:24].

A doorway to the future

A door is opened in heaven [Revelation 4:1], and John is immediately in the Spirit. He is now permitted to enter the heavenly realms. Paul speaks of the “EPOURANIA” in Ephesians 1:3 & 2:6. This New Testament Greek term describes the exalted position that Jesus has with God. Literally it is translated as “the heavenly's” [1] the believer who has accepted the dying Lord also takes part in the ascended Lord’s victory over darkness. To partake of this redemption means that the focal point is now on our spiritual position with the heavenly Jesus as we are seated there with him in the heavenly places enjoying all of his victory over all the powers of darkness and negativity; placing ourselves in that position because Christ makes it clear that we enjoy that position with him by association through his saving grace means that his Spirit makes it possible to overcome every obstacle to faith and effective living for Jesus right now as we continue to share the gospel with those around us.

The Christian is a partaker in Eschatological salvation [2]. The word “Eschatological” comes from the Greek word “Eschaton”, which means “end”. To be a partaker of Eschatological salvation means that when we trust Jesus as our saviour we start at that moment to be eternal creatures. We are no longer considered by God to be mortal creatures who will die, and live but once, but we are now considered to have gone beyond the grave, and to have started living already in God’s eternal kingdom [John

5:24 & 2 Corinthians 5:16 – 18]. It is like we had got into a time machine and been transported beyond the end of the world, and, that we had started to live forever in God's future kingdom right now! This is what God wants us to understand, and this is how he wants us to perceive our position with him right now. This means that Jesus has won everything for us. His death for all sin, his victory over the grave, and his ascension to the highest place, above all rule and authority, is ours the moment we put our trust in him. Paul pictures this in terms of entering into the life of the future age in the present [Romans 6:23]. We begin eternal life the moment we believe [John 5:24]. Thereafter, we can never be lost in any circumstance that life throws at us [John 10:27 - 29 & Romans 8:38 & 39]. There will be 100% surety that we belong to God forever. There need be no fear of future loss. It doesn't matter how we feel; saved or unsaved, Rebellious, or holy, we can be sure that our feelings are only an illusion compared to the facts of who we now are in Christ Jesus. We should rely on the facts, not on feelings, in other words. There will be times when emotions contradict faith. Learn that you can have those times. It is important not to dialogue with ourselves during the difficult periods, because the tendency will be to make mountains out of mole hills. The more that we focus on something the bigger it gets; this may be called the magnifying glass principle. God's remedy for all human instability is to promise the believer that he/she has "passed over from death to life" [John 5:24]. If you magnify anything enlarge upon that!

The data base of life

Revelation 13:8 states it another way:

“.....all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.” [RSV]

This verse comes within the context of a symbolic demonic being who wishes all people to worship Satan. The sense of the verse is in the negative, although the ramifications of its' argument has volumes to add to our encouragement. There are, by implication, people who have had their names securely written in God's data base of life since before the world began. Revelation 17:8 & 21:20 mention this record book again. Before the world was made God foreknew all those individuals who would make it to future glory. This does not mean that God makes some people saved and others lost, but it does indicate that he foreknows all who will be saved, and he has already recorded their names in the eternal book of his future kingdom. Of course some may laugh at the idea of a literal record book, but the scripture is clear all the same God knows us in advance as his eternally secure creatures, and that is the important thing not to be lost sight of!

Indeed John in his gospel reinforces this by telling the story of a time when Jesus told Peter how he would die. John says that by this Peter understood that Jesus had given him information in advance on how he would “glorify God”. What does this mean? If we look at what Peter had been through when he denied Jesus on the night of his betrayal, we can see that Peter had every reason for future insecurity. Would he deny Jesus again in the future? How could he rely on his own self estimation when it proved that he had got it so wrong already? Jesus says to him in so many words “I know that you will always worry that you will let me down again Peter, so I’m going to let you know that when you die, it will be as a man destined for eternal glory. You will make it Peter, and I want you to be encouraged by it!” [See on John 21:15 - 19]. At the end of this chapter I share how God told me that I was eternally secure. I believe that every Christian who has once received the Holy Spirit will know that they belong to God forever [Romans 8:14 &15]. God wants us to know that we can never be separated from him as his elect children [Romans 8:31 - 39].

A distortion which can nullify future security

The epistle to the Ephesians informs us that we partake in Christ’s victory over all the powers of evil [Ephesians 1]. In Ephesus [See Revelation 2 comparing it with the epistle to the Ephesians] a group had arisen who claimed that Christ’s sacrifice was not enough to win the battle against evil. Other practices beyond grace, and faith, were

needed. This was yet again another form of salvation by works as opposed to grace. Collosians, Ephesian's sister book, gives us an insight into some of these other practices, which were thought to be the key to a special secret about salvation. Paul outlines them in the following terms:

“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its' joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. [Col. 2:16 - 19 - RSV].

The secret of Christian victory is in God's hands alone. Paul reminds the Collosians that “growth” is “from God” only. It comes by sovereign grace, not by any human effort or activity. Man cannot will himself to change. He either receives it by simple faith, or lives in bondage to the Jewish regulations, that had produced spiritual death in that nation. Judaism had become so fixated on Mosaic practices that it lost sight of the true goal of those practices, foreshadowed in its sacrificial system. With the Arrival of Jesus the shadow met its' reality, sacrifice was no longer needed [Hebrews 9].

Bondage is the inevitable result of humanistic efforts to win favour with God, or to change one's self. Paul comments in Gal 2:19,20 that the purpose of the law was to show man that he could not produce salvation, or, for that matter, change his life by adhering to a law code is true for any individual who thinks they can earn merit with God by human efforts. It is only by giving up/dying to self effort that salvation can be realised [See also Ephesians 2:8]. Paul pictures this as an act of self crucifixion with Christ [Galatians 2:20]. The law was never given to keep, but to be a demonstration that we could not become holy by it. The new life of grace is not constructed to exist by moral, or ceremonial law, but by walking by the Spirit. We are to let what God wants to do for us happen in us. It is the Spirit who will grow what are described as fruit in our lives [Galatians 5:22 - 24]. A level of morality that far exceeds the law will then become self evident [Galatians 5:16]. This will happen because our real inner most selves have been changed by the purity of Christ from then on new positive Christ-like traits of character will spring up from deep inside. The Holy Spirit is the means by which Christ forever after dwells in us.

In Galatians Paul highlights this very clearly. The church of Galatia had succumbed to a salvation by works philosophy. He targets this failing directly to a life bereft of the workings of God's sovereign Holy Spirit of grace. He says:

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain? - if it really is in vain. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? [Gal. 3:1 - 5 - RSV].

How God works in the Christian's life

God's Spirit is the Spirit of grace. We cannot work to produce his activity, we can only trust and receive his presence as a simple present or gift. When we receive the Holy Spirit we have discovered the key to the life of the future in the present. He offers us the complete victory of Jesus over sin. Paul is filled with awe concerning this reality in his letter to the Ephesians. He says:

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in

the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. [Ephesians 1:15 - 23 - RSV]

Also consider what he says in Ephesians 2:5 & 6:

.....when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. [RSV].

There are some important teachings to be deduced from this passage:

[1] God has given us a “spirit of revelation” and wisdom. He directly reveals who we have become by virtue of our connection to Christ. Jesus has “accomplished” everything, not just some things, so that we can be totally saved. There is no partial gospel theology here. Salvation is pictured as a completed package given to us in order to give us 100% security for now and the future.

[2] We are to see ourselves as “saints”. “Saints” are not a select few, canonised by the church, but all believers are included.

[3] This revelation informs us that we have all of Christ’s absolute power over death, Satan and sin dwelling in us. It is a gift to us. We are not to look to the future for it. We are not to work for it. We cannot even will it into existence. It is already ours in Jesus. We just need to trust that it is true. Satan is utterly defeated. We only have to inform him of this. His foothold in human lives was destroyed at conversion, when a new nature was implanted in the Christian. All that is required is to know, and to accept, what we already are in Christ. There is no special methodology to acquire it. Just trust the complete victory which is already signed sealed and delivered to us by the “Spirit of Jesus”. It is ours by virtue of our connection with Jesus. He is above all rule and authority - those forces of spiritual wickedness said to exist in heavenly places are nullified [Ephesians 6:20]. New spiritual birth is a real, new implanted nature in us, which we now possess [Colossians 3:10]. It is as much ours now as new spiritual

children of God, as our physical lives were when our parents brought us into the world. Some Christians seem to have got so hung up on their freewill, and their right to choose, that they have almost gone over to a gospel of the power of choice. What God has given to us is not primarily free will, but rather to trust the new nature he has put in us; which is in the likeness of Jesus. Jesus power to overcome all sin is ours to take hold of in trust. It has been implanted in us miraculously at the point of new birth [John 3:1- 16 & Colossians 3:9,10 & 2 Corinthians 5:16 – 18]. We are not saved by choosing to be changed, but we are saved by God choosing to save us [Ephesians 2:8]. Even our future works, and destinies, are prepared in advance for us to walk to follow as we discover each day what God’s Spirit is guiding us to do and say for him [Ephesians 2:8 – 10 & John 5:19] Humanism has a lot to say about our right to choose. It is the buzz word of post - modernism, but Christians cannot produce anything in themselves by simply choosing to change by their own power, or piety. As Peter said of the lame man who was healed by him [through the Spirit of Jesus dwelling in him]:

‘Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him.....And his name, by faith

in his name, has made this man strong.....” [Acts 3:12,13,16 RSV].

It is Jesus alone who changes us, heals us, and empowers us; this is the central thesis of the Acts model of ministry, mission and evangelism. It is not by the power of our choice or will that lives are transformed but by the Spirit of Jesus [Acts 16:8]. The Bible has very little to say about the power of our choices. It has a great deal to say about the power that is opened to us through Faith in what Jesus has already completely achieved for us on the Cross, and by virtue of his resurrection to eternal life. Because of Him we have power, not because of anything in ourselves. Beware of the false gospel of salvation by choice. Satan is peddling it in the church today! It is derived from individualist psychologies and philosophies; it is not the basis for the great Gospel of our Lord’s grace. But it is based on a false premise which makes man and his freedom more important than the God who made him.

[4] We are seated above all rule and authority with Jesus in “heavenly places”. That is how Paul means us to perceive it! The victory of the future age is already ours. Nothing can get in the way of our relationship with Jesus except our own humanism. The Devil may try to convince us he can, but he cannot. This is the truth! This is our liberty! We are now sharing in Christ’s life of future victory in the present. Hebrews 1:1-3 teaches that with Jesus arrival the “last days” began. We are part of the Kingdom of God right now. We have been born into it once for all [See John 3:1-18].

[5] The will of God is for us to be totally liberated.

Future life as present worship

This all relates to the way we worship God. If we only see ourselves as struggling individuals, hobbling on our way to heaven, then that is how we will express ourselves in worship. However, if we consider ourselves to be living the life of the future in the present, then we will have reached a realistic sense of security. Our spirits will then unite with the Holy Spirit, and we will be spiritually transported into the liberty of the worshippers of the future age. Real Christian worship starts when we know that we cannot ever be lost to that future. Many people offer a praise which is not praise at all - for it is based on fear of loss. God does not want this for them; so he has promised that we are eternally his!

Gordon Fee, in His book "Paul, the Spirit and the People of God" makes a number of critical observations about living this life of the future in the present, and it is well worth the read [consider notes 3 – 6 from Fees book].

John's vision of present future security

It is this "absolute certainty" of our inseparable eternal security in Christ which informs the vision John receives, of the life of future worship in Revelation chapters 4 & 5.

This view of heavenly worship, and Christ's immutable place above all rule and authority, is what gave the absolute certainty of salvation to the early Christians, who saw themselves as already partaking of this life of future worship through the Spirit.

The 24 elders, representing Old Covenant and New Covenant Spiritual Israel, draw the attention of believers to their already existing spiritual position in the eternal Kingdom of God. The visions of Revelation 4 & 5 should give us a practical focus of what is already ours.

It is only as the church loses sight of itself, and starts to see itself as belonging to Christ, that it will be able to start to live the new radical, holy lifestyle of worship that God wants us to possess. If our view of Christ's exalted position is too microscopic, then we will find ourselves focussing on our own weaknesses. This will occur because we have no real hope in an omnipotent Jesus. The end result will be a sense of defeat. The message of Scripture is that we already have the victory in Jesus. We already have the full spiritual armour of God that is our possession through the indwelling of the Spirit of Jesus. We need to wear this armour with a full understanding of the completeness of its defensive and offensive capabilities which Christ has

delivered to us through his indwelling Spirit [Eph. 6:12].

The seven churches of Asia needed to picture themselves as no longer part of this world, but as part of the heavenly lifestyle of worship instead. As the song goes “This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through”; if our convictions are not in agreement with this realisation we will inevitably set ourselves up for spiritual failure.

The seven churches, being full of weakness, uncertainty and insecurity, needed a vision of the worship of the future, in order to have a clear picture of who they already were in Christ. This vision is an individual and corporate sense of awareness of the completely new creatures Christ has made us into. This was to be the ultimate encouragement for early Christians who had come to a new self perception about their real identities in Christ. Christ had already made them completely new creatures as the sense of the original Greek in 2 Corinthians 5: 17 demonstrated. The pictures of chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation are to be taken as the goal towards which the church must shoot.

The story is complete - God has said so!

The heavenly beings surround the throne of redemption echoing what Christ has achieved on the cross for the church. The Greek is in the aorist tense. As we will note later, this assuage almost always is an expression of a completed action, once and for

all, in past time. This is every believer's heritage. Those who partake in this future life awareness know that redemption is completely theirs. It is the concept of being bought back from slavery. We have once for all been bought back from bondage to sin and Satan. The victory is ours by right. Whatever Satan says about your failings it no longer matters. You are completely God's possession. You are saved! Satan need no longer have a foothold.

Some people think of themselves as found, but easily lost. This is the Devil's ploy. God's message is that we will never be lost. There will never be a time when we will be overcome to the point of eternal separation. We are totally and irrevocably saved. All we have to do is trust it. What a security, what a joy. There is no need to keep on with the vicious circle of introspection to see whether we are good enough to be saved, or what it is that is now hindering God's work in us. All of that was once and for all dealt with at the cross. Don't spend your life examining your every motive, but home in on what you already are in Christ, and rejoice that you will always be that for ever and ever. We are transformed by beholding his glory, rather than by gazing at our own navels.

What scripture says about the grounds of Christian security

So often people unconsciously think of themselves as having been started on the Christian journey by an act of free grace, and ever after they have to work at keeping themselves free from sin. But the teaching of Scripture is:

[1] At the cross Jesus died for all sin once and for all; thus giving the Christian complete atonement. We never again need to see ourselves as struggling sinners, but as a saved and accepted saints [1 Peter 3:18].

[2] He justified us once for all. He completely forgave our sins from the beginning to end of our lives. He also completely covered us with his righteousness once for all from beginning to end. Hence we no longer need to fear condemnation [Romans 8:1]. This does not, however, give us the right to sin as much as we like. Real gratitude to God will make us want to please him, not disobey him!

[3] He offers us complete victory and security. We no longer need to see ourselves as sinners, but as saints. We belong to him. Victory over sin is not won by our present activities to overcome it, but it was won 2000 years ago on the cross of Christ [Romans 6:1-4]. Hence it is impossible to try to make something ours which was ours

from the moment of conversion. Rather than seeing ourselves as struggling sinners, we need to see ourselves as victorious saints.

Living between times

We are now living between times. Theologians speak of the “now” and “not yet”. We are “now” saved, but we are “not yet” in heaven in the body. This does not mean that we focus on our suffering and pain, but that we focus on what is ours as a 100% certainty. When the physical reality of the Kingdom of God takes over in this world - destroying all other competitors - we will be there [Daniel 2:44 & 7:13,14].

The “not yet” of this future was what Paul strove to reach forgetting what laid behind, and pressing on towards the goal [Philippians 3:12]. His was a positive focus. So much of modern psychology would have our past dominate our present. For Paul the only past which dominated his present was the fact that all of his sin past, present and future had been paid for at the cross. This positive mind set meant that he was not tied down by the skeletons in his closet anymore. Satan could not use them against him. He was already singing with the redeemed before the victorious Lamb in his mind’s eye [Revelation 7]. When Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi they sang praises to God and there was an earth quake and the doors of the prison were thrown open [Acts 16:25]. This was a very practical demonstration of the power of Jesus as he

shared his position of authority over earthly principalities, and demonic forces, from his seat at the right hand of God. Paul and Silas exercised their place seated with Christ and Jesus released them from all constraint and human attempts to contain the mission of the gospel work.

How God offers encouragement

A person with a gift of prophecy gave Jenny and I a Word from the Lord, which came after a particularly hard experience. He told how he had seen us standing by a pile of stones which we had raised as a monument to the past. At first we were obsessed with this monument. It seemed to dominate the terrain. We became discouraged and walked away in darkness. Then the Lord asked us to look back. We had not noticed before that next to it was a well bathed in light. He told us to go back and drink of it. Once we had done this we walked away with a new sense of purpose - free from the past.

Through this picture God showed us that we were holding onto the past. We had in theory accepted that it was all buried at the cross, but in practice we still clung on to it. It was God who released us from this to a new starting point. It was for us to start to see ourselves as completely new creatures. Not sinners, but saints - bathed in the joy of eternal security.

To resist the Devil effectively we need to see that our pasts are dead, and buried, at the cross. We no longer must dwell on them. We no longer must focus our minds on them. We must not get into a dialogue with Satan about our pasts, and the hindrances they can place on us. God the Father has made us completely new, and he never again asks us to dwell on that which has become history, except to rejoice that we are now living in the light, although we were once in darkness.

Hearts which are labelled "new start"

He has given us a new start. This is the new heart of the covenant spoken of by Ezekiel in chapter 36, verses 26 & 27. It is a new self which belongs to the future age. It is a victorious heart which has created us as new beings. We must lose our old identities as we focus on our new identity. And in so doing we will find out who we really are. God is completely reliable, and he has given this new nature to us once for all [Collosians 3:9&10]. The Devil is the prototypical liar; he will try to turn us away from this truth. He will aim to make us look to our old selves. He will try to make us hold onto our pasts, arguing that this is the truest thing we can do. But God's message is "A new heart I will give you, a new spirit will I put within you.....I will cause you to walk in my ways" [Ezekiel 36:26,27].

This, then, is an important contrast between the enemies way that leads to misery, and the Lord's way which guarantees an abundant future [John 10:10]. I know that his ways are right for me from experience. "Trust in the Lord and lean not on your own understanding" we are advised [Proverbs 3:5]. May the Lord Jesus do this for you and I. We are to perceive our selves as completely new persons in Jesus. I accept it to be so with joy and delight for myself, and ask the Lord to change any unwillingness in me. He can even do that. May he do the same for you too! Amen!

And this means that there is no hindrance for us to worship God with abandon, because he has a solution to every challenge!

Personal Worship File

I'll never forget the day when God told me that I was eternally saved. I was reading Romans 8:28 -30, which I had done many times. I had always resisted the notion that anyone could know that they were inseparably bound to God forever. As I read it once more God said to me look at the verbs. I did this, realising that they were all in the aorist tense - which is the tense which expresses a once for all completed action in past time in ancient Greek.

I noticed that it said that God had foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified the believer all as a complete action in the past.

Then an inner voice said to me “That is you Andrew, you are eternally and inseparably mine.”

God had just told me that I was his. This has changed my life. I no longer see myself as a sinner who might make it to heaven, but as a saint who will!

My Response

[1] What things have been holding me back? Consider your Christian experience and see if you can identify issues which are not as yet resolved.

[2] How can seeing yourself as a possessor of eternal life now help you?

End Notes

[1] H. K. Moulton, The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised, Zondervan, USA, 1978

Page 164.

[2] The word “eschatology” comes from the Greek “EXCHATON” which is the technical term used to describe the events leading up to, and being part of, the end of the world culminating with God’s judgment of the wicked, and the return of Jesus to collect his elect to be with him forever living in heavenly perfection with him. It is during this final time that this present age of sin will be terminated and the new age of God’s kingdom will be physically realised. The term “Eschatological salvation” expresses the concept that with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus that all those who are converted have their future salvation secured in the present world, they now live with a present awareness that they are no longer part of the world, but rather they see themselves as living the life of the future in the present. Much more could be said in definition, but at the most fundamental level this is what theologians mean when they use this term. Having said this, some may see it differently. For a more comprehension study of this concept, see on: Gordon Fee, “Paul, The Spirit and the People of God”, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1997.

[3] Ibid, page 52

[4] Op Cit page 53

[5] Op Cit pages 54 & 55

[6] Op Cit page 61

3. Change the Way You See Things

We now move from the general to the particular. This particularity has been one of the most hotly debated topics in the history of the church. It is still contentious, and often makes for many rifts in fellowships.

We are talking about the form that worship takes. Liturgical scholars distinguish between form and meaning. Worship may take many different forms, but it is the meaning that is attached to it which is the most critical factor.

The English word for worship originally meant “to attach worth to someone” especially God. The Greek word used in the Apocalypse “PROSKUNEO” is best translated as an act of prostration before the deity. Worship which does not set God in the highest place in our lives is a dead form. Neither is it something we take part in for one hour per week neglecting doing so in the other 167.

The same John who was given the visions of the Revelation was the man who recorded these famous words of Jesus:

“God is Spirit, and

Those who worship him must

Worship in Spirit and truth.” [John 4:24 RSV]

Jesus was a radical. Radical worship is a lifestyle, not focussed on a place and time, but on a person and in a special relationship. True worshippers give God the glory and honour in every aspect of their lives, at work, whilst driving the car, at church, in the shops and at home. One hour a week of following a set liturgical exercise can be a dead and meaningless form if we are not radical followers of Jesus Christ throughout the rest of our week.

The many debates and heated discussions which transpire concerning the worship hour pale into insignificance when judged by the criteria of a lifestyle of worship in Spirit and truth.

1. The radical worship of the future age

The apocalypse challenges our worship forms. John the Apostle falls as dead at the risen Christ’s feet [Revelation 1:17]. In utter dismay he sees his finite limitations in the light of the infinite. As R. C. Sproul writes concerning the famous studies undertaken by Rudolf Otto, there is a definite response of the human when confronted by the divine [1]. This phenomenology of human encounter with the divine is descriptive of John’s reaction to Jesus Christ.

Consider your worship on a Sunday morning. Imagine the elders of your church prostrating themselves before the rostrum, as the 24 elders of Revelation chapter 4 fell on their faces before the throne of God. What if all the congregation, cast all their money, credit cards, house keys and car keys before the communion table as the elders did their crowns. It may be possible to have our priorities wrong on earth, but in heaven it is not! That is not to say that these things are wrong, but they must have their proper place in our order of priorities. Our home is no longer ours to do what we will with, but it is God's - at his disposal.

If you are in a traditional church with set liturgical regularity even one person doing this would seem shocking. "Must I do that too?" you question yourself. The church treasurer may be adequately pleased by the prospect of new funds. But the natural human reaction would be to see this as going to far, to the edge of fanaticism. This was certainly a charge laid at the door of the Acts church. They were accused of being drunk with new wine [Acts 2:13]. They all shared things in common [Acts 2:45]; which must have seemed to orthodox Judaism too much to allow.

A traditional liturgy does not lend itself to the loud "hallelujah's and Amens" of more charismatic congregations. "Not the done thing!" may be your thoughts. But the done thing does not figure in heavenly realms of future glory as Hallelujahs vibrate through

the celestial melody [Revelation 19:6]. The over exuberance of waving hands, or palm branches [See on Revelation 7] will probably make many hyperventilate in outrage.

“We’re not that sort, we don’t want emotionalism to take hold here, it might disturb the nice secure environment we have worked so hard to maintain over the years.”

Before I am accused of having a dig at the tradition based churches, I must turn to those who are attracted to the rave in the nave worship style. Silence, and so called waiting on the presence [Revelation 8:1], would make many search for a new place to freak out.

For those who are used to the magisterial liturgies, of the so called high churches, would find spontaneity such as that found amongst the throng of Revelation 7 to be anathema. Those who love spontaneity would find set liturgies to be cramping and unreal. As one church member once said to me “I don’t want all of this, top ten name a tune and sing a chorus stuff here.”

For those who don’t like the high tech infiltrations into their congregations with video projectors, special lighting effects, and top spec sound equipment there might be a shock in stall when the lightening flashes, the thunders roar, creatures cry out in strange voices, and the throne is surrounded by numerous coloured lights before the presence of God [Revelation 4].

What I am trying to point out in all these examples is not that one worship form is better than another, but that there is a real danger that we make worship forms into dogmas and doctrines. This is not the case in the apocalypse. The only criteria for worship forms in heaven, is that they be real, from the heart. A theology of worship informs us that it is the person we worship that matters most, not how we do it. After all he made us all to be different, and this will be reflected in the way we worship. People of every race, nation, kindred, tongue and people will be before the throne with their differences making for a richness of harmonic love and adoration [Revelation 7:9].

The harmony of heaven is not created by the beauty of the voice, although I am sure that it counts, but by the harmony of the heart. The most awful singing may be heard as the most marvellous melody in the ears of God. He looks beyond the cultured, and clever, and educated to the heart.

Imagine yourself with the innumerable multitude [Revelation 15] before the throne of God. Over in one corner are the Puritans shocked at the prostrate elders and the many instruments, harps and all. Somewhere else we find the Adventists who can't believe that so many Catholics, Methodists and other religious groups have made it to heaven. Some strict evangelicals whisper together "those thunder claps around the throne are worse than drum beats - I thought heaven would exclude those wacky happy clappies

over there.”

Is heavenly worship going to be characterised by such segregation and prejudice? No.

A resounding no!

2. God looks at the heart's meaning not the outward display

When we consider John's response to the risen Christ [Revelation 1:17] we can see that his heart was pounding with a desire to give Jesus the highest place of significance. He loved his Lord. He knew Him to be king, Lord, wonderful altogether, beautiful, his everything. He fell before Him because his whole being needed Lord Jesus.

As Jeremiah 17:9,10 reminds us that God looks at the heart. As Jesus said to the woman at the well it is the lifestyle of worship that matters to God. It means attaching worth to him in everything.

God doesn't look at dancing in the aisles, or prostration, or loud congregational testimonials as irreverent. If He does then the heaven pictured in Revelation is not to be taken seriously.

Drums, electric guitars, great church organs, metrical chants, Handel's renditions, Graham Kendrick's celebration events, high church masses all pale into insignificance when we consider that God looks at the heart. Worship forms are the means by which we show our love, they are not to become an end in themselves.

God will tolerate any worship which comes from a sincere and open heart.

The apocalypse challenges us to think about the worship of the future age. It should inform the way we allow our liturgies to shape themselves. It will mean we will need to be more flexible in both directions. The magnetic pole of tradition and set forms and the pole of free spontaneity will be challenged; segregation from other Christians who like things different to a denominational tradition have their place if they help a particular church group in their spiritual journey, but they must not make their worship journeys the paradigmatic criterion by which others are judged. This is not biblical. The apocalypse gives a glimpse of the diversity of the international and inter-cultural atmosphere of heaven. God loves variety - He created it to be the spice of life. He accepts diversity, but never at the cost of the loss of unity. Heavenly worship is unified in its' love for God, and this is in the context of the creatures he has made so diverse and different. Our fear of diversity is often an expression of our fear of change. It is safe to have sameness each week at church, when the world around continuously changes. God challenges us to confront the changes which life threatens us with, by

learning to accept the greatness of the diversity he has made.

The next time you are tempted to judge a worship form by your own, ask yourself “What does this mean to my brother or sister?” Rather than “this is something I must stop at all costs from entering my church.” It is God’s church of which Christ is the head. To be a body of Christ, such as it is described in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4, we need all of the different body functions of varying worship forms to allow the diversity of meanings that we attach to them to empower the whole body into vibrant life.

There is a story of a young man who attended a prayer meeting at a local church for the first time. This congregation had its own definition of how a person should behave. In other words there were strict behaviour codes, even if they were mostly unconscious requirements most of the time. As the Pastor spoke on his topic the man shouted loud Amens in agreement. As they sung the hymns he clapped his hands and tapped his feet. As he became more enthusiastic he waved his arms in the air. When they prayed he laid his hands on the sick and discouraged.

After the service the elder approached him and said “Please don’t come here again if you are going to do things like that. We don’t believe it is fitting to worship God like that!” We know that Jesus once disrupted the nice cosy atmosphere of a Palestinian

synagogue by proclaiming that he had fulfilled one of the great Messianic prophecies [Luke 4]. The net result was for him to be driven out of the fellowship. Jesus the radical often confronts our traditions and forms, how often have we driven him out of our churches with those who are radical enough to need to worship him in a different way. May God truly have mercy on us!

The young man I just mentioned did not return again to that fellowship. Was it because they wouldn't let him worship as he wanted, or was it because they rejected him, or was it a bit of both? I rather think the latter may be closest to the truth. Perhaps we may be tempted to a cynical laugh, or cry of outrage at what happened. Perhaps even denial. The truth is that something like this story happens thousands of times a week. Will heavenly worship be like that? Will God ask the elders to leave, or the four living creatures to tone down their enthusiasm? No! No! No! Let us look for the hearts meaning in all worship forms, even if we dislike them. To be ready for the worship of the future age we will need to start to live the life of the future in the context of our attitudes toward the diversity of human responses to God now!

This will mean that all of the traditions from formal to the happy clappy types, associated with charismatic land, will need to look at each other as believers who are exercising their God given right to worship God as He has put it into their hearts to do in the way which will be expressive of their peculiar love for him. Love will mean we

seek unity in diversity rather than diversity at the cost of the family of God's broad church. May God help us! Amen!

Your Responses

[1] In what ways do you feel the closest to God - when you worship?

[2] What makes you uncomfortable when you are in a service?

[3] How can you get to know others better - so as to better understand where they are coming from when they worship God?

[4] In what ways could you contribute to a more open and varied worship environment in your church?

End Notes

[1] R.C.Sproul, "The Psychology of Atheism", Bethany Fellowship, INC., USA.

See on page 88.

4. How to Make the Middle the End

The book of Revelation, like all literature, has a certain structural form. In much modern literature it is common for the author to lead his readers to his or her most important conclusions at the end of the tome.

The apocalypse has its' own special medium for leading us to its conclusions, or most critical teachings. These are not found at the close of the book, but near the middle; in chapters 12 - 14.

This is because of something known as its' chiastic structure. The term comes from the Greek letter "Chi" which looks like the English capital "X". The first half of the book is mirrored in the second half. [1]

Within literature of this genre it is those teachings, and images, in the centre of the "X" that are the most crucial. In a real sense the Revelation makes the middle contents of its message the end. Some have asked, "why would John, have concealed the Lord's messages in such rich symbolism, and structural obscurity?" For certainly many remain unaware of its deeper finesses. One reason is because he wished to use a code language which would have been readily understood by Christians of his era, but not by their Roman persecutors. If the apocalypse was indeed written during the persecutions

of Domitian, then the churches life was in danger.

As Leon Morris draws our attention to the fact that apocalyptic literature prospered in the times of persecution. The future promise of eternal freedom and liberation from intolerable conditions was a massive foundational hope which gave focus to the destiny of the present world, and the peace of the age to come [2].

This observation gives a primary reason for the powerful worship scenes as they are portrayed regarding the future life. God wished to let his people know that their suffering would climax in the unutterable joy of the Day of the Lord. This observation also prefaces the question: "What is the core message of the apocalypse?" for surely God wishes to communicate the most important aspects of Himself, and his plans to his suffering persecuted people, so as to encourage their flagging faith.

The core of the message of Revelation

We begin with Revelation chapter 12. We find ourselves in the presence of a pure and beautiful woman who is about to give birth to the Messiah. The image of a woman is a constant theme in the Old Testament to represent God's people [see on the book of Hosea chapters 1 - 6]. It is out of Abraham's children that the Christ child is born.

Next on the scene is a great red dragon, which symbolizes the devil; pictured as trying to destroy the Messiah. After his failure to achieve this he then targets the woman, who is born away to a place of safety. Finally Satan tries to destroy the very last remnants of the woman's pure Christian seed.

In these simple symbols we see the transformation of the woman from Old Testament Israel to the birth of the new Israel of the Christian church. Both are connected by virtue of their synchronisation obtained through Jesus Christ. A conflict is also uncovered. Satan has always desired the destruction of God and his people. His fury is graphically portrayed, and should not be taken lightly [More later in our chapter on spiritual warfare].

This is a thumbnail sketch of the key players in the cosmic conflict. Death, destruction, fear and manipulation are Satan's prime weapons, which are motivated by a complete hatred of the Godhead. Christ and his people follow the way of suffering. Theirs' is the journey of the way of the cross [Luke 9:23]. Just as Jesus suffered as the paradigm of all agonising servants of God, so we also are called upon to model his sacrificial love [See on Isaiah. 53]. There is no fear in God's love [1 John 4:18], and he has poured that love into our hearts by His Holy Spirit [Romans 5:5]. The basis of His eternal kingdom is that love [1 Corinthians 13 & 14:1].

God wishes us to make an intelligent comparison between the ways of the enemy and his ways. One utilises tactics of fear, punishment, and manipulation; the other [Christ] calls himself the way, the truth and the life [John 14:6]; it is found shining in his loving face of [2 Corinthians 4:1 - 4]. The basis of false and true worship systems, which are symbolised in chapters 13 & 14 of Revelation, find their starting point in our picture of God as the one who allowed his Son to empty himself and die on a cross bearing the sins of the world .

In Revelation chapter 13 we find the enemy demonstrating his real motives of heart and mind. This he does through the so called beast, the anti-lamb and the image to the beast. Perhaps we have a deliberate distortion of the Trinity pictured here. Certainly this unholy trio are motivated by the one and same demonic purpose to enforce worship of the devil himself on people in opposition to that which is due to God alone. The image of the lamb like beast must refer to Anti-Christ [see also 1 John 3:1] The Greek word "ANTICHRISTOS" does not mean "one who puts himself against Christ, but one who puts himself in the place of Christ" [3]. The anti-lamb is the one who puts himself in the place of the true lamb. People are goaded into accepting Satan as their master by force, fear, punishment and torture. As we consider history, even modern history, we find many contenders for "Anti-Lamb" of the day - Hitler, Stalin, Napoleon or Saddam Hussein.

False worship in comparison to true worship has now become of critical importance in the unfolding of this cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. Satan selfishly desires worship for himself, and will get it at the cost of anything. True worshippers come increasingly to the realisation of the contrast between the enemy and Christ. Only love can win our hearts to worship willingly - nothing else. God does not wish to force anything upon his creatures, but he does want them to be informed about his love, as opposed to the enemies fear tactics. Those fear tactics may be based more on what people will say about us now-a-days, but nevertheless anxiety is the driving force. The believer, whose name is written in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world [Rev. 13:8], is the one who loves God unreservedly, and is protected from all the terrors of the beast. We will probably never understand on this side of eternity why so many follow the enemies self driven path, when they have had a chance to know the love of Jesus; but praise God that we have a God who keeps us eternally secure.

In Revelation chapter 14 we find ourselves following the lamb, as part of his special redeemed entourage. It is this group who are eternally redeemed and eternally elect. They know to whom they belong. At the foundation of all secure relationships is the knowledge that whatever we may be we are unconditionally accepted "in Christ". It is this "unconditional" love which makes us follow the lamb. We cry out our praises to such a great unfathomable love. In John's gospel Jesus is pictured as the lamb [John 1:29], and as the good shepherd [John 10]. Jesus is the lamb shepherd. As the one

true lamb without one stain of sin or blemish [1 Peter 1:19] he offers us the power of his perfectly pure life as a gift to be used to the full. By his power as the shepherd he always leads us safely home to his Father's fold.

It is the Lamb who has kept his followers safe. He has travelled the complete road of suffering which we must tread. He can sympathise with his people [Hebrews 2:18]. As we look to our pioneer [Hebrews 2:10] we fulfil the truth of Revelation 14:1 - 5, for we realise that we follow one who has trodden the whole path, and that he has left no stone unturned. As Jesus highlighted in John 17:4, he completed the work his Father gave him to do. Nothing has been left undone so that all of the elect may be safely delivered to mount Zion. Zion is a representation of the place where God dwells; a safe and secure domain which is already the believer's true position in Christ! True worship is to prostrate our wilful self led beings before the lamb, in humble submission, looking for him to lead us, not we ourselves.

Following the picture of the redeemed we meet the 3 angels - who deliver their powerful messages.

Angel 1 proclaims an eternal gospel to the whole world. He calls people of every cultural distinction and ethnicity to hear the message. At the heart of this message is a promise of an eternal gospel, offering eternal salvation because of an eternal sacrifice

for sins made once for all time on the sinners' behalf by Jesus Christ. People are also reminded to turn to God their creator in utter worship and adoration. Judgment has begun with this clear declaration of God's terms, and covenant treaty [Rev. 14:6,7]. This treaty is based on God's complete free gift of salvation found in Jesus Christ it can only be accepted, not bought [Ephesians 2:8].

Angel 2 informs us that Babylon has fallen. Babylon probably stands for powers which oppose God. In the Old Testament period, for a time, this kingdom fulfilled a role in chastising God's people, but later this nation is considered to be deserving judgment and destruction [Isaiah 48]. There could also be a sense in which the tower of Babel is being referred to. In this case we would think of confusion reigning in the hearts of those who do not dwell in the light of God [Rev. 14:8].

Angel 3 Finally declares God's judgment against the devil and his unholy trinity. This will be an executive act in the presence of the Lamb and his Angels. False worship will be eradicated. Never again will anything false destroy the beauty of God's perfect creation [Revelation 21]. Satan's threats and manipulations will be no more. 1 John 4:18,19 makes it utterly clear that perfect love must get rid of every particle of fear, and ultimately of its perpetrators. As the saints finally enter the physical reality of the life of the future age; they will be able to rejoice that every last particle of sin will have been obliterated from the universe.

Next Christ is pictured as coming again. This is the great climax of the central chiasmic message of these axial chapters [Revelation 14:14 - 20]. With Christ's second coming the world will end, and God's kingdom will become a physical reality even on planet earth [Revelation 21].

The most important conclusion to draw is that there is a battle being fought for our minds. It is a spiritual war of unparalleled importance. It is the sort of battle which makes the tough man movie star Arnie, the "Terminator", now Governor of California, seem minuscule in comparison to the prizes to be won. The battle was won at Calvary for us all we need to do is claim the power of that victory. Only those with their names in the book of life will make it [Rev. 13:8], none others will. It will be those who know that they belong to Jesus now, who will also set their focus on living the life of the future in the present, as they focus on being with Jesus in victory on mount Zion [Rev. 14:1-5 & John 5:24]. It is the realisation that we belong to Jesus now, and forevermore, that will aid us to develop a new identity about ourselves; not as people who might make it to heaven if we behave well, but rather to accept we are completely saved right now because of what Christ has done. May the Lord secure each of our hearts and minds upon him; in Jesus name, Amen.

Your Responses

[1] How do you view your relationship with Jesus - do you see yourself as saved right now, or as someone who might make it if they are good enough?

[2] Picture Jesus' second coming, now consider your response to seeing him. What is the first picture you had, of [a] him and [b] yourself?

[3] Which of the three Angels messages meant the most to you, why?

End Notes

[1] Austin Cage Warren discusses the chiastic nature of the book of Revelation and the gospel of John in his PhD dissertation. The whole thesis is valuable hence I have not referenced a section. See on: Warren A. C., "St. John's Vision of the Heavenly City", USA: University of Dallas, 2000. Dr. Leo Paul de Alvarez.

[2] Leon Morris, "Apocalyptic", Inter-Varsity Press, GB..Page 27

[3] William Barclay, "The Daily Study Bible - the letters of John and Jude", The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, UK.. Page 61.

5. Danger Churches Can Kill Worship

As we have been seeing worship is the key to understanding the book of Revelation. It is the aim of God to enable us to prepare for the radical worship of the future age by developing lifestyles of worship here.

This chapter focuses on the local church and its role in developing this lifestyle. The apocalypse is addressed to seven churches which each face challenges that either help or hinder this lifestyle. The number seven is a recurring phenomenon in Revelation and probably stands for completeness. In the case of the seven churches we are meant to understand them as a complete presentation of the different facets of the Christian community. The whole experience of the body of Christ is represented by these seven Asian fellowships.

Moreover, J. B. Philips in his translation of the New Testament has an interesting view of each church, which is expressed in the headings which he has assigned to each [1].

They are as follows:

Ephesus – “The loveless church”

Smyrna – “The persecuted church”

Pergamum – “The over-tolerant church”

Thyatira – “The compromising church”

Sardis – “The sleeping church”

Philadelphia – “The church with opportunity”

Laodicea – “The complacent church”

Each of the states being indicated in these summaries is provocative to a positive or negative focus which will shape any congregations worship environment, at any time in history. This is true regardless of race, culture or social and educational status.

Ephesus

Ephesus, “the loveless church”, faced one of the most serious spiritual maladies that can ever exist. Its’ fellowship of “agape” love had been compromised. “Agape” is the Greek word which is always used to describe the sort of love that is of divine origin. It

is after the likeness of God's sacrificial love. It is the love which expresses the essence of the New Testament concept of grace. Grace is God's complete way of dealing with humanity - it is defined above all as gift love. It expresses acceptance of us for just who we are, and where we are in our relationship with Christ in terms of 100% positive regard. It is the love that serves the best interests of the other first and foremost without regard to itself. It is this love which has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit [Romans 5:5].

David Seamands, in his book "Healing Grace", highlights three different ways in which love/grace can be negated in the local church. These are:

[1] The gospel of success. This is the focus of the church built around the size of the building, the annual budget and the steady growth of the membership. It is the gospel according to activism [2].

Clearly this gospel of activism has its own seeds of destruction for our sense of peace with God. His 100% acceptance of us, warts and all, can be blurred so easily. In this false gospel version we are made to intellectually accept the concept of grace, but then to leave it as almost elementary; moving on, we suppose, to a Christian commitment which requires us to act in order to be accepted. No wonder fellowships like this end up with disillusioned members.

[2] There is the gospel of self-reliant individualism. If we have received grace then we should also give it. This means we need to minister to each others needs. We need an atmosphere where ministry can happen. But so often the church becomes a spectator sport. One person ministers, the spectators put their feet up for an hour of entertainment, and then go home without really giving grace to others. It is the gospel which says “I stand alone I ought to be able to handle this myself.”

This is a long way from the concept of the body of Christ where we all have different organic functions by which we can minister to each others needs. This gospel of individualism is in fact a cop out. It really shows that the person has not received grace with its associated “agape” desire which wants to give without thought of return. What the individualist really wishes is to keep at a safe distance from any openness to God where it will involve selfless giving. The real motive of individualism is to seek what the “self” needs as opposed to what the “other” needs. This is clearly not a “grace-agape” founded reality [3].

[3] Then we come to the gospel of legalism; the idea that human beings can earn credit with God by what they do. It is the idea that we have to sort our our salvation to a large extent by human effort [4].

So what is the relationship between love and grace? It is that God's love is given to us unconditionally. It is not given to us because we woo him by some good behaviour, but it flows from the very heart of God's gift love graceful nature [5].

The loss of God's unconditional agape love in Ephesus was caused by a breakdown in the love the fellowship had for each other. The believers had become so suspicious of heretics, that they had lost the ability to be open, trusting and unconditional in their love for each other. This also affected their love for God. A worship environment which is built on loveless suspicion will kill any genuine love for God and others. It closes the heart, and makes for a depressed worship environment. A graceless church which has reached this stage by the breakdown in inter-personal relationships based on God's grace will lead to spiritual illness and depression.

The false brethren which had challenged Ephesus with their Nicolaitan Proto Gnosticism had developed a good characteristic which Jesus commended [Revelation 2:6]. They had become good bible students. They had the gift of discernment. They could sniff out heretics. In this case heretics who said that anything sinful done in the body was not wrong in God's eyes because he is only interested in man's inner spirit which, in their

view, could not be affected by bodily deeds, whether good or evil. Sadly, as is often the case with discernment, the Ephesians had become pathological. There was a paranoid ideation which had become inherent in the corporate culture. They had started to suspect everyone, and trust no one. Instead of the fellowship being built on the agape love which looks to the needs of the other first, they had started looking inwards, at themselves - withdrawing in an act of self protection. They had lost their first love, and had become individualistic and selfish. What had started as a good thing ended with the loss of God's gift love throbbing through the veins of their fellowship. There was no longer any expression of it toward him, or toward others. Ephesus was about to die because intimacy was dying in every practical sense of the word. True biblical worship is founded on agape intimacy; where we put God first, and the needs of others before ourselves. It is that openness, where we are willing to receive the good gifts which God pours out through others for us which Ephesus had closed the doors from the inside against. Any new person soon was put in his or her place. What they brought to offer in love of their spiritual gifts were stamped on! With agape in our hearts we do not see ourselves as standing alone, but as in need of giving and receiving God's gift love. This giving and receiving always makes worship meaningful, because it makes it possible for us to take hold of what God gives to us, and enables us to give our gifts to others. True biblical worship is founded on an every member ministry where Christ as the head of the spiritual body pours out his gifts to each as they have a need.

Ephesus had developed into a community of fear of intimacy, because it was fearful of the hidden motives of other so called believers. It had developed a police state mentality. The problem with this was that negative environments have a tendency to change the way people see things. Ephesus had not only lost intimacy between members it had also become fearful of God, and his motives. What a terrible state of affairs. If you are in a church where suspicion and gossip are the norm then be sure that the community of believers is fearful. Also be careful not to allow this negative environment to effect the way you feel about God. Because corporate worship is so fundamental to an intimate relationship with God, it can mean the difference between heaven or hell in the way you feel about God. If people are fearful and suspicious they can transfer this onto how they see God. If they are open and sharing in worship, then they will see God in this way to. The message in this latter case will be it is safe to be vulnerable with others in worship, so it is safe to be vulnerable with God.

It is when we have been repeatedly hurt in our vulnerability by dysfunctional worshipping communities that we can then start to get the message that it is too painful to be vulnerable with God. This was the danger facing Ephesus.

1 Corinthians 14:1 instructs us to make agape love our “aim”. Without it we can never be true worshippers because anything else other than love creates a cold and unfeeling

environment for worship to occur in. We were designed to function in intimate loving relationships. When we are unconditionally loved it is like we have arrived home. Jesus said in John 14:1-3 that he had gone back to his Father to make many homes for us. Home is where the heart is. Inclusive fellowship leads to an inclusive worship environment accepting people warts and all. All functional families must obtain this quality. John says there is “no fear in love”, it does not fear God’s judgment, it drives out every particle of fear [1 John 4:19 - this text cannot be over-emphasized].

Relational psychologists tell us that if we expect to be accepted, and behave in a way that shows we want to be then in 90% of cases we will be [6]. If this is so fundamentally true of our social relational design then it is certainly the most important thing to model in our fellowships - one to another. God is like this! A God who does this is a God who heals more hurts than a thousand well designed seminars, or methodical bible studies which aim at getting every single Christian belief spot on. God does not call us to be perfect in our knowledge of him that can never be so here [See on 1 Corinthians 13]. But he asks us to develop a perfect love like his [Matt 5:48]. This perfect love is poured out into our hearts as a gift. We do not have to make it for ourselves, but all we have to do is receive it in the same way we receive God’s grace. The two are one and the same after all.

Smyrna

Smyrna is the persecuted church. Soon the fellowship will be torn apart by believers being thrown into prison. Many will die. Jesus encourages them to hold on so that they will receive the crown of life [Revelation 2:10]. As Eusebius indicates more than once in his “history of the church” [7], persecution was the best way of keeping the church pure. Only those who really loved God would give up their lives.

Smyrna was rich in love; a love which drove them to give up everything for their Lord. Worship seems to be at a premium when we face persecution. Just consider the countries where Christianity has been banned the church goes underground but its’ passion grows. At the end of the Soviet phase of occupation of Moldova, the Orthodox church, the Pentecostal church, and the Baptist church was found to be stronger than ever! Getting together for worship is something that many have lost their lives for, but they have seen that fellowship is more important for their spiritual survival than anything else that life can ever offer. A pastoral friend of mine from former Yugoslavia told me of the time when Christian meetings were forbidden. In order to meet to worship it took an undercover operation; people had to make sure that they were not followed - thus giving their friends away. My friend spent a number of months in solitary confinement because he had been at the forefront in leading covert worship events.

There is nothing like persecution for making us face God with our eyes wide open. Acts 16:25 records how Paul and Silas sang hymns of praise when thrown into prison. Such is the power of this type of worship that it causes God to respond with earthquakes of Love. All the prison doors fly open. Captives are released. The jailor is about to kill himself, but Paul rather invites him to give his life to the Lord. God's earthquake of love transforms this man's life and that of his family. The book of Acts demonstrates that God is at his most active when his people worship him. The whole church is shaken and the believers are filled with boldness and power to do their Lord's bidding [Acts 4:31].

As one leading evangelical put it at a seminar I had the privilege of hearing "Let us pray for economic hardship, it will be God's way of awakening his church in the rich west." We may not face persecution for our faith, but many would know hardship if they were in extreme economic difficulty. Difficulty is often God's medicine for spiritual maladies.

Pergamum

Pergamum is the over-tolerant church. It has its' Baalamites who are introducing corrupt Christian beliefs that are causing believers to become confused about the

gospel of Christ. The worst type of deception is that which involves a mixture of some truth with some error. It also has Nicolaitianism which is causing moral decline to enter the ethical lifestyle of the church [Revelation 2:14,15]. Over-tolerant fellowships can be recognised where there is lack of clarity of belief about the Christian basics. Examples could be the denial of the virgin birth, or the reality of the resurrection. On a moral level there are congregations which seem to tolerate homosexuality among the clergy or membership. Many other examples could be given. Ethical behaviour is as important to God as right belief. It is one and the same in the context of the lifestyle of worship. Jesus is about to raise up people who will fight against these heretical tendencies with the sword of his mouth [in other words, clear teachings which any rational person can readily deduce from a study of the Bible]. All who conquer through his blood will receive the assurance of a hidden mystic name, which will only be known to the saved individual. This is perhaps a picture of an eternal sealing into an eternally secure relationship with God. These people will know they are elect and God will personally reveal to them that they will never be lost. R. T. Kendal, in his book "Once saved always saved" tells of the day when he was informed by God that he could never be lost, that he was eternally saved [8]. This is thoroughly biblical. Paul pictures it as our spirits agreeing with God's Holy Spirit that we are his people [Romans 8:14,15]. Later in that same chapter he speaks of the elect and the impossibility of them ever being separated from God's love. If it were any other way, then when the first sniff of trouble was to come, we could easily become fearful and insecure. God does give us

assurance that we will make it through every difficulty by the power of his almighty help. This is spoken of as a guarantee in Ephesians, which is endowed to us by the Spirit [Ephesians 1:14,15]. It is rather like the guarantee on a product which says it will last for a specified period, and that it will do what its' manufacturers claim it will. Although human manufacturers do get it wrong with some poor quality products, God never does. His product of eternal salvation is based on his ability to do anything perfectly and irrevocably. Our Christian warranty is stamped with the seal of approval "My Eternal Child".

Every worshipping community needs clear biblical teaching in order to be able to grow in relational intimacy with God. Eternal security is at the heart of it. Children who thrive are those who know they inseparably belong to their families whatever they do. This need not be a licence for them to act badly, but a means for them to thrive in a way which will make them about as stable as anyone can become in a sinful fallen condition. If this is true of weak and erring human beings, how much more true is it of God our Father? We know he will never cast us out, and he knows us better than we know ourselves. He is fully aware of our whole life journey from the cradle to the grave; that is what his titles of Alpha and Omega signify [Revelation 1:8].

True biblical worship has intimacy with God based on a venerable relationship as its goal. Christians have an intimate mystic name as a sign that they are eternally God's

property [Revelation 2:17]. It is their secret that they rejoice in, and boast of in Christ, and not because of any merit in themselves. This so called hidden name, known only to the individual believer, is almost certainly a symbol of an individuals' recognition that they belong to God. The concept of name in scripture is a designation of character. The character which is given to us by God is one that is secure in its' relationship with him. We have once for all time been given a new nature that is opposed to the old nature [Colossians 3:10 & Galatians 5:22 – 25].

Worship of this type is founded on openness and honesty. It will have its cost, as God by nature wants transparency, and as he asks us to let go of sins we may want to keep secreted away. A community of this type will not be over tolerant towards sin, and false teaching, or immorality. But it will deal with every person with love, which will often cover up a multitude of sins once owned and confessed. It will also be tolerant of those young in faith, it will not condemn every single little misdemeanour that is identified, nor will it focus on changing all of a new believers' behaviour at once. It will proceed with caution and grace. But people who are mature will be clear about the dangers of over tolerance in themselves.

False teaching leads to unethical behaviour. The history of the church demonstrates this. The community founded by David Koresh was meant to be Christian. It ended up with married couples being told to break their marital vows, and for women to become

sexually involved with Koresh. Manipulation is often found to be a leadership style as well. In some cases people can do the most incredible things so as to remain in favour with God. Or at least that is what they are duped into thinking. Jim Jones persuaded his followers to commit mass suicide. Of course these are extreme examples, but even lesser corruptions of Christian belief can have their dangers. One of my concerns is that it has become increasingly common for church leaders to reject the notion of eternal security. This must have an effect on their congregations. Moreover, in my view, this is one of the symptoms of a Baalamite church. Such a congregation is not given the whole gospel, but only parts of it. Real grace is built on the intimacy of the new name. Rightly understood it will never lead to the idea that now I am eternally saved I can do what I like, but rather the security of knowing that I belong to a just, pure and sinless God, who offers me this 100% security, should lead to a grateful love expressed by obedience to him. One of the objections to this Great teaching has been that some people seem to come to believe that if they are "once saved always saved" they can do what they like without changing the outcome of their salvation. They start to do all sorts of things of which God cannot approve. In other words their hearts true condition is shown not to be that of a genuine Christian. Antinomianism is another example of unbalanced belief systems. Accepting God's complete grace package of eternal security is the only way that my inner self can become completely secure. Christian obedience is based on a grateful love, not a fear of punishment and judgment [Romans 8:1]. Are you eternally secure. Do you know your new mystic name? Or do you picture yourself

as unsure of the final outcome of your life in Christ?

Thyatira

Thyatira is the compromising church. The symbolism of Jezebel smacks of compromise with other belief systems; particularly the entrance of worship of false deities or some form of idolisation. We could be talking about anything here. In the context of a church it might be the exaltation of the preacher to a god-like status in his mind and that of the membership. Often people are drawn to the man of God rather than God himself. The leadership of a church must be centred in Christ. Believers' must be focussed on God. Whatever form this compromise takes it is important to root it out. Jesus looks with his fire like eyes into the depths of the secret things of all hearts. He will not tolerate worship of the creature rather than the Creator.

Believers who compromise their ethical standards, or beliefs at work, or home, or in the church will weaken the purity of the worshipping community. Judgment is pronounced on such. It is usually those who are unsure about their standing with God, who flit from one extreme to another. Sometimes being repentant, at others being compromising. God's judgment is always mercy, but it may mean we have to learn some hard lessons so that we can face our sin openly and honestly. God has to root out the cancerous sin of self reliance.

There is a church that I know of where God systematically removed some leading figures that were holding his church back in the most blatant manner. He did this through death and illnesses. It was so clear at the time. Compromise always holds the church back, and causes the radical lifestyle of worship to suffer.

Sardis

Sardis is the sleeping church. It has a name for being alive, but it is spiritually at the point of death. Jesus is pictured as the one who has the seven Spirits of God. In other words the fullness of the Holy Spirit is at his disposal. Fullness of life and vitality are the principle motivation of his nature!

The Sardis believers are quenching the Spirit. This particularly seems to be true because they do not accept justification by faith [Revelation 3:4]. Justification comes before the Infilling of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps they have come to rely on their own merits rather than the covering garment of Christ's righteousness. In Galatians 3:1 - 4 Paul clearly relates the work of the Holy Spirit to the work of grace. If we fail to accept grace as a gift, then we will also fail to accept the gift of the Spirit's activity. Justification is the primary building block for reception of the Holy Spirit.

It seems that Sardis has developed a theology of works rather than a theology of grace. Instead of trusting the merits of Christ's free grace and forgiveness absolutely, they have turned to themselves as a source of energy. So often we turn to ourselves. We blame our lack of the Spirit's work on our lack of faith, or our failure to read the bible enough, or our failure to be able to choose the right things. God's word to us is "accept my free gift of grace and forgiveness, do not look to yourselves, do not look to your behaviour, but accept what is already yours. It has always been yours. When I died on the cross 2000 years ago it was completely yours for the taking, and that includes the gift of my Spirit. Your failure to see the great things of the Spirit is because you are looking at yourselves as the problem, but that is the problem. My gifts to you are not conditioned by anything you have done or not done, it is all a gift which is completely yours waiting for you to accept. Stop looking at your uncertain selves and look at everything which I have already given you."

Ephesians 1:19 Tells us that all of God's almighty power to act by his Spirit is already in the believer by the presence of the "Spirit of Jesus". Stop trying to make something happen, by blaming its failure to happen on something you have done, and rather learn that everything is already yours by virtue of the fullness of God's Spirit being at work in you. God does not want you to look at yourself as the cause of spiritual failure, or the failure of revival in the church, he wants you to laugh and say "its already mine in Christ, all I need to do is trust that God does not expect me to do anything to get his

Spirit flowing in unlimited measure other than trust it is already mine.” Look to what is already yours, rather than thinking you have a long way to go before you can get it.

Sardis’s failure to accept grace in their hearts meant that they had failed to accept the work of the Spirit of grace in all of his unlimited fullness. We yearn for revival on the level of primitive Acts Christianity in Europe today, but we fail to realise that revival is already ours. It is not something we have to strive to create, but it is something we only have to accept - today [Hebrews chapters 3 & 4].

Sardis felt that church was going OK, that there was no need to worry. Perhaps they had become hard and legalistic - relying on human wisdom and tradition rather than the living grace of Christ. They no longer had a listening ear, but a sleepy complacency. Jesus threatens to come at a time when they do not expect him. This coming may be the second coming, it may be the coming of the Holy Spirit in all of his power. Which ever it is, because this church has not accepted grace in their hearts, their hearts are not in tune with the movements of the Spirit of grace - meaning they do not know the activities of Christ.

This is descriptive of their almost complete failure to know the living Jesus who guides his church by his Spirit. They have become deaf to him, they will not recognise the time of his visitation.

Moreover, there is no radical lifestyle of worship in this church. Real worship recognises the presence of Jesus regularly. Theirs' does not. Only a few are in an intimate relationship with their Lord. The rest of the church may be letting these faithful ones do all the work whilst they sleep on. How many churches have lost the dynamic lifestyle of worship today? One sign that the church sleeps is when the few burn out whilst the many watch them do it!

Another indication of trouble is when there is hardly ever a testimony heard of what God has done for a believer. This is a sign that the life of worship is not there, and that the church is at the point of spiritual death.

Philadelphia

Philadelphia is the church with opportunity. The doors of opportunity are open for this community of brotherly love [this is the meaning of the church's name]. Because they love Jesus, and recognise their need of God's help, they are objects of God's special protection [Revelation 3:10].

It is their love, and humble openness of heart, which is the key to their power to grow. A broken spirit is the catalyst of divine intervention.

Their worship is probably characterised by times of waiting on God's presence - to intervene in their lives.

Biblical worship is to be still and know that "I am God" [Psalm 46:10].

True New Testament worship is a willingness to let God enter every aspect of our lives.

This is Philadelphia's secret to success.

Laodicea

Laodicea is the complacent church. Material wealth is their god. Sitting on the fence is their preferred posture.

They do not see themselves for what they are. They probably don't want to accept they are poor in spirit, blind to what they have become, and naked and exposed before the gaze of Christ.

Jesus is about to correct those he loves. They will have to face trial and pain in order to become aware of their true wretchedness. I am convinced that God would much rather not use such methods, but pain in the end leads to spiritual gain. Radical

surgery hurts, but it may only be possible to save a patient by undertaking it. God does so in love and mercy. So often people ask “why has God let this happen to me?” almost as a statement of anger or outrage. The better question is to ask him “What do you need me to learn from this Lord?”

Before they can ever start to enter into the lifestyle of worship they need to listen for Christ’s Spirit knocking on their personal inner doors [Revelation 3:20]. They need to open to him, and enter into an intimate communion with his Spirit. Dark closed doors marked “Private keep out” will be opened in their lives. They will need to repent, be converted and be covered with the garment of Christ’s righteousness.

Laodiceans’ may be Christians by name, but not by experience. I have often spoken to young people who have been brought up in the church, even baptised, who say that they have never really had an experience of conversion in any way they could recognise. There can be congregations with second and third generation Christians by name in them that have many who are in real need of a conversion experience.

Conclusion

Each of these churches informs us about spiritual conditions that either lead to lives lived for the glory of God, or lives bereft of his presence. Where do you fit in? May

Jesus Christ reveal this to you by his Spirit? In his name - Amen.

Your Responses

[1] Which of the churches do you identify yourself with as you considered the various conditions that described their position in Christ?

[2] What is Christ's answer to the condition which you have identified in yourself [look up Christ's message to that church, also look up related scriptures that might help you].

[3] Ask God to put into your mind what he wants you to do to rectify your situation. Pray with a known committed Christian whom you can trust for God's help.

End Notes

[1] Phillips J.B., The New Testament in Modern English, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965. Pages 515 – 519.

[2] Seamands D., Healing Grace find real freedom now, UK: Scripture Press, 1990.

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[3] Ibid, Page 42

[4] Op Cit, Page 43

[5] Op Cit, Page 126

[6] Johnson D.W., Reaching Out interpersonal effectiveness and self-actualisation,
USA: Prentice-Hall International, Inc., 1986. Pages 57 & 58

[7] Williamson G. A. [Translator], "Eusebius The History of the Church", UK: Penguin
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[8] Kendall R. T., Once Saved, Always Saved, UK: Paternoster Press, 1997. Page 15

6. When the middle becomes an end in itself

We return to structural considerations now. The whole of the apocalypse is based on a chiastic structure, as already noted. In terms of the big picture the centre of the chiasm is found in chapters 12 - 14. In terms of the smaller picture there is a chiastic mechanism at work in the messages to the seven churches.

Ephesus and Laodicea

Ephesus the loveless church has its' counterpart in Laodicea the complacent church. The problem facing Ephesus is that it has become intellectually superior in its' self estimation, making it cold and unloving. Laodicea has become obsessed with material gain, and does not recognise its real wretchedness.

The two poles of the chiasm give a prophetic insight into modern society with its preoccupation with materialism and scientific intellectualism. This dualistic marriage has given birth to scepticism, agnosticism and atheism. This is even true of the church universal. Intellectual pride - thinking that we know better than God and reliance on material reality for security are characteristic of the rich west - even in the church. Perhaps even more serious is the temptation toward synchritism of modern beliefs on,

for instance origins, which drive certain theologians toward an obsession to make scripture fit the current world view, rather than the reverse. Materialism has always had its dangers, but this epoch seems to have maximised the issue. The church generally has a tendency toward creating a sub-culture of upward mobility. It is not unusual for second and third generation Christians to be in high paid professions. Not that this is a bad thing in itself, but there seems to be a danger that education and material professional gain have become the god's of many. The critical problem is not so much that intellectual and material gain should be discouraged, but that they should be framed in the context of a servant heart. The servant heart is that state of mind in which the individual asks God where he would have him/her serve.

Returning to this dualistic marriage, it can be clearly seen that a wrong attitude of the heart can lead to a church that is bereft of God's love and God's presence. The focus may have turned to what we have and what we are rather than what we need to be for God.

Smyrna and Philadelphia

The second chiastic link is between Smyrna the church of persecution and Philadelphia the church of opportunity. Both know they are weak. They cannot rely on their intellect or material wealth for security. Their self estimation is realistic. It is the knowledge of

their existential need that offers the key to a focus away from themselves toward God. Worship is characterised as a thing of child-like trust, and abandon in these churches. It has to be. For wherever man recognises his essential emptiness without God there is a corresponding dependency on the Lord. Jesus own words to his disciples show that child-like reliance is the key to the power of the Kingdom of God in every single persons' life. Jesus says:

And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said,
“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you
will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” [Matthew 18:2,3 - RSV].

This saying is not some optional extra which we sometimes think about at a christening or baby blessing, but it is absolutely foundational to the Christian journey. Ephesus and Laodicea have bought into the worldview of humanism, which values what man thinks and what man makes above what man really is. Man was never made to be in control of his own destiny. He was designed to be a creature of dependence on God first, and then on his fellow creatures and environment under God second. God does not want control freaks, who desire to be in control of their own destinies, he wants us to become weak, dependant, and trusting upon Abba Father.

It was Jesus who taught his disciples to pray to Abba Father. That is the Aramaic for

“daddy”, as a term of intimacy, such as a small child would say to his father. Paul informs us that God has given us the Spirit of his Son into our hearts which cries “Abba” [Romans 8:14,15].

It has become trendy even in the modern Christian market place for many books based on a self-help philosophy to be produced. Many aspects of these modern works are useful, but if they in any sense produce a mentality toward self help derived in human terms, rather than help obtained by divine intervention, then there is a deadly virus which will need eradication or the church will suffer. This is not to say that the principles of self help enabling people to take responsibility for them selves is not vital, it is rather when the focus of self help becomes founded on the principles rather than the designer of human nature who founded the principles behind our natures in the first place.

The picture of God to both Smyrna and Philadelphia is of a kind and compassionate Father who wants to help his weak and needy child. It is unpopular in modern culture to paint this picture of man, but we must let ourselves be radical enough to be dependant children, looking to a loving Father, who will do all that he can to encourage his little ones. This is thoroughly grounded on the Johannine worldview [See on 1 John 2 etc - note John’s use of terms such as “My little children” indicating John’s own picture of God as his model Father painted in the same likeness]. I know that in writing

this I am flying in the face of some Christian Sub-culture which would make us to be people who have reached beyond the age of dependency to full adult responsibility, but this has often been framed in the context in which our first responsibility to be fully surrendered to God in complete reliance on him is seen as a sign of immaturity and insecurity. There are those who would say something like this “It is a sign of immaturity when people want God to give them all the answers.” I have heard this said more than once. In this view Christians are meant to grow beyond an insecure searching after God’s continuous encouragement. Maturity means a tough faith that takes responsibility for itself in the face of a hard world, of hard knocks. I wonder if this sort of attitude, often unconsciously accepted as true, is not just an expression of either:

[1] Fear that if we make ourselves vulnerable to God he might not really be there for us when we need him. So we protect ourselves. We argue for a tough faith that essentially is a form of withdrawal and self-protectionism in case trusting in a loving Father God like a little child proves to be a painful betrayal.

[2] Fear of not being in control. We come to desire to be our own bosses; to be the arbiters of our own destinies¹. Much modern psychology is built on the premise that we need to become self-determining by choosing for ourselves without regard to the opinion of others. This has entered Christian doctrine in the guise of a theology of decision and choice. Of course we all have delimited

choices, to choose Jesus as Saviour at the beginning, but we cannot of our own strength and volition choose ourselves out of every situation with its difficulties without making reference to God's enabling grace to make this movement effective. We cannot choose to stop sinning; we don't have the power to do so without Christ's enabling presence. Scripture hardly ever speaks of choice when talking of our child-like walk with Father God - it almost always talks of Trust built on a firm knowledge that he loves us as only a daddy can. Scripture talks of God choosing us, not us choosing him [See on Mat. 12:18;22:14, Luke 6:13;9:35; John 13:18;15:19 etc]. I can tell you that I have fought against my desire to be in control, but I would much rather have God as my daddy at the age of 43 years, than try to live my life in any other way. Jesus taught us to become like children. To rely on Daddy God, who is the best Dad there ever has been. Daddy God is always there to help us, and encourage us. He has never let me down, or left me to get on with it. He has always been there for me. His arms have so often been open wide to embrace me. Just like a child who can run to mum or dad when hurt, or after a bad dream, so have I discovered God is there telling me "I am there for you everything will be OK, everything from the beginning to the end of your life. I can assure you of that, because when I chose you, I then gave you an absolute iron cast guarantee that you would make it in me."

So often the modern view of God is of a being of clinical deistic distance who like an impassive surgeon awaits the outcome of critical surgery leaves us in uncertainty about our eternal security. I dare to exclaim this view is a lie fabricated by Satan himself!

It would be unthinkable for me to turn my children away when they ask me for help. My love for them would make me want to encourage and reassure them in every way possible. There is a story of a Father who told his son to jump out of the branches of a tree and that he would catch him. After much encouragement from his father the child jumped and the father stepped away and let him fall to the ground. The child was shaken, but not seriously injured. He looked to his father with hurt and a painful betrayal of trust echoing from his eyes. The father said to his son: "Son I did that so that you could learn never to trust anyone." Although the child's physical body was not seriously damaged, I am sure that his emotional/spiritual self was deeply injured.

What sort of picture of God did that son get? What sort of picture of the world did he presume? God is not like that irresponsible father he is the best Father who is always there for us his little children. Of course many parents reading this will be thinking I am not like that parent! I would never do that! Nevertheless we all need to consider what sort of image of God we are portraying to our offspring!

Smyrna the church of persecution and Philadelphia the church of the intimacy of

brotherly love both knew what it was to have a Father who was worth sacrificing all for. He offered doors of opportunity to them, in their utter dependence on him; they loved and trusted him above all others. My cry at the end of this section is “Daddy thank you!” And this state of being is the key to all Christian worship which offers itself to God with child-like thankfulness and abandon.

Pergamum and Sardis

The church of Pergamum is the over-tolerant fellowship, and its' chiastic companion is Sardis the sleeping church. Pergamum has deliberately tolerated false doctrine and immoral behaviour. Sardis does not have the central doctrine of Salvation by free grace through faith in its corporate consciousness. Put together we have a view of a church which uses grace as a licence to do whatever its fellowship pleases. The reasoning is that which is condemned by Paul in Romans 3:1 - 8:

.....What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every man be false, as it is written, “That thou mayest be justified in thy words, and prevail when thou art judged,” But if our wickedness serves to show the justice of God, what shall we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world? But if

through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come? - as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just. [RSV].

Believers come to think that the more they sin the more opportunity God has to show his mercy. This is thought to be helping God's mercy to become more evident in its exercise. This interpretation of free grace is built on a humanistic desire to be over-tolerant of sin. The fellowships of Pergamum and Sardis did not grow spiritually because they were worshipping themselves rather than God. Over-tolerance is founded on antinomianism and irresponsible grace. It makes man once again arbiter of his own destiny, building his own future based on his own desires. When it is convenient to be holy it is fine, but when it is not excuses are readily found. Worship of God as king, with him asking for trusting obedience from us is not central to this state of being.

Thyatira

This leaves us with the centre of John's chiastic compendium. The church of Thyatira is the compromising church. Tolerance of other ideologies and religious philosophies is the king pin of this churches' being. Of all sins compromise is the worst because it completely rejects the notion of God's absolute truth and absolute right to be the centre

of worship - with none else in his place.

The showdown on Mount Carmel between Jezebel and the prophets of Baal, and Elijah God's man, is about to be repeated [See on 1 Kings 18]. God must be seen to be God. The God who answers by fire - "He is God" [1 Kings 18:24].

The chiastic middle is the worst danger facing any church today. When we reach the point of compromise the cutting edge of truth becomes just yet another example of relativity. The surgical knife of truth is blunted by an attitude which declares all things of equal truth thus making biblical truth irrelevant to the seeming Christian attitude.

Relativity is Satan's greatest weapon in the so called civilised west. It is at the foundation of our society today. Moral relativity contends that there is no absolute morality, but just different ethical systems, each being equally good, and therefore demanding our tolerance. Sadly this sort of attitude often leads churches to accept biblically amoral behaviours into its fellowship. The tolerance of homosexuality is one case in point. Whilst the present writer is sympathetic to those who have no sexual desire for the opposite sex, the scriptures of the New Covenant are clear that God's wrath is focussed on such practices, although not on the orientation without the practice I believe [See Romans 1].

There is also such a thing as spiritual relativity. There is in this view no such thing as one right religion. All are but just different paths to God. Relativity on this scale makes God less than God. Surely God can give a clear picture of himself in a substantive way which will not lead to confusion. Either Jesus is the only way to salvation [Acts 4:12], and the only way to find God [John 14:6], or he was seriously deluded about his importance to human salvation and knowledge.

Relativity in the spiritual realm is to make ourselves into our own gods once again. It is but another humanistic shade of reality. Thyatira is probably the clearest prophetic picture of the modern west. Relativity is the underpinning of current intellectualism. It is the basis to modern cosmologies, and it is the justification for our material reliance. After all man needs something to rely on. If he is a relativist then his best security will be to have material comfort and security, but what a sad cop out.

A church which has lost its awe for the greatness of God and that has gelatinised its biblical reliance through compromise is made up of a group of believers in name, but agnostics in reality. When life begins to revolve around relativism it has nothing but dead ends to focus on. It no longer has an absolute God to look to for answers, and this in turn destroys true biblical worship of an absolute loving God who is the only answer to everything!

What the church needs is a real contrast based on the absolute vision of God in Christ. This is the Christian paradigm. We need a picture of a God who is far far greater than any human conception. We need a God who is the only answer to every need. This is the only way that the church will be kept true to its biblical roots, and this will be its only defence against the relativity of humanistic dogma. We need to go beyond the limitations of this present age. We need a new picture of the age to come. This can only be found by a living encounter with a loving Jesus through his Living Spirit [See on 2 Cor. 3 - 4:1 - 4].

We need to live with an awareness of the life of the future in the present in other words. This will be the topic of our next chapter.

Your Response

[1] What sort of world view best describes your present outlook on life?

[2] To what extent do you consult God on the important and less important choices you make?

[3] How do you see yourself from what you have just read above? What states of being seem to be descriptive of your outlook?

[4] In what ways do you need to rethink who you are, and what you believe?

7. Trinitarian Worship

Jenny, my wife, asked: “Can you read a piece from the bible for the kids tonight please darling?” We were in Bournemouth on holiday with some friends staying in a lovely vicarage, my ideal sort of environment; big spacious rooms, an intoxicating study [may I say with materials that forment the right sort of Spirit], and a lovely Anglican church next door.

The children, two ours, and two our friends, didn’t take long to start quizzing me with the traditional childhood questions. “Where did God come from?” “Who made Him?” “How is God one and yet three persons?” And so on.

I got to thinking after this onslaught of neonate interrogation that little changes.

The great Christological controversies between the Nestorians and Monophysites during the second and third centuries AD, with one side arguing for Christ being equally God and man, whilst the other wanted him to be more God than human. The Arian debates concerning whether Jesus was indeed God or some kind of lesser god; the Gnostic denials that God could ever have become a real flesh and blood being in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Coming down the ages to today you may remember the “God is

dead” slogan of the 70s’ and the arrival of a new age mysticism which would have us discover that we ourselves are meant to be some sort of gods ourselves. All of these diverse and complex issues, and ideas grew out, and still spring forth, from a world filled with men and women who have not grown beyond the basic questions of childhood. All that changes is that adults are able to make their ignorance sound more plausible - somehow duping our offspring into thinking we have some insights which they have not!

Indeed, however, sophisticated we become, even in this age of unparalleled scientific advancement the basic need to question remains, and this is because we are still struggling with the questions of childhood. In the presence of the divine the human element is best expressed with a child-like humility which Jesus pointed out as being a critical foundation for entering the Kingdom of God [as we noted in chapter 5]. My experience with my children has taught me that there is nothing better than the child’s intoxicated pursuit of knowledge, and the trusting way that they will accept often the impossible [for instance Father Christmas].

Our questions must often sound a bit like an interrogation to God. Men and women are very good at asking “why?” “Why” questions always leave a question mark which leads to more questions and question marks. The great “why” questions have a definite tendency to limit our lack of understanding to what we do not know. This is based on

the reality that we are unable to go into the realm of the unknown by any human means. We need a key which the route of the sciences, with their fundamental basis of observation and notation and theorization cannot facilitate. The mysteries of God are beyond man's ability to fathom out in the contemporary, so called, objective fashion. Knowledge of Him must come on a metaphysical spiritual plane.

More usefully we may choose to go beyond our "why" questions to "What next?" questions, which will aid us to look to what else is beyond our human limitations. In other words we can recognise our limitations of cognition in our quest for knowledge and we can start on a new radical path of faith and acceptance of the necessity of mystery remaining mystery; so that we can start to meet with a God who can be understood in terms of a heartfelt relationship, which will in the realist sense make sense to our rational faculty.

Maturing as a Christian does not suggest that we get all the answers to all our questions, but it does imply that we will come to trust that God is bigger than our present ability to find answers. The greatest way that we will come to have our deepest heart desires met will be by discovering the God who wants a two way relationship based on love with us on a personal level.

At this point we may enter the mystical realm of God and discover that this arena is full of new experiences and new answers.

John the Apostle, possibly the closest disciple in terms of relationship to Jesus Christ, had learnt to go beyond what is seen to what is unseen. He had learnt to trust the Son of God who was at one and the time both human and divine. John's gospel has more to say about Jesus relationship in the Godhead than any other book or letter in the entire bible. Jesus addresses God as his Father more than any other of the gospels. John had learnt to stop being a limited humanist because he had discovered a real vibrant relationship with Christ and Father God through the authenticating influence of the Holy Spirit in the deepest recesses of his being..

Moreover, perhaps he possessed that child-like spirit of humility which is willing to trust those who are bigger and more powerful than the child itself.

Transported by the Spirit into heavenly realms [Rev. 4:1,2] John finds himself in the throne room of Father God. His mind, his eyes, his ears see and hear things unutterable. He struggles to recall what he has experienced by the use of human language and earthly imagery. I am sure he found it almost impossible to do. He cannot describe well enough who he sees, so he speaks of "one who was seated" on the throne [4:2]. No language or image can do any justice to our Father in heaven. All

that can be said with any sense of comprehension is that God is worthy of our worship because of who he is and what he has done for us through his one and only Son Jesus Christ [4:11]!

Next, as we read in Revelation chapter 5, John meets the Lamb; the Son of God. Who is pictured as a perpetually slain lamb of offering [Revelation 5:6]. There will never be a day in eternity when we will be able to forget that we are there because of his sacrifice, and there will never be a day when we can stop worshiping him as worthy because of it [5:9].

Revelation 4:5 and 5:6 inform us further that the sevenfold Spirit of God is to be found in the courts of Glory as well. He it is who sees all things and knows all things. He it is who makes God universal to all that there is. We are presented in this grand panorama with a picture of the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent almighty and all loving Trinity of the Godhead.

Revelation is a Trinitarian document. John, like all of us could not explain how God is three and yet one, but he saw it to be true. He came to know that it is true because he went beyond what is seen to what is unseen. We can only ever enter into a deeper knowledge of God through the media of abandoning ourselves to the mysteries of God's Spirit. This all starts with a relationship based on trust.

John was a radical. He had a complete trust in Jesus the God-man. His heart throbbed with a passion to be in a close and intimate relationship with him. Through that relationship he developed a radical trust which resulted in a radical worship which brought him into the very courts of glory.

We will never grow into mature Christian people if we let our questions, and doubts, rule our destinies. It will only be when we let go of our efforts to fly and learn to glide in the Spirit's mysteries. Chickens cannot leave the ground in flight. They cannot sustain anything we would recognize as competent flight. Most other birds have to work hard at sustaining flight, but one bird does not; the great eagle. It is when we have learnt to let the wind take us on its journey, rather than fighting against it in an effort of self mastery. He has made the wind his friend. If we are to take to the skies with the wings of the eagle then we must learn to abandon ourselves unreservedly to the mysteries of the Spirit. Jesus says as much to Nicodemus in John 3:8. The wind must transport us to its destinations, not we but the wind; and of course I am referring to the Holy Spirit's activity in our lives.

In a Vision the prophet Ezekiel is taken to the temple of God by an Angel. Issuing from the temple is a great river for the refreshing of the nations. The Angel bids Ezekiel to enter the water, first with it lapping at his ankles, then with it washing around his

knees, and then with it buffeting at his waist. And finally Ezekiel is taken out of his depth into the river [Ezekiel 47:1-6]. The Angel makes his point, in order for Ezekiel to enter into the power and presence of God fully he must stop trying to move the water, but let it move him. If we try to control our destinies then we will never walk into the bigger world of who God is. Real worship is that sort of worship which means we are led by the Spirit of Christ to find and do God's will in every situation of our lives. Radical worshippers worship God in Spirit and in truth [John 4:23].

We need to go beyond our limited "Why?" questions and start to let ourselves ask "What else?"

It is as we go into the realm of letting God be God that we can become accessible in the deepest recesses of our beings to the Godhead. Our hearts need to become the homes of the Trinity. Not just Father God, or Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit, but of all three. Each person of God needs to be related to in worship, in order for us to be complete in our relationship with God. Jesus promises that the complete Godhead will manifest themselves to us and will dwell in us [John 14:21-24]. It is when we allow ourselves to be Trinitarian in this way that we will be able to give the highest place to God's government and dominion in our lives.

Within the history of the church, and in our current epoch, there have always been over

emphases on one or two persons of the Godhead to the neglect of another. This has resulted in the stunting of men and women who need to experience all dimensions of God, rather than selective censorship of one whilst not excluding the others.

This exclusivity has taken at least three different forms:

Firstly, there has been Unitarianism. Arising with the beliefs of Arius who thought of God as one in person - the Son being a lesser god or created being, and the Holy Spirit being another way of describing God, or simply a neuter force or energy.

In early Adventism in the USA Unitarianism was advocated by such pioneers as Joseph Bates and James White. Seventh-day Adventists of today do hold to a Trinitarian belief, but this was not necessarily always the case.

Jehovah's witnesses are basically Unitarian as well. And there is the Unitarian church which had somewhat of a following last century.

But before we become hung up on condemning Unitarian beliefs let us consider ourselves. There can still be a tendency to theoretically embrace Trinitarian theology, but practically deny it. We may speak of gentle Jesus meek and mild, but watch out for the wrath of God the Father. In this case God can be painted as a supreme arbitrary

and malevolent monster that gentle Jesus needs to plead to for mercy toward sinful people who have accepted him. This flies in the face of Paul's assertion that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them." [2 Corinthians 5:19 RSV]. Father, Son and Holy Spirit were all on that cross of suffering so that we might be saved.

John's own vision in which the Angelic hosts' lovingly and trustingly worship all three persons of the Godhead demonstrates that their adoration is not forced but given freely. Indeed God's love is to be poured out into our hearts by his Spirit [Romans 5:8]. The whole Trinity is to be considered as being "for us" not against us [Romans 8:31 and on]. Surely the whole direction of Paul's thought in this great passage of scripture is to encourage us with the love of the family of God toward us.

In Romans 8:14 and 15 the Holy Spirit is pictured as loving to make our hearts cry out "Abba, Father"; "Daddy!" Yes you got it right "Daddy!" My heart cries out to my "Daddy", not in fear as to a wrathful God, but in adoration to the best Dad I ever had.

Secondly, we turn our attention to Bina – tarianism [not a true English word, but my attempt to discuss another concept]. In this system of thought there is a more or less right emphasis on God as Father, and Jesus as Son of God and Saviour, but the Holy Spirit is not often mentioned.

It is almost like there was a statement of belief which said: “We believe in God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures.”

No there is not a misprint. Many evangelical groups wishing to distance themselves from the so called “abuses” of charismatic groups have more to say about the Holy Scriptures than the Holy Spirit. To screen out the Spirit of God from our experience is like trying to make a light bulb work without the electricity. We need the Holy Spirit in order to have a vital relationship with a vital God.

In one book I was reading for a publishing house I observed that the author had much to say about Father and son, but little, if anything, was mentioned concerning the Spirit.

The desire to make the Word of God central in place of the Spirit has been perceived to be necessary because of the so called lack of rooted-ness in scripture that some charismatic groups have exhibited. It is thought that their emphasis on hearing from a living and speaking God today has taken the place of the guidance of the Scriptures. Therefore, the Word of God becomes a means of locking the Holy Spirit out of people’s lives, with the warning, “Don’t trust your feelings, and experience of God, trust the Word.” Although this is valuable advice, it is not scriptural advice in the sense that such individuals give it. Often such groups take a cessation position; they teach that the

supernatural gifts of prophecy, tongues and so on ceased with the apostles. As we will see in the next chapter this view is not supported by the Revelation, neither is it sanctioned by the New Testament writers.

Scripture must be the media for weighing, and testing modern day words of knowledge and prophecy, but it must not take the place of the Holy Spirit's activity by trying to lock God up into a nice set of systematic doctrinal statements; which set a traditional creed up which is never to be broken.

We may otherwise find ourselves like the Pharisees of old building a protective wall of systematic dogma around the very person of God. For them they thought it their job to protect their beliefs by defining them in strict legalistic codes that went far beyond what God had ever intended. In our case we can easily develop our own God in the shoe box mentality. Stacking, and compartmentalising him in neat packages which are aimed at keeping us safe from excess. I will remind you that the Jews rejected Jesus because they had become too narrow to let God be God in the person of his radically loving Son, who welcomed prostitutes and ate with sinners.

The trouble is that the spiritual experience of those of us who try to lock God up in a Holy Scripture world without abandoning ourselves to his living Spirit is that we end up as a heap of dead dry bones in a well known valley spoken of by Ezekiel the prophet [Ezekiel 37].

The bones need to be brought back to life. But the valley of dry bones needs a miracle that is beyond the greatest scientists or doctors in this world. The only answer is for those bones to be prophesied over. The only hope is for the Spirit who took part in creation to put flesh on them old bones and to breathe life into them [Ezekiel 37]. But in order for this to happen we need to be born from above by the miracle of the Spirit of Jesus [John 3].

Finally we come to Trinitarian worship. This is where we give all three persons of the Godhead their proper place in our teaching and experience.

Father God is related to as our Daddy. He it is who is the super big Daddy of the whole universe. Just as Father and Son, or Daughter and parent lie in each others arms as they fall asleep, or hear stories read, so we are called to an even greater intimacy with our heavenly dad just like Jesus had [John 1:18]. We regain this intimacy with Abba Father by coming to him through Jesus; and Jesus makes it clear that God loves us every bit as much as Jesus does, and the Lord Holy Spirit does! John tells us that Jesus came from the very bosom of God to show us what God is like [John 1:18 & 14:8]. We are to find rest in that bosom of love as well [Matthew 11:28].

Jesus is to be worshipped as our personal Saviour. He is our example to follow. The

scriptures are full of many descriptions of ways we are to see him. Through Jesus we have eternal access to God [John 5:24]

The Holy Spirit is the vehicle of God's self disclosure in the here and now. He it is who shows us what God is like, and what he wants to communicate to us individually. He fills us with the very presence of the Godhead [John 14].

No wonder so many churches are empty, and so many people who attend can feel lifeless and listless - hungering for more, but at the same time being limited by their traditions and dogmas from finding the big God shaped hole filled. The only hope is for you to listen carefully to what scripture says about our great Trinitarian God, rather than to what our dogmas inform us of as the right way to do things.

All worship must be Trinitarian for it to lead us to maturity in our journey with God.

John the recipient of the revelations was rooted in a Trinitarian experience of God. To be otherwise would have been for us to have possessed one less book in the New Testament. I believe that is an absolute fact, not a fiction.

Your Response

[1] To what extent can you recognise the inner influence of the Holy Spirit in you?

[2] What concerns do you have about letting God take the steering wheel of your life?

[3] How does the Bible help you in deciding when a word of knowledge is from the Spirit?

8. John the Charismatic

The Apostolic age saw a supernatural explosion of God's miraculous presence. It was the time of the inauguration of the age of the "Spirit of Jesus" [1].

Luke writes in Acts 1:1:

"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt
with all that Jesus began to do and teach." [RSV]

Luke starts the book of Acts by referring to his other significant work the gospel by his name. His gospel can be basically summarised as following a structure which records Jesus' "doings and teachings". Or put another way his "Words and Works".

Luke informs Theophilus that these "Words and Works" were "began" [Acts 1:1] by Jesus as his gospel records, but the book of Acts demonstrates that they are to continue in the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the disciples and Apostles of Jesus.

It is the Apostles and disciples who receive the Holy Spirit [Acts 2]. It is by their hands that Jesus continues his miraculous deeds [Acts 3], and reinforces his teaching

[Acts 2]. It is the “Spirit of Jesus” [Acts 16:8] who guides the apostle Paul. Indeed it is he who works Signs, wonders, healings, miracles, prophecies, new tongues and portents of incredible magnitude and undeniable veracity of divine origin [Acts 2:43,44]. The church was authenticated by the miraculous presence of God working through his servants.

Acts 2:16 - 21 gives the good news that the Holy Spirit is poured out on “all flesh”. In the Old covenant age kings, priests and prophets were the major recipients [2]. In the new covenant age all believers are to receive the Holy Spirit on some simple conditions:

“Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” [Acts 2:38 RSV].

The Spirit is a gift of God. Just like Salvation is a gift of grace [Ephesians 2:8]. He cannot be earned, he cannot be bought, he can simply be sought and received. Paul says as much in Galatians 3:1 - 5:

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you,

Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain? If it really is in vain. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing With faith?" [RSV].

As we can see from this excerpt from Galatians that Paul considered it to be a natural phenomenon for the Christian to experience the miraculous presence of the Holy Spirit. We can also observe that the Holy Spirit is received as a gift of grace not by something we produce by our own power or piety [Acts3:6]. A Christian, in order to be a true Trinitarian believer, must be switched on in the Holy Spirit. She must let the Spirit work in her, rather than trying to make Christianity work for her according to her own agenda. Perhaps this is the great problem facing Christians today. Perhaps we do not want to accept that we are saved by grace alone. That we cannot do anything of ourselves, that we are helpless and that we need to be led by God alone.

It is by the media of the Holy Spirit that Christians are to do greater works than their Lord [John 14:12]. This challenging saying of our Lord has often been misunderstood. It has been wondered “how can we do greater works than Jesus?” But seen in the light of Acts 1:1 it makes perfect sense. It is not us who are to do the greater works as if on our own, but it is Jesus who will continue by His Spirit to do his deeds and teachings through us by his Spirit. This includes miracle, prophecy, the complete package of gifts of the Spirit. It includes him doing these things through mere mortals like you and I!

It is the “Spirit of Jesus” who guides Paul to go to Macedonia [Acts16:8]. He is forbidden to go to preach the gospel by the Spirit in Asia Minor at that time. How often we wonder why we do not reach the people of this age. Perhaps it is because we do not follow the Spirit but our own agendas. It is the “PARAKLETE” who draws attention to Jesus and reveals his present and future plans to his people now, today! [John 16:12 - 14]. Jesus principle of ministry should be ours, not our own agendas. He said of the way he conducted his mission the following in John 5:19:

Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you,
the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but
only what he sees the Father doing; for
whatever he does, that the Son does likewise.’ [RSV].

Do we follow this principle in our lives? Are we grace driven Christians? Do we do things where God is doing them, or do we set our own agendas? Are we Spirit gifted Christians? Do we receive the gift of the Spirit, and go where he blows us [John 3:8]? Or do we go where we want to go following our agendas, and not the Father's heart? Jesus followed the passionate throb of his Father's heart. Jesus was the paradigmatic man of what it means to be gifted with the free gift of the Holy Spirit.

The early church was a charismatic group who ministered following their master as he continued to guide them. They were known as the people of the way. That is the way Jesus had guided them to model their lives. They were involved in abandoning themselves to do the biddings of Jesus Spirit as he continued to exercise his deeds and teachings through them. Luke intended his gospel to set the criteria for what those deeds and teachings should look like. He wrote it so that the authentic voice of Jesus could be recognised. He penned it so that Christians of today can see that they need the God of miracle and prophecy working by his Spirit directly through them. What a great challenge we face!

We return to John, our intrepid Apostle and guide on the felons island of Patmos. Almost 60 years have passed since he walked the paths of the Holy land with his Lord. Yet what do we find him doing on his prison Isle. Lamenting that the church is failing,

or not making progress? Weeping for the lack of commitment in his life? Trying to think of an escape plan so as to be able to get back to his new home in Ephesus? No we find that John is waiting on the Lord as he has done for the last 60 years. We find that John is still switched on in the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit - exercising his gift of prophecy [Revelation 1].

Chained and imprisoned he meets the risen Jesus. He is transported by the Spirit into visions of heavenly realms [Revelation 4:1,2].

Moreover, it was not just John who possessed these gifts of the Spirit, but it was also true for every believer without limit, except those which a believer's heart may have put upon them. These gifts are every Christians still to be exercised without qualification, or status, or educational or social status being reckoned upon. This is clear from Paul's own teachings on Spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians chapters 12: 12 - 14. Paul's reckoning was that a congregation should regularly be exercising these gifts. He says in 1 Corinthians 14:26:

“What then, brethren? When you come together,
each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation,
a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things
be done for edification.”

It seems that Paul considered it to be a regular requirement for a church to exercise the gift of prophecy in worship services so that unbelievers would be forced by the miraculous evidence to see that God was really at work among them. He says:

“If, therefore, the whole church assembles and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.” [1 Cor. 14:23 - 25 RSV].

I wonder why so many churches are empty? I wonder why so many outreach programmes reach so few? Could it be because we are not switched on in the Spirit of prophesy spoken of in Revelation 19:12? Could it be that we forbid the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit to local gifted prophets whom God has called? Have we denied his presence and power? Is our church ruled by tradition and dogma which tries to lock the authentic voice of the God who speaks away from the people? “We’ve

always done it this way we might say, why do it in another?" Has our tradition, and leadership locked us away from God? Is our fear of God speaking to us based on a sinful need to be in control of our own lives? Would what the prophetic voice has to say to us be too challenging to our neat little world?

Every congregation needs its prophets. This is a fact of scripture, not a fancy of this writer. We need to be honest bible students, not dishonest institutional bureaucrats who want to keep the status quo balanced. To do this is to have our congregational candle in immediate danger of being removed from the presence of the Lord [Revelation 2:5]. It is to bring corrective judgment down on our own heads. It is so easy to lock God away between the pages of the bible. It is so easy to be selective about what portions of scripture we read. But the challenge is for us to let prophets live again in our local congregations. It is clear from Revelation 19:12 and Acts 2:16 - 21 that every congregation is to have the Spirit of prophecy in living speaking prophets today. This will rock the boat. This will lead to excess and challenge in some peoples estimations, but if it is weighed and balanced by scriptural counsel then the church will be far better off for it!

In the later part of the first century Ad and in the early 2nd century it is clear from reading Clement of Rome's Epistle to the Corinthians, and Ignatius's epistles to the churches to whom the Apocalypse was first addressed that disunity had taken root

among believers, that they were looking more to themselves than God. Paul's warnings to the Corinthians about the dangers of following human ideas as opposed to divine guidance had led to the charismatic gifts dying out [3]. Ignatius's epistle demonstrates that disunity had led to strong pastoral control of congregations which in my view resulted in the spirit of innovation and openness to the Holy Spirit being crushed by a desire for man to be in control [4]. We must have direction and leadership as local congregations, but this must not be based on dogma and tradition so much as following the prophetic voice and discerning God's plans by listening and weighing words given, and uttered by mysteries of the Spirit [1 Corinthians 14:2].

If we consider the Greek word for gifts it is "CHARISMATOS", Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 12 - 14. It describes spiritual gifts. It informs us that all the gifts outlined in these chapters were supernaturally given as a miraculous gift to individual believers [5]. These gifts included prophecy, tongues discernment of spirits, healing gifts and so on [See on 1 Corinthians 12]. All God's people are to exercise the "CHARISMATOS", the free presents given to his grateful children. They are offered to us without money or price [Rev.22:17], HP agreement or down payment. No repayment instalments are required. There is no 19% APR. They are free for the asking.

The God of all resources gives us all that we need to complete his mission through us. These resources are poured out without limit in the person of his Son, and his Son

continues to exercise those gifts through his people today! Dare I say, in some cases, if only we would let him!

The apostle John, the last of the 12 apostles, was found to be still a man of the Spirit exercising the gifts. If he had not been filled with the Spirit of Jesus, then the great scenes of worship and future events would never have been written down in the form of the Revelation for us to read.

We cannot really enter into the worship of God's new covenant kingdom unless we are baptised, switched on in the Holy Spirit. It is clear from Acts 19:1-7 that Christians may have accepted Jesus as Saviour, but they can remain bereft of the power of the Holy Spirit, they may not have been switched on in his full power and presence this is what the Apostles discovered to be true of the Samaritans converted under the aegis of Phillip. Whenever we have a power cut we note the absence of electrical power. When we are not switched on in the Spirit we will continuously note our lack of God's beautiful presence, peace and power.

Our failure to be switched on may simply be because we have erected barriers which stop us from allowing ourselves to invite the fullness of the Spirit in. These blockages may be as follows:

[1] The barrier of fear.

The question is often asked “How can I know that this is really of God?” talking of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit.

All I can say to this is that God will not let us be deceived if we ask for his protection. If we ask to be switched on in the Spirit and let the barriers down then he will protect us on our new journey. He will not let us be deceived by the enemy. Would a good Father let his child be abused knowingly by a pervert? No! No! No! However, it would be a good idea to take this new journey under the guidance of a mature Christian who has walked in the Spirit for some time, and knows some of the challenges and pitfalls.

Scripture sets the scene for what we must see as normal for the Christian. It is normal for the disciple to be a learner. It is often pride and arrogance that prevent the modern day believer admitting to her self that she needs to deny herself and take up her cross, and go on the way of a lifetime of following and learning. The principle of the body of Christ [1 Corinthians 12] informs us that we need others, none of us has all the answers or all the gifts we need. No one needs to stand alone in the Christian family where Christ is the head of the body [Ephesians 4].

It is normal for Christians to have visions, prophesy, speak in earthly languages, and

heavenly languages of tongues, which will need interpretation. It is normal for miracles to happen and for healings to occur. These things will happen if you lower the drawbridge of your minds, raise the portcullis of your hearts and let the King come in [Psalm 24].

[2] The fear of loss of control.

Society today has mass produced an age of control freaks. We seek scientific control of disease, the environment, the skies, the roads, the food chain etc. We want to be in control.

The teaching of Scripture is that we must let go of control and turn our lives over to Jesus, the only one who can give us rest from our freakish sin problem of self centred control [Matthew 11:28].

The Holy Spirit works his miracles not on the basis of our agendas, or capabilities, but on the foundation of his power and resources, and our need to accept this as normal [See on Gal. 3:1-5 once more].

It has often been said to me by non-Charismatic people, "If I let down my guard then how can I be in control of what happens in my life? Perhaps the Devil will take

advantage of me!”

At the most basic level God wants us to let go of control of our lives and hand it over to him. We need to say with Jesus in our Gethsemane of fear of loss “Not my will but yours be done!”

God wants us to let go of our self control and to give our wills over to him! Frightening isn't it!

It is a matter of sinful distrust if we do not take God at his word, and let him possess even our wills and choices. He wants us to let him direct our lives, not our humanism. Yet many Christians are humanists who first and foremost want to do things on the basis of self control, rather than divine government of their lives. We fear that we may lose our selves, when Jesus promises that he “who would lose his life will find it” [Matthew 10:39]. And this is paradoxical isn't it. Yet since I have been switched on in the Spirit over the past 25 years I have been on some painful journeys of discovery, yes, but I have also found my true God-given self. I am far happier now than I have ever been. May the Lord continue his work I say - in Jesus' name Amen!

There are other fears I could mention, but the crucial thing is that we let God's will be done in our lives. This means that we must be obedient to scripture's normality for the

Christian. Scripture clearly teaches that we must be supernaturally gifted by the Spirit [1 Corinthians 12 - 14 & Acts 2:16-21].

This is all reinforced by the Revelation given to John. The very word "APOCALYPSIS" [the Greek for Revelation] gives us the key to all life in the Spirit. At its root it describes the miraculous uncovering of something which is hidden to man without divine disclosure taking place [6]. In Ephesians 1:18 Paul Prays that all Christians may be given a Spirit of revelation and inspiration so as to enter into the mysteries of God.

Jesus is at the heart of every uncovering of the Mystery of God [Rev. 1:1-3]. It is the Spirit's first function to reveal Jesus, and his plans [John 16:12 - 14]. It is by looking at him, and hearing from him by his spirit that we come to know God personally rather than abstractly or intellectually. Yet it is true that many possess endless degrees of theology, but possess little of the power of God's presence by the Holy Spirit. Human knowledge and educational traditions are probably the devil's way of locking us into human means of trying to know God and his ways and nature. But 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 tell us that such ways are declared foolishness by God, and that the only means of receiving God's power is through the miraculous means of the power of the cross, which opens the window to the gifts of the Spirit.

All of the revelations of Christ in the book of uncovering [another translation of the

Greek “APOCALYPSIS”] result in ever greater worship responses from Angels and men. John falls at Jesus’ feet as though dead, but he is raised by the King, and brought into the joy of the very presence of God [Rev. 1:17 and chapters 4 &5].

John the apostle “was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” [Rev. 1:10]. And as a man of the Spirit he did not just spend his life looking back on what had once happened in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but he was also accustomed to hearing from the risen, ascended and living Jesus of today by his Spirit. This was the key to the early churches success. It was not down to a method, but it was down to an abandoned, listening, relationship and obedience to God’s living government in the person of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts is not the “Acts of the Apostles”, but it is the “Acts of the Spirit of Jesus”.

Christianity is not just a historical religion, but it is also a present reality shaping the history of today for those who still hear from the living speaking Jesus [Rev. 1].

Your Response

[1] In what ways do you understand the word “charismatic”?

[2] To what extent would it be true to call the early Christians “charismatic”?

[3] As a term do you think that it is useful to define one's self as a "charismatic"?

[4] To what extent is the experience of supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit part of your experience, or your churches' experience?

End Notes

[1] Green M., "I Believe in the Holy Spirit", London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998.

Page 18.

[2] Dye C., "Sword of the Spirit, a school of ministry in the word and the Spirit, knowing the Spirit", UK: Sovereign World, 1991. Page 15

[3] See on 1 Corinthians 1:18 and compare this to Clement of Rome's epistle to the Corinthians. It seems clear from Clements' letter that there was a danger of strong heavy shepherding taking root in Corinth in the late part and early part of the 1st and 2nd century. Schisms were occurring which were destroying the spontaneity of the Corinthian believers. Whenever schismatic trends develop people inevitably take sides with various leading figures; instead of listening carefully to the Spirit of God, there is a tendency to follow trends and leaders. See on: Holmes M.W. [Editor], "The Apostolic

Fathers Greek texts and English translations”, USA: Baker Books, 1999. Page 29.

[4] Ibid, Page 139 – see on verse 4.

[5] Moulton translates “CHARISMATOS” as “a divinely-conferred endowment”. See on:

Moulton H.K., “The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised”, USA: Zondervan, 1981. Page

434

[6] Ibid, Page 42, see on: “APOKALYPSIS” and compare the translation with

Revelation 1:1-3.

9. Holy Spirit Give me your passion for Jesus!

Passion for Jesus is the key that unlocks the hearts of all those who are pictured as worshipping him in the Apocalypse.

We are confronted with John's passion for Jesus. When he sees the risen and glorified Lord he falls at his feet as though dead. I often ask myself "What would I do if I met Jesus now?" I know I would do what John did. The cry of my heart would be "Lord save!"

John's love for Jesus grew through an intimate acquaintance with him whilst he ministered to the people during his earthly life. John came to know Jesus, and to love him to the very core of his being. As tradition says John was about 80 years old when he met his Lord once more face to face on Patmos. The years of physical separation had been long and hard. It had been a spiritual journey with many troughs and peaks, but John's passion had not diminished. His character is probably no better portrayed than in his epistles. He addresses the people of his Asian church communities as "My little children" [1 John 2:1]. He often writes on the topic of love; particularly defining it in these words:

"Beloved, let us love one another; for love is

of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." [1 John 4:7,8 RSV].

This love had grown through long meditation on the life and death of Jesus. It was a fruit of the Spirit which particularly defined John's deepest longings and expressions. But probably the most important dynamic in all of his growth was the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life. John knew the presence of the comforter [John 14:20] to be a reality that continuously vitalised the presence of God's agape love in his life [Romans 5:5].

"AGAPE" the Greek word for love is one of several types of word used to describe it.

There was "EROS" love - which was the sexual type of romantic love.

There was "PHILOS" love - which was true of close friendship and marriage.

There was "STORGE" love - which was the type of love which existed in a family between parent and child, and brother and sister.

And there is "AGAPE" love which in the New Testament is always used to describe

God's love. It is God's passionate self sacrificing love - which lays all of itself on the altar of sacrifice without a thought for itself. It is gift love as C. S. Lewis so aptly termed it [1].

"AGAPE" is the type of love which John the Apostle had passionately for his Lord, and for other men and women. It had taken hold of every fibre of his being. But it is wrong for me to speak of love as "it" for to John it was a person, and a presence:

"I will not leave you desolate [says Jesus] I
will come to you." [John 14:8 RSV].

To John love was made manifest in the living and breathing Jesus [John 1:14,18].

John saw the compassion which Jesus whole being breathed for sinful and lost human beings. It was so infectious that he never got over it, it completely revolutionised his entire being. His whole heart was continuously throbbing with the heart, mind and Spirit of Jesus. For John there was no other way, no other love in his life which could compete with his passion for Jesus.

In the person of the Holy Spirit Jesus entered into every believer's inmost being; through this most profound intimacy John's whole being throbbled with passion for God, his government and his purposes.

John could remember the words of Jesus about the Spirit so well because he knew the Spirit so well. He records that it is the Spirit who speaks for Jesus, it is he who draws attention to him, and brings us into relationship with him [John 16:13]. The comforter has a passion for the Son of God, and it is only as we seek his presence that we can have the gift of that passion for ourselves. It is not something that is resident in us, but it is something that the Spirit gives to us. Like salvation by grace is a gift, and the Holy Spirit is a gift, and the gifts of the Spirit are a gift, so, in the same way love is the first and primary manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our lives [Gal. 5:22]. It cannot be bought, earned or worked for, it can only be received.

When the elderly apostle cast himself at the feet of Jesus he did so in passionate adoration [Revelation 1:17]. He was so overcome with love that he fell as a dead man. It was that sort of love which completely knocked the breath out of him. It was like a physical blow. It almost destroyed him. But Jesus can never let that happen to those he loves. But God's love unleashed in all of its potential is a raging force of passion which tears at the heart like a lion seeking its prey. But its prey is not to be killed by its force, but it is to be enlivened and saved. No wonder Jesus is called the Lion of the Tribe of Judah [Revelation 5:5]. If only we allowed God's raging love for the lost to be unleashed in our hearts! This is what the church needs right now! This is what you and I need right now!

A little later John partakes in heavenly worship. He is transported from one ecstatic scene to another, what an incredible experience. In Revelation 5 he sees a mystic sealed scroll which will unlock the secret plans of God for his church. No one is found to be worthy to open them [Revelation 5:1-4]. In Rev. 5:4 we find John weeping - "surely there must be someone who can see within this hidden document." His weeping is not for himself, however, that would be a wrong assumption. Just reading his letters confirms that his heart throbbed not with selfish desires, but with God's unselfish AGAPE. He is weeping for the church; for God's people. What will become of them if they do not see within the mysteries of God's vital plans for his church on earth? What if the cosmic picture is not unfolded? The words come "weep not; lo, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." [Rev. 5:5 RSV].

Then John's gaze falls upon his beloved Lord now symbolically portrayed as a continually slain lamb [Rev. 5:6]. What a paradox; mystery of all mysteries. The eternal nature of Christ's sacrifice is demonstrated. He will bear the results of Calvary in his body forever. Could it be that the Godhead will forever suffer in a sense for the sin of man? What love! What passion! John's passion for Jesus is then echoed by the heavenly throng:

“Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open
its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood
didst ransom men for God from every tribe
and tongue and people and nation.” [Rev. 5:9 RSV].

He further echoes his experience:

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

[Rev. 5:11 - 14 RSV].

This passionate worship is addressed to the eternal three. It is probably the most

incredible picture of worship that we possess in scripture, or in human language. To know God is to love with his infectious love, it is to have our whole beings transported to ever higher heights of adoration, praise and thanksgiving.

Jesus once said: "If you have seen me you have seen the Father." [John 14:9]. The whole of Jesus life was one great passion story of God's great sacrificial heart lived out for us. He is the paradigmatic friend of all sinners who gave his life so that we might live [John 15:13].

It is finally this God of the cross, this God of "AGAPE" sacrifice, who died for the whole cosmos, which has fallen into sin that makes our hearts cry:

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us,
that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we
might live through him." [1 John 4:9 RSV].

John's profoundest moments of meditation must have been spent dwelling on this great fact. The book of Revelation reminds us that God's passionate nature is so great that he wants us to be before his throne waving palm branches, and raising our hands forevermore [Revelation 7]. And in this his great heart will be satisfied to look on the faces of his joyful children safe in his presence forevermore.

In John 17 Jesus says that he wishes for us to share in the oneness of the love which he shares in the Trinity of the family of God [John 17:21]. It is through this co-equal sharing in God's heart that we will enter into all the depths of the mystery of God [Ephesians 3:7-13]. Who dares to picture God as selfish? He has given us himself, yea he has given us his Son, No more! He has given us life and his love. To share in that love is to possess everything, God, His Son, His Spirit, his very family. It is for us to be sons and daughters within it [John 1:11-13 & 1 John 3:1 – 3]. Nothing more could he ever give than that one thing which brings meaning to who he is, and will bring meaning to who we are. God's heart knows all paths that may be trodden; those of pleasure that Freud focussed on in libido, and those of power that Adler studied in his patients'. But God knows that there is only one thing that really matters, and it will last forever, the love he shares within his triune self and as he pours it out within us and among us. By partaking of God's love we come to know his heart, and do his will. By so doing all of the fullness and resources of God will be open to us [Eph. 3]. Nothing of his power to act in love will be held back. I have often wondered how Peter knew in an instant that it was God's will to heal the lame man at the gate beautiful [Acts 3]. How is it he said to him "Arise". Now I understand, thank you Lord, it has just been revealed to me, it was because his heart throbbed with your love, and all of your resources became his to share. God wishes to hold nothing back from us, he wishes to share all, but it can only be shared if we grasp his love and are filled with it

and live by it. Satan became jealous, and, therefore, could not enter into the mysteries of God's power. God could not pour all of his fullness through Lucifer because his heart was unworthy. If he had done so then Satan would have used it for himself, instead of for others. It will be as the world around us experiences the love that we share that they will come to see that this love is for them. This will prove to be the most affective way that non-believers will become believers, as they are joined to us through our love for them and God. The only other reaction will be for them to reject that love, but such a thought is too terrible for us to contemplate in this book.

There is no better testimony of God's worthiness to be worshipped than to see his passionate love transform his people into paragons of that same love.

The worship of the future age reproduced in the apocalypse is a reality that begins in the church here today. We are to enter the worship of the future age by the Spirit in this present world. We are no longer seated upon earth, but we are already in heavenly realms with Jesus in the Spirit [Eph. 2:6].

Love, 1 Corinthians 13 informs us will outlast this age, and carry on into the age to come. It is the one eternally inexhaustible quality which will never become boring, or irrelevant. You and I will share it with our loved ones. This is why John is so anxious that the Asian believers discover that no one who says he is motivated by love and

hates his brother can be said to have God's love within him [1 John 4:7]. It is impossible to be born of God and live in hate toward another. There is no room for one particle of non-forgiveness in our hearts. All sins committed against us must be forgiven by us [Matthew 6:14]. Therefore, we need to make love our sole aim [1 Corinthians 14:1]. It is the only thing we can take with us! Without love we are nothing.

May Lord Jesus fill my heart and your hearts with his Spirit of "AGAPE"! In his name, Amen!

My Response

[1] If you consider the core driving forces in your life to what extent do you do things out of love for Jesus?

[2] As you consider your Christian life to date how much does Jesus love for lost people make you an active personal evangelist to your friends, family and neighbours?

End Notes

[1] Lewis C.S., "The Four Loves", UK: Collins, 1989. See on the introduction. Lewis discusses the nature of four different types of love, and explores them in detail in the rest of the book.

10. Listening to the God Who Speaks

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.” [1 John 1:1,2 RSV].

The core of Christian apocalyptic is the manifestation of God through the incarnation. In John's thought world the manifestation of God is through the “LOGOS” - the eternal Word. In the Old Testament the Hebrew term used for “word” was “DABHAR”, which at its most basic level stood for a “word or a thing”. The words of God speak creation into existence [See on Genesis 1]. The spoken word becomes reified as an objective material reality.

The word of God also becomes a living reality in its own right. When the prophets declare “Thus saith the Lord” [Isaiah 45:18]; his words become effective as living realities in the human arena ever after expressive of God's eternal invariability. His word is, therefore, forever binding. This is because God in Christ never changes in his intentions towards his creatures [Hebrews 13:8].

But the incarnation of God in his living words written on parchment, codex and paper is not enough. The word has to become flesh [John 1:14]. God was to make his word enter our world at our level. We need to relate to a living, breathing, speaking, passionate fleshy God. In Jesus we see God in a way which is non-repeatable. God has finally spoken in the humanity and divinity of his Son.

However, this final speaking has opened the door to all of the eternal potentiality of God's resources for our aid. The Spirit speaks for the living Christ now that he is seated at the right hand of God [John 16:12]. The comforter manifests Christ Jesus [John 14:21]. As Jesus was a source of comfort in the exterior observable world of human flesh, so the Spirit brings his comfort into the interior world of the human spirit. We can never understand our sinful hearts [Jeremiah 16:9,10], Jesus is the only one who ever could [John 2:24]. The Spirit interprets the longings of our fragmented sinful hearts in a language we could never utter [Romans 8:26].

The Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of Jesus" [Acts 16:8]. Through the Spirit Jesus continues to speak. The true worshipper will listen to him and trust him before his own heart. The psychologies and philosophies of this present age will never be able to interpret man's heart like the Spirit can. Follow your deceitful heart and reach a dead end. Only the Spirit of Jesus can make a road out of a dead end.

The worshipper whose eyes are open, and whose ears are unblocked will listen to what the Spirit says to their churches [Revelation 2:7].

John the Apostle had touched God in the flesh and had leant against his passionate breast [John 13:23], who had cared for his dying master's most intimate family [John 19:26]; this same John had an open heart. He was found "in the Spirit" on the Lord's Day [Rev. 1:10].

So often this text has been used to support Sunday worship, or Sabbath worship, or the "YOM YAHWEH" [Hebrew for the day of the Lord], that its greatest significance has been overlooked. John was "in the Spirit". He was filled with the Spirit of Jesus in all of his Pentecostal majesty and power.

The book of Acts is often considered to reveal what happens when the Holy Spirit is active powerfully in the church, but John, most intimate friend of Lord Jesus, shows us a picture of God in the apocalypse which no other book ever written has ever achieved.

John's spiritual ear was tuned to the still small voice of his master's Spirit. When he saw the victorious Jesus in all of his majesty it was because he was accustomed to hearing the voice of God through listening prayer. To see Jesus we must learn to hear him first. So often we relate to God in prayer as if he were a vending machine of

celestial goodies, but John's relationship with him demonstrates that he must be an intimate friend to whom we pay the closest attention.

True prayer may be defined as a heart which says: "Thy will be done". The Christian who listens to the God who speaks can say, as Jesus did, "I do only what I see my Father doing" [John 5:19]. John had become so accustomed to hearing the voice of the Spirit of Jesus that he records in Rev. 1:10:

"I was in the Spirit, on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me
a voice like a trumpet saying 'write.....'" RSV

Is there anything that catches you as strange in the words John chooses to use? He says: "I heard a voice". He goes on to comment in 1:12 "Then I turned to see the voice." You don't turn to see a voice, you turn to see a person, but John had become so accustomed to hearing the voice of the Spirit of Jesus that he turns to see the voice, the living word. Perhaps we have a strong indication here of why John spoke of Jesus as the "LOGOS" [word], to him Christ was God's voice made audible in a person.

Next time you hear the voice of the Spirit speaking to you remember that it will be that same voice who will confront you as a living being on the Day of the Lord.

A heart which does not take time to listen to Jesus, but rather takes time to listen to its self will receive a curse, the curse of Jeremiah 17:9,10:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt,
who can understand it?’I the Lord search the mind and try the heart.....”
[RSV].

Today humanism speaking through psychology declares: “Follow your heart.” “Know thyself”. “Follow your heart and you will be led to true self actualisation.” The Lord says to you “Follow me, head my voice, follow not your ways but mine - man’s ways lead to the destination of death, only I can show you the right paths to tread.”

The enemy utilises the “follow your heart” argument, but to do so is sooner or later to find oneself in utter despair. Spiritual warfare with the enemy can only be won if we listen to the God who speaks. When we hear God’s Spirit we will also gain a true insight into ourselves and into God. Only Jesus knows us in every detail [John 2:24], we will never gain such insights on our own. “Trust in the Lord and lean not on your own understanding” [Proverbs 3:5]. God knows you best. Follow him, and you will find real fulfilment. Nothing can ever snatch his sheep out of his hand [John 10:27 - 29].

The Lord is “my Shepherd” [Psalm 23:1]. He is the one who “restores my soul”. It is in his house that “I will dwell” forevermore [Psalm 23]. These are some of the great promises that God’s written “DABHAR” give to us. John 10 and Psalm 23 should always be read together. The Lord promises us that we can never be separated from him, not even when the sinful nature seems so powerful that we are about to be engulfed by its impulses. The Comforter, the Spirit of Truth continually will guide us through the labyrinth of our misery. He will protect us from our sinful wayward hearts. However, even though it is true that God protects us, we do have a responsibility to grow in our relationship with him. Sitting on our laurels is not the way that intimacy of relationship with Jesus develops. God wants far more for us than just a basic security which is used as an excuse not to grow in God. Growing in God only happens when our spiritual ears are tuned into the Holy Spirit frequency.

John stood the test of the years, and received the greatest revelation of God’s plans ever given to man, and all of this because his heart was open to the Lord and none other.

At the centre of all apocalyptic worship is the worshipper who prostrates himself before his God, and listens to the God who speaks, not sometimes, but regularly.

May the Lord weald these words and his promises into our hearts at the deepest levels

of our beings. This I pray in Jesus name Amen.

Mr Response

[1] In what ways have I sought my self valuation from others and myself rather than from Christ?

[2] In what ways have I followed my heart, what it feels is right rather than testing these feelings against what the Bible teaches?

11. Complete Atonement

The doctrine of atonement is the centre of God's plan to restore mankind into a right relationship with him self [2 Corinthians 5]. True worship can only begin when we have accepted Jesus death for us on the cross. The word "atone" is understood to mean "the way in which God makes us at one with himself once more". It pictures how God dealt with the sin problem which has broken that oneness.

At the most basic level Jesus bore every human beings sin on the cross, taking the punishment on to himself, and offering us forgiveness and a new relationship with God.

All we have to do is accept what Jesus did for us. It's that simple - really!

This act of atonement needed to be complete. Another way of saying this is that we need to be completely rescued by God because we are completely helpless. We cannot solve the sin problem. We cannot cure, war death or suffering. Nothing can do it or will ever do it. Scientists may argue that it is within our grasp to find solutions, but if there is one thing that has proven true over the years is that the more that man is able to discover and utilise, he utilises it for destruction resulting in yet more misery.

Scripture talks of "all" having sinned [Rom. 3:23]. We are totally depraved. We are therefore in need of a total and complete solution. All our sins need dealing with, not

just some. Jesus death on the cross has done just that. He died for all sin for all time [1 Peter 3:18].

It is often a Christian failing which leads people to think that we only need God's aid with some things and not others. This may not be conscious, but it is often practically true in the way we live our lives presuming so much, forgetting God in the busy rush of contemporary first world society. After all we're successful aren't we? Fast food, fast cars, reasonable health care, plenty to eat Incredible choice - what more could we need? We may not believe this in theory, but in practice it is easy to rely on things rather than God. Scripture is clear, however, that "without me you can do nothing" says Jesus [John 15:5]. Jesus is definite about this. We need complete and total help. We need a total rescue. Like a victim caught under rubble in a building about to collapse, the only hope of survival is rescue. It needs to be a total rescue. We can't stay in the building we must be liberated from it. As we look around the modern "techno" world we may find this hard to swallow, but in every sense of the word we need Jesus in every part of our lives. We need a complete rescue package. We need to be liberated from the crumbling world around us. It may not seem to be true, but it is! The sin virus has totally taken hold, without the completeness of what Jesus achieved for us on the cross there is no hope of our cure.

The word used to express God's remedy for our viral sin sickness is "SOD'ZO", which

is translated as save. It does not imply that we need a little bit of help sometimes, but it expresses that we need a complete rescue package because we are totally helpless and irrevocably lost.

Paul teaches us that we are “saved by grace through faith” [Eph. 2:8]. “CHARIS”, the Greek term for “grace”, implies a free gift which is given to us without any payment or power of purchase on our part. All we can do is accept it; We can do nothing other than accept that God wants to do everything for us by his power to act for our salvation in Christ. This also includes an infusion of power so that we will be equipped to live a new life following Jesus by faith every day of our lives once we have accepted him [Eph. 2:8 - 10].

The apocalypse states the case for a complete atonement very strongly. In Revelation 1:5,6 we read:

“.....To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever Amen.” RSV

Jesus is said to have “freed us from our sins”. The Greek term for this act is “LUSANTI”, which is in the aorist tense. This tense [found in ancient koine Greek] is

almost always expressive of a completed action in past time. John is saying that Jesus has completely set us free from sin by what he did on the cross. All sin for all time was atoned for. This means that my past, present and future sins are dealt with and forgiven. They have been overcome. There will never be a time when what Jesus did will be insufficient. As long as we remain “in Christ” [Romans 8:1,2] we are totally covered by his blood. We are to view ourselves as no longer under condemnation [Rom. 8:1]. We need never fear again that we will be rejected by God. We are unconditionally forgiven and accepted - forever. The right response will always be to love God for what he has done, and it will become more and more natural for us to be sorry for sin, and to want to live free from it. God never intended for mankind to be forced into repentance and sorrow for sin, he meant man to respond in love.

John further comments that Jesus has made us to be “a kingdom of priests.” [Revelation 1:6]. The verb to “make” is also in the aorist tense. We are to see ourselves as completely accepted into God’s kingdom not just now, but also in the future. Marriage is not for life these days, but God wants us to be his for life and eternity. We may live in a world that is used to discarding relationships, like a bird does to useless feathers but God wants us to see our relationship with him as an eternal commitment more binding than marriage vows “to death do us part”. Eternal life means eternal atonement for all our sins. What brilliant news that is.

Put another way we are now living the life of the future in the present as priests before the throne of God. This is not pictured as a future reality to a select lucky few, but it is part and parcel of every believer's experience right now. Through Jesus the High Priest we all have complete access to the very presence of God in the Most Holy Place right now. The Jewish Day of Atonement, which was built around the most holy place in the temple of God, had as its central truth that judgment was good news for the people of Israel. It was on the Day of Atonement that God pronounced his judgment that the sacrifices thus offered for the people were accepted, and that they were acquitted [Hebrews 10:1-4,14]. We are 100% acquitted, the trial is over we are free to worship in God's presence forever and ever.

Hence we can come with confidence into God's presence [Hebrews 4:15]. For we already have:

“Come to mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.”

[Heb. 12:22 - 24 RSV]

Through the Spirit and sacrifice of Jesus we are accepted as perfect just like the “spirits” of just men already are. Indeed we are among those just persons, because the “just” always live “by faith” [Hebrews 12:23 & Romans 4]. We are enrolled in heaven. We have arrived in God’s presence - completely accepted by him because of our faith in Jesus complete atonement for our sins [Ephesians 2:6].

This marvellous New Testament vision is so powerfully perceived by John that he is able to talk of Christians as having no fear of judgment, for perfect love casts out every “particle” of apprehension [1 John 4:18 JB Philips].

Christians are to see themselves as super glued to Jesus Christ by his Spirit. We can have complete confidence before God. The future is totally secure. At this point we are not to rely on our feelings. We are neither to contemplate our many weaknesses and failures. Any such approach always leads to loss of confidence. Rather let us accept God’s diagnosis and prognosis of our situation. He has eternally covenanted that we will be his. John makes this point forcefully. The matter is clear to him, and he does not leave us in any doubt of how we should respond. He says:

“I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears

us.” [1 John 5:13,14 RSV].

Eternal life is ours in the present continuous sense. Complete atonement means complete eternal life cover. Many life insurance policies have numerous stipulations, or conditions attached. They only last as long as this life lasts. God’s policies are far superior, they last forever.

Yet so often we let the adversary hiss his nasty little accusing voice into our consciences. “Look at yourself he says - how can God love you!” Despair will come if we enter into such a dialogue. It will be despair because we look at our condition, or despair because we try to sort it out by self punishment. Self punishment is the response of a guilty conscience which has not as yet learnt to thank God for our complete atonement. Guilt is good if it leads us to say sorry and then thank God for the forgiveness which is eternally ours. It is unhealthy if it becomes an obsessive self denouncement - where we are continually reliving our sinful act. True Christian guilt is built on the realisation that all our sin is dead and buried. No skeletons in the cupboard please. Leave your sin buried. Leave it dead. Move on into God’s new reality for you. You are a new creature every moment of every day forevermore [2 Corinthians 5:19] [1].

Lest any of us should doubt the great reality of this majestic gospel of completeness

John is given view after view of what our Lord has won for us. Space will not allow an in depth analysis, but here in summary form are some important examples:

[1] Revelation 5:9,10 pictures Jesus as a slaughtered lamb. The Greek term for this expiation is “ESPHAGES” - which is once again in the aorist tense. Expressing that Jesus sacrifice for sin was a completed action in past time. In other words the down payment for our eternal life assurance policy is complete. No payments are needed. We may be 3 years old, 30 or 100 years old. No payments are needed when we take the policy out, this was all done at the cross all we can do is accept the policy.

The term for redeem in our passage is “EGORASAS”. This verb speaks volumes about the concept of redemption. The verb is once again in the tense of completion. In order for us to be bought back from slavery to sin we need a payment which will cover all of the debt that our sin has accrued. If my house burns down I want to be able to rebuild it, and buy some new things. I need a home insurance policy which will cover this eventuality. If it cannot meet the cost then I will be in debt to the builders and suppliers. God’s policy covers all eventualities and losses. Past, present and future sin has been redeemed [In the Greek it means “covered or bought back”]. Debt is no longer a word which will be used to describe our affairs with God. We are not debtors but sons and daughters of God - completely.

[2] Revelation 7:14 is our next passage. Those who stand before the throne of God with palm branches in their hands are pictured as having washed their robes in Jesus blood. “EPLUNAN” - the Greek verb is in the aorist tense once again. The future worshippers have completely been washed and purified in Jesus. There will never be a day in all eternity when the completeness of that washing from sin will not happen. Our only basis for standing secure before God is based on a complete cleaning process affected by Jesus blood.

Future salvation is aorist and complete, because past salvation is complete. This all happened at the cross. The very fact that future salvation is considered to be complete is another clear argument that shows the totality of the atonement.

[3] Revelation 14:6 is a critical passage worthy of much reflection. We spoke in an earlier chapter about the chiasmic structure of the apocalypse. In Revelation 14:6 we reach the centre of the central chiasm at the heart of the whole book. It is here that we find the three famous angels, who have critical messages for sinful man to consider very carefully. The first angel is primarily our focus now. He proclaims the greatest message ever given to man. He shouts out to all the world the good news about God’s “eternal” gospel.

The Greek for “eternal” is “AIONIOS”. It is a commonly used word often found in John’s

literature. It informs us of our eternal security in Jesus. This is the core truth of the apocalyptic declarations of these angels. It all starts here. It all begins with the eternal gospel of eternal security. None need to be lost none need to suffer eternal separation. What good news! This good news burns in the heart of God, it burnt in the heart of John with a passion, and it must burn in our hearts too. We need to make sure that everyone we meet will find something of the grace of God in us.

In the present age we have started to live the life of the future on a secure basis. Let us not use our security as a way of looking smug, acting smug and being in-accessible to a dying world which is crying out for knowledge of that same eternal gospel.

This book is about worship. Imagine what it will be when we finally worship in Spirit and body before God's throne. Imagine what it will be like if all we have done in our lives is think about ourselves being there, smugly, and having done nothing for others. When we stand before that throne we will see God's passionate eye fall on us and smile in love, we made it, how glad he is, but also behind that joyful gaze there will be a great river of grief because we did not let his passion overflow through our lives for the lost.

We will not be able to worship freely with joy before God until we have buried all of our sin in the tomb with Jesus. As we look at the risen victorious Jesus we will then be

secure. He has risen, and so have we! We have left our sin in the tomb, and we now walk in newness of life [Rom. 6:1-4]. But security is not enough. In order to have a depth of worship experience we need to let God's pounding heart of passion for the lost world become our primary goal and primary service in everything we do. God's love is always outward, not inward. In order to experience it and in order to worship God fully we need to turn away from our personal selfish orbits and look outward. To love God and others, then we will have love in ourselves, but it will not stay there it will flow out to God and others in words of thanks and notes of joy and praise. May God aid us to walk into all of this! In Jesus name Amen!

My Response

[1] How do you see yourself? As completely saved? With your eternal destiny being in doubt?

[2] How does it make you feel when you consider yourself eternally saved?

End Notes

[1] Watchman N., "The Normal Christian Life", Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1997. Pages 20 & 21

12. Spiritual Warfare and Worship

The apocalypse gives us a behind the scenes view of what are the real issues at stake in the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. The main issue is “who do you worship?” “Who do you attach the highest value to?” The Godhead is pictured as only worthy of receiving our worship [Rev. 5:9]. People are said to worship the beast in Revelation 13:4 and the devil in reality as he inspires his symbolic creatures’ actions. However, we define the symbolism of the beast, one thing is patently clear from the passage, that this creature is totally opposed to worshipping most high God, and it does all in its power to force men and women to attach value ultimately to the devil.

We do not know very much about the origins of Satan. The book of Isaiah tells us something of them if we allow for some creative imagination as the passage really is focussing on the king of Tyre. In the beginning Satan was named Lucifer [son of the morning]. He was an angel of power being found at that time in the very presence of God. But somehow jealousy of God’s position crept into his heart, resulting in him wanting to be exalted to the same place as God himself [Isaiah 14:12]. His fall meant that Lucifer turned away from God as the centre of his life and he became an ego driven self - obsessed being who has ever since wanted to be worshipped himself. We only have to consider the state of this evil old world to see what self worship and self glory leads to hell on earth; dictators, so called ethnic cleansing and all the rest. We

worship God because in love he has given us freedom to grow, and realise an unlimited journey into the infinite resources of him self. God will hold nothing back from us that is not for our good. For all eternity we will be able to explore his unlimited creative potentiality that is ours as beings made in his image. We will be able to do this without fear or punishment. How different it is in this world.

We will never understand in this life why Lucifer rebelled against God, but we can understand what happens when jealousy and selfishness reign. Human history since sin came into the world by Adam's choice is full of evidence of what happens when we do things our way rather than God's. Wars over religion and wars over territory have always happened. But all wars come down to greed and selfishness and jealousy. War even happened in heaven. Not because God was jealous, but because Satan was, and those who followed him. We do not know what form it took, but we do know that it resulted in him being limited to this world - after having been thrown out of heaven [Rev. 12:7 & 8].

The good news of Revelation 12:8 is that Satan has been totally defeated by Jesus Christ. He knows he cannot win any more ground. But this seems to infuriate him to the point that he zealously torments those who belong to God [Rev. 13:12].

The enemies' principle weapon is deception [Rev. 13:9]. He is the deceiver. He will do

all he can to turn our mental focus from God.

The Christian has three major weapons in his armoury as he battles against the many temptations and challenges Satan brings our way. Because these weapons are so effective to the Christian's armoury the Devil will do all that he can to distract us from consistently using them. We read about them in Revelation 13:11. We conquer the enemy:

[1] By the blood of the Lamb

[2] By the word of our testimony, and

[3] By sacrificing everything that gets in the way of our relationship with God.

Let's go through each of these armaments.

[1] The blood of the Lamb.

We spoke in the last chapter of the absolute essential nature of the completeness of the atonement, in order for us to be able to put God in the highest place in our lives.

In another sense this is what worship really means. It is to give God the ultimate place

of worth in every area of our existence.

If we consider the atonement to be incomplete for us then God is no God at all, to put it bluntly; if he cannot see us through every temptation to sin and if he cannot forgive every iniquity, then he is not all powerful and no God at all. A complete atonement takes as its starting point a God of total power. A God who cannot do all things necessary for our rescue would not inspire confidence in us as we faced the enemy with his 1001 temptations. We would lack the essential clout to win if we could not turn to God for his help in everything.

Yet some Christians do lack complete certainty about their future with God. They see past sins as forgiven, present sins as forgiven, but the future as insecure because they themselves do not see that the atonement has covered all sin past, present and future. This lack of security is based on a miscomprehension of the truth. When the deceiver comes he says in effect "look at how often you sin, look at how weak you are. You are incomplete and God cannot accept you unless you sort yourself out." Whenever we consider ourselves we will find incompleteness and uncertainty. That is a fact! The Devil would like to make our incompleteness into an argument for an incomplete atonement. In effect he says "You are incomplete still even though you call yourself a Christian, therefore, Christ's sacrifice is incomplete for you - it must be, or you wouldn't be so weak." This is deception at work big time. The Devil gets us to look inward

rather than outward toward God. The fact is what Jesus did on the cross won complete forgiveness for us past present and future, not just for the past and present. We need to claim this and be encouraged by it. Christ's victory needs to be our focus not our own weakness and inherent sinfulness. Paul says in Ephesians 2:8 that we are saved. That is completely. Therefore believe this truth and you will win. Contemplate the lie and you will keep on getting filled with despair.

Deception, then, is a battle for our minds. This is psychological warfare at its most dangerous. Those who have swallowed Satan's lies are pictured as having the mark of the Beast, and those who have been liberated by God's truth are presented as having the seal of God. Both are painted as being imprinted on their foreheads [Rev. 13:16 - 14:1]. Paul speaks of this battle for our minds in 2 Corinthians 10:5. He comments:

“We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” RSV

Satan's tactic is to draw our attention away from truth about the completeness of the atonement. If it is only partial in our minds he is pleased - we are set up for failure. He may try to make us believe that:

[A] We have to earn God's forgiveness once we have started on the road of

grace. This is subtle. Christians may not consciously accept this to be so, but they may soon start to think that God's view of them is based on how much time they spend reading their Bibles, or praying or doing church work. It is very easy to be moved away from saved by grace through faith to something which looks a lot more like having to earn a continued right relationship with God. If you find yourself in this sort of trap then I would suggest reading a really good book on grace, such as David Seamands' book called "Healing Grace".

[B] Satan may try to discourage us with the thought that we cannot be accepted for who we are warts and all. Somehow in this view God is always somewhere ahead of us, waiting for us to be perfect before he can fully embrace us. Perfectionism is that false system of thought which says God cannot accept any one who is less than perfect. It says we can overcome all sin now, and that God cannot accept weak people who don't. This flies in the face of the assertion of Romans 5:8 which lays this dogma to rest, by saying that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Yes that is it. We will always be weak until we are finally rescued from this sin marred world. God knows that and accepts us warts and all. In fact such a God inspires us to love him, trust him more and grow and change into better people.

I know of a story of a pastor who became free from continuous guilt and failure. He

was in bondage to his continuous failure to please God. He did not emotionally accept that Christ's death for his sin had covered all of his life past present and future. Then he came to understand things differently when he realised that by putting his faith in Jesus he had in effect taken the whole package of Jesus death for his sins. He read Colossians 3:2,3:

“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

He realised that he had “died” with Christ completely when he had put his faith in that complete death for his sins. He realised that past present and future sins were forgiven. He was liberated from needing to focus on his failures any more. From then on he was a new man with a new vision of himself. He stopped letting the enemy make him focus on his weakness, and instead he looked at the completeness of his victory in Christ. His sin was dead and buried and he came to see himself as a completely new resurrected being [2 Corinthians 5:1-10].

This man became free because he realised that the death of Jesus for his sin had been a complete event. When he accepted [Jesus had] already achieved a complete victory for him he no longer found it necessary to keep on struggling. In a very real sense he was emancipated from deception!

[2] The word of our testimony

Do you have a testimony? A testimony is an experience of God's activity in our lives which enables us to say with confidence "God has helped me - I know he is able to aid me in my present trouble" because of my experience of him in the past. We may explore this further by making the following observations:

[A] That God is with us in every life situation even though at times we may have to take it on faith that he is because it is not evident to our senses.

[B] That he never leaves us to wallow in our troubles although he may find it necessary to teach us important lessons by being silent at times.

[C] God conquers our present dilemmas through what Jesus is doing in our lives right now; to conquer the enemy. We may at times feel alone, but it is through remembering how God has helped us in the past that we come to be able to trust that he will do everything necessary in the present to help us move forward in faith in him

A living testimony is a state of mind. It is based on a positive Christian world view

which is founded on a personal encounter with a God who really does have all the answers. It is in this encounter that we grow and mature. It is also the means by which we can remain confident when we are under pressure. There is no situation which God cannot pull us through - although I must say at times he has had to do it for me whilst I kick and scream. I must say I have always come to see even hard experiences as good in the long run.

We will always stand firm if we remember three important rules:

[A] Remember how God led you in the past

[B] Trust that where you are and what you are going through at the moment is where God wants you to be

[C] Look out for his guidance so that you can identify the next step in his plan for your life.

[3] Sacrifice of everything that gets in the way of God in your life.

This will sound very uncompromising, but it is vital. If we cling on to things which are holding us back from obeying God then we will not progress in the Christian life.

Paul had learnt the lesson of how to be content in every circumstance that life could muster up against him [Philippians 4:11]. This must be a fundamental part of the maturing process in our walk with God as well. Those spoken of in Revelation do not even love their lives more than Christ [Revelation 12:11]. This does not do away with our responsibility to live life to the full, but it does give us a correct perspective of what matters most. Those who overcome temptation realise that there is no one who matters more than God the author of creation, and Jesus the master of salvation.

Peter's experience must become ours. When all were leaving Jesus during a critical part of his ministry he asked the apostles if they too would desert him. Peter said: "Where else can we go you have the words of eternal life" [John 6:68]. It is when we come to see that no one else can better God that we will give everything up to follow him.

We may be tempted to value promotion at work more than spending the time we need to with God in devotion and listening prayer. We may be challenged to compromise our Christian values in order to close a deal through some sort of dishonesty. We may face many things which confront our ethical duty, but the question will always be: "Who do I value the most?" Apocalyptic worship is based on our duty to give God the highest place of value in everything.

Of course in all of this we are talking about the development of a Christ-like character.

It is interesting that the mark given by the beast, to those who are said to belong to him, is described in the Greek as a "CHARAGMA".

This word has come into English usage as the word character. The Greek is descriptive of a mark which delineates the nature or character of a person. Those who follow the beast give Satan the highest place even if they do not know it. What is characteristic of the Father of lies [John 8:44] becomes characteristic of those who bear his image.

Primarily it is a life based on selfishness. The primary question is mostly: "What can I get out of this situation?"

Revelation indicates that a natural polarity exists between those marked by the beast's character and those sealed with the new nature which Christ has implanted in them [Colossians 3:10]. It is interesting that when Paul speaks of Christians as having "put on" the new nature he uses the aorist tense. We have put on a new nature once for all. God has made us into new people. It is complete in the sense that we will always have an inward urge to follow God and develop his character of unselfish love; even if it is often in the context of struggle and temptation.

Revelation 14:1 indicates that we have the Father's name written upon us, or deeply

encoded into the depths of our new nature. A name in Scripture is expressive of character as well. Abram becomes Abraham once God has given him the promise that he will be the Father of many who will share a faith like his in God [Genesis 18]. His new name means "Father of many". God gives him this new name, and this new name means that Abraham starts to live a new sort of life. He now sees himself as having a God-given purpose. His life gains meaning and direction. It is God who gives him his new name, not he himself. All Christians may be said to have a new name at conversion. This new name is "Christian". It means we eternally belong to Christ.

Jesus name has the meaning: "Yahweh Saves". To have Jesus name is to have accepted Jesus as my personal Saviour. It is to choose to follow the way of God's government of unselfish love in all of my life dealings whatever the cost.

Christians are said to be sealed with God's Magna Carta impression [Revelation 7 & 14]. Indeed Jesus is at the heart of it. In John 6:27 he speaks of himself as being the very seal of God in person. There is only one way to win in spiritual warfare - it is to accept the one who has already beaten the enemy. The gospel is not an idea, but it is a person - Jesus. He is the only one who can save us [Act 4:12]. Ideas cannot.

So many Christians wrestle with God on an ideas level and Satan dupes them into doing this to the exclusion of meeting the person who the ideas all point to. Chance

can only happen when we meet Jesus the living one. Ideas can be another subtle way of keeping God in a limited set of seemingly well defined theological boxes; boxes like I don't believe in all of this speaking in tongues business - and the Bible says [to defend our position]. Although we must be biblical in everything, there is a sort of biblical ethos which is based on a theological model which only takes account of one part of the biblical picture to the neglect of other parts.

Meeting the person of Jesus through his Holy Spirit beats all systematic theology - although systematisation can help us to get many things right. The Bible is a relational document, not a theological document. It challenges us to know God, not about him on some sort of theoretical plain. To have one authentic word of God spoken personally to me means more than all the years I've spent studying my Bible; and Why? Because I'm hearing from God personally! He is speaking meaning into my situation! Of course we should read scripture as if it were God speaking to us, and then much of what I have said about a theoretical Christianity is obsolete, but I am concerned with the dangers of confining God to the pages of theology books here, not about using the bible as a relational document through which we meet with God. To hear God speak through scripture is marvellous and part and parcel of the relational rational of God in giving us his word; but to use scripture as a text book is quite different and tremendously dangerous.

Moreover, in Ephesians 1:14 and 15 Paul informed the church of Ephesus that it is the Holy Spirit who had sealed them. To have the Spirit of Jesus come and live in us is to be filled with a person not an impersonal force or idea. It is the key to a living relationship with God. Without the Holy Spirit's complete aid we will fall every time we are tempted. It is through him that we have the strength to withstand the enemy.

Paul goes on to speak of God's unlimited power which is in all those who believe through the Spirit [Ephesians 1]. It is not some future promise, but a present reality. God hasn't saved up all the goodies for when we reach heaven, he has made every resource of his infinite power available to us now so that we may overcome every temptation and live a fully abundant life with him right now [John 10:10]!

That is why the Holy Spirit living in us is the guarantee that we will make it to heaven [Ephesians 1:13,14]. In the ancient world if somebody made a down payment on some goods it was unthinkable for the person to break his word concerning the purchase. Now-a-days we more easily back out of deals, but in the ancient world to give your word, and put your money down as well was as good as having made the complete purchase.

If this was true of sinful men, Paul more or less says it is super true of God who never breaks faith and never lets people down!

He will never let us go. The victory is secure. The victor is within. All the fullness of God's resources can come to dwell in us by his Spirit. Through them we can never be snatched from that almighty hand from this day and forevermore - amen.

My Response

[1] In what ways are you facing temptation at the moment?

[2] What methods are you using to fight it/them?

[3] What has this chapter taught you about the ways you can now fight your temptations?