

**Pathway
Church**



Foundations

12 Studies for Christian Living



If you have any questions or
would like more information

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Caring - Committed - Connected

INTRODUCTION AND FOREWORD

This study course is primarily designed for new believers, or those wishing to freshen up on their foundational doctrine. The development of this series follows a winding track covering several decades. It began with a need to have some form of written material for new believers at a time when very little material, which did justice to certain important topics such as Water Baptism and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, was available.

In one form or another we have now used this material in churches for over 35 years, and it has proven invaluable for both new believers and those who desire a more concrete, Word-based foundation for their faith. It is also particularly useful for those who come from other churches and perhaps somehow missed the basics along the way, which is not as uncommon as it should be.

This is the something like the fifth edition of this particular format. It has been updated and revised totally in 2024 for use at **Pathway Church**, and divided into twelve studies that can be done one-on-one or in a small group. Ideally the material should encourage discussion and questions, which is an ideal way to learn, but reading through them will also benefit those who need to know the information they contain.

I would like to reiterate, with the writer of Ecclesiastes (Eccl 1:9-10), that *"there is nothing new under the sun"*. I have gathered material and ideas over four decades of study, and added to and updated my initial notes to such an extent that many of the sources are no longer known to me. I have given credit where I am able, but alas, I am mostly undone in this regard, never imagining at the beginning that this series of studies be would the end result.

Finally, let me say a hearty "thank you" to those who have helped me put this series together, reading, re-reading and editing along the way. You know who you are. Thank you to all for your able help and assistance. I appreciate it more than you know.

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Lesson

1

SALVATION - THE FIRST STEP

What it means for You

Welcome to the family of God. Now that you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, the Bible tells us that you are a new person in Christ:

“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor 5:17)

This means that you are no longer the same person *inside* that you used to be before becoming a Christian. Jesus said that to enter into a relationship with God we must be ‘born again’ by the Spirit of God:

“Jesus ... said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’” (John 3:3. See also 1 Pet 1:23)

This ‘born again’ experience is spiritual, and comes as a direct result of confessing Jesus as Lord, and believing in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead:

“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved” (Rom 10:9)

‘Born again’ and ‘saved’ mean much the same thing. Salvation can come by no other means. No matter what else you may hear, or what people may think, Jesus is the only way by which men can be saved:

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me’” (John 14:6)

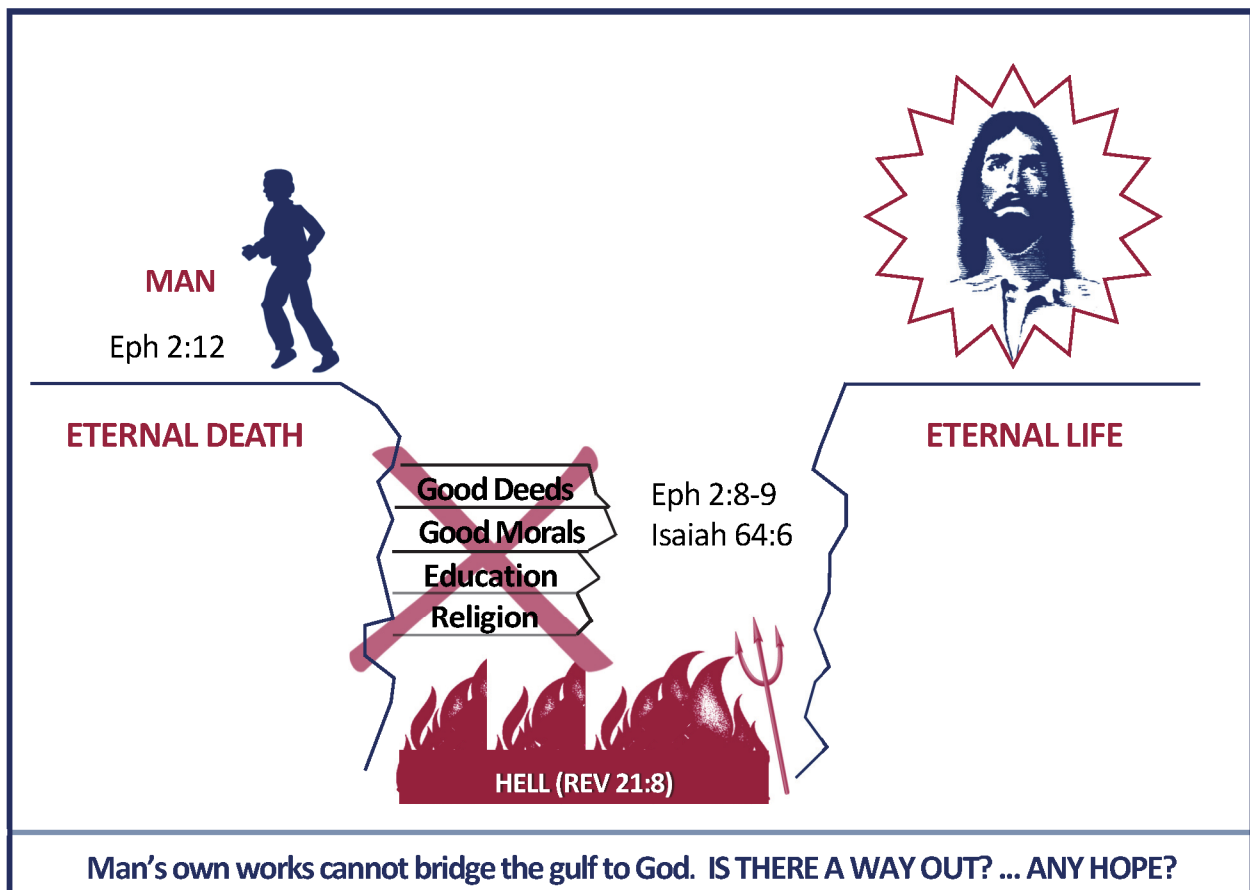
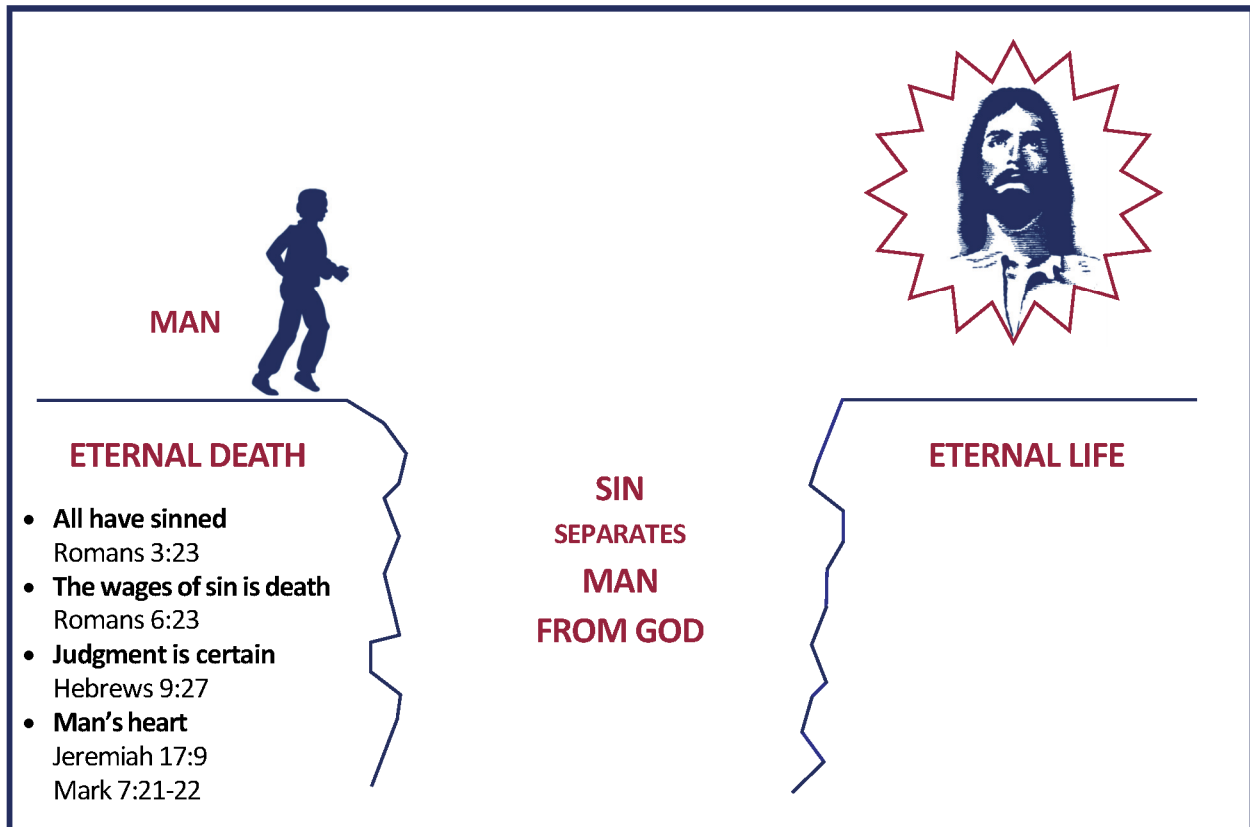
Jesus is God’s Son and is Himself God (John 1:1-5,14). He never changes.

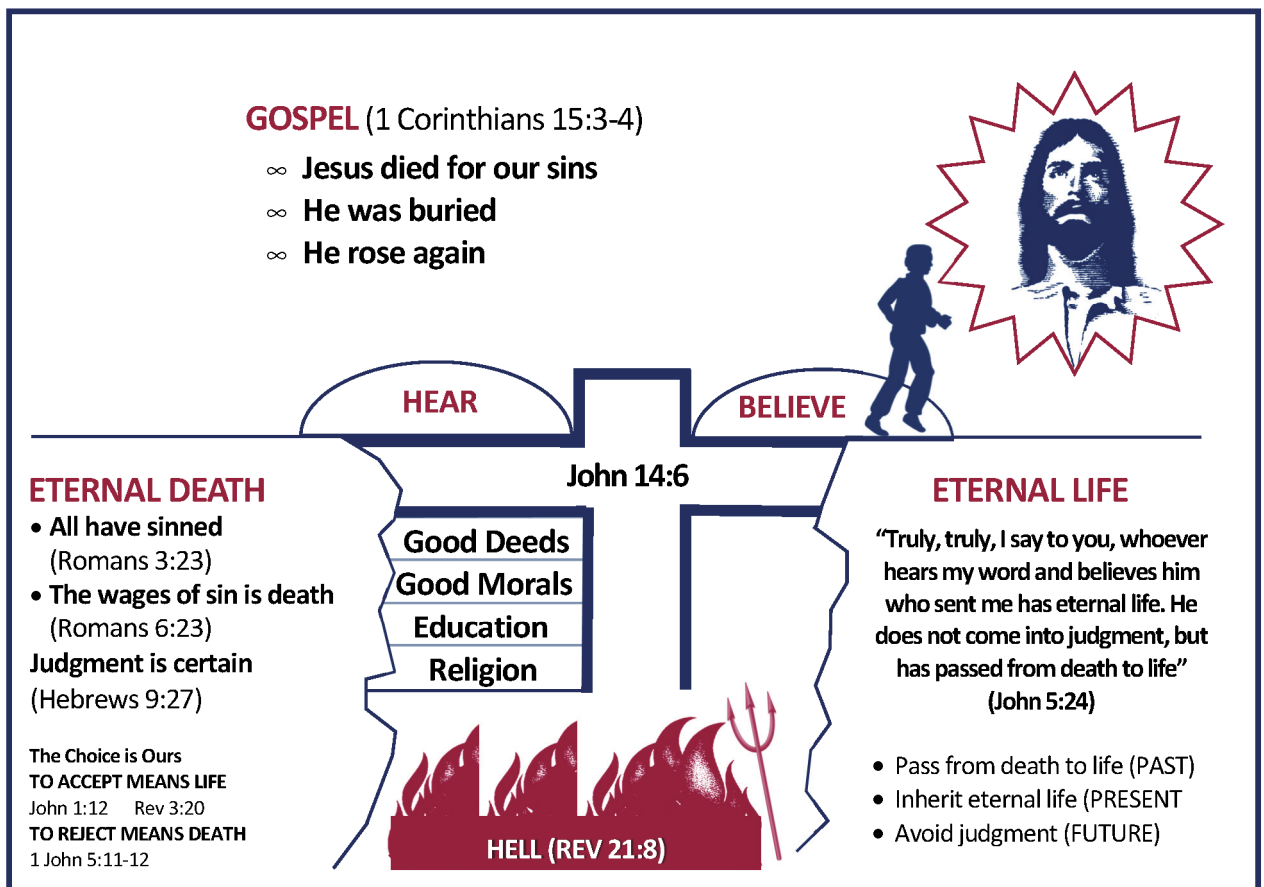
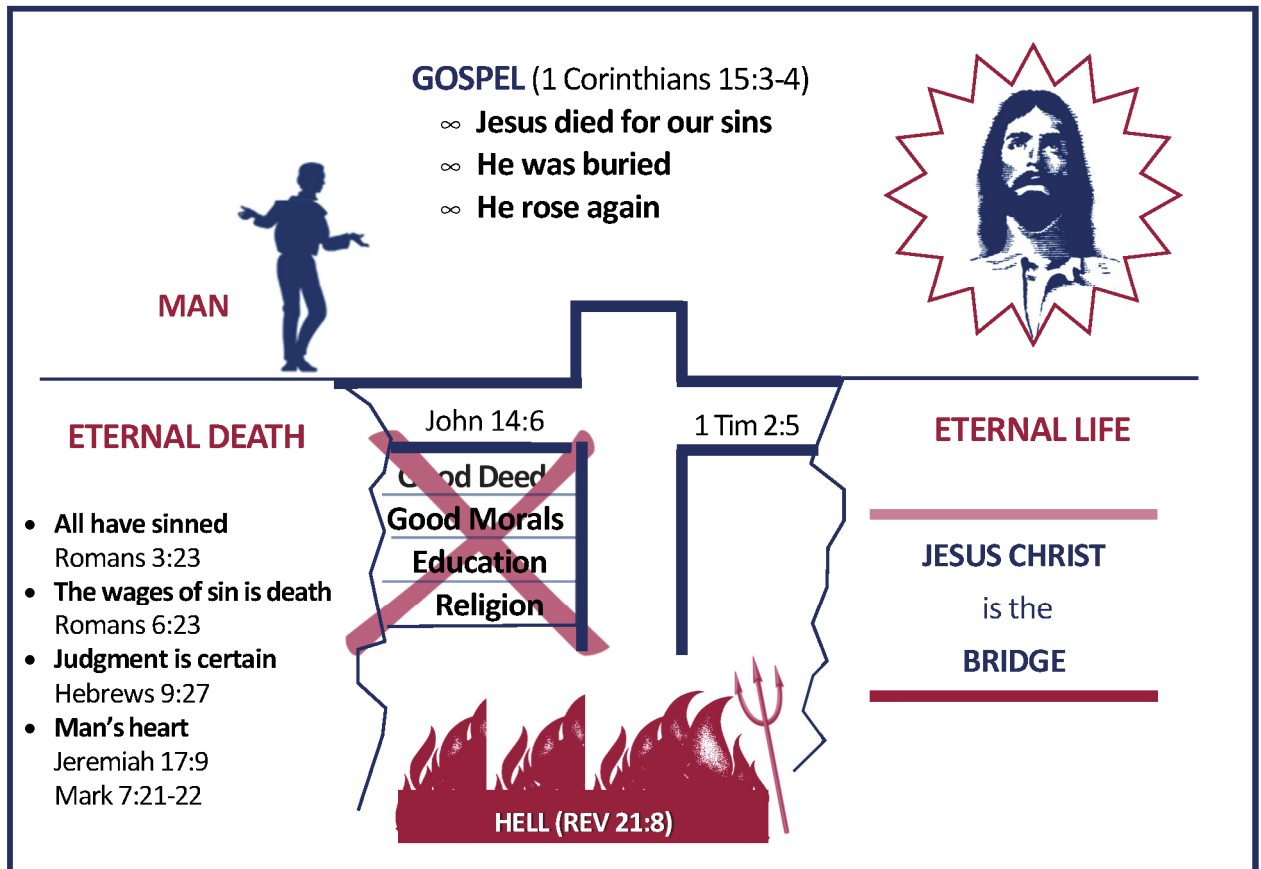
“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever” (Heb 13:8)

Simply ‘believing’ in God won’t get you to heaven, or even help you much in this life. Almost everyone believes in God - it’s foolish not to. Psalm 14:1 declares, ***“A fool says in his heart there is no God”***. Even demons ‘believe’, and tremble (James 2:19). Their ‘belief’, however, doesn’t do them any good! True faith in God means commitment. Commitment to follow Him and to be obedient to His Word (the Bible). True faith also leads to a desire to fellowship with other Christians in a good church.

As a new ‘born again’ believer, your life will never be the same again. You are now a ***‘new creature in Christ’*** (2 Cor 5:17). The Bible even calls you a ***‘babe in Christ’*** (1 Peter 2:1-5). As a spiritual babe you will need food, shelter and protection (security) until such time as you are able to provide these spiritual necessities for yourself. In the meantime you must rely on older and wiser Christians to guide and instruct you (Rom 15:14). In order to learn and grow correctly in the glorious and exciting new life you have received it is important to be in relationship with other Christians, learning and growing in your faith daily.

A New Beginning





We are all part of the 'Body of Christ' (1 Cor 12:12-31), His Church, and we need each other if we find our place and purpose as believers in Christ, especially as we grow to maturity in the things of the Spirit.

There is much to learn and quite a journey ahead for any new believer. The Bible talks about maintaining a humble and teachable heart:

"You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (1 Pet 5:5-6)

An Interesting Statistic

In the Western countries such as Australia around 93% of people who make a decision for Christ never follow it through with any real commitment, and only around 30% of those who do actually persist in that commitment. These are troubling statistics. In the Third World, places like China, South America, Africa and Asia have a much higher retention rate and a much deeper commitment rate than Western churches in general. In the West we seem to be able to get people to make a form of commitment, but are not as successful when it comes to helping people stay the course.

The Family of God

You are now a part of the great family of God, with many brothers and sisters to get to know and fellowship with (Eph 3:14-19). You will make many new friends and find your lifestyle gradually altering to reflect your new-found status as a 'child of the living God'. Becoming an active part of a good 'Church Family' by becoming involved in a good local church is essential so that God can begin to show you some of the great things He has in store for you personally. He will teach you about life, as He wants you to live it, and about being a successful Christian in today's challenging world.

An Ongoing Experience

Being a 'born again' believer is both exciting and challenging - full of adventure and new experiences. As our relationship with Jesus develops, we discover that there is no real alternative to walking with the Lord (Gal 5:16-18). Once we taste of the goodness of God for ourselves, with hearts that genuinely search for truth, we find that we gradually lose the taste for things we have been involved with, but which are not edifying or helpful to us as Christians (Eph 4:17-25).

With the Holy Spirit resident within our heart, speaking daily to our conscience, we quickly learn the difference between right and wrong in God's Kingdom (1 Peter 3:15-17). As we study His Word, we also begin to understand that God wants only the best for us. He designed us to operate in peace and security by doing things His way. As we learn to trust the truth of His Word for our lives, we will see that being obedient to the prompting of the Holy Spirit is the only wise choice.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17)

Some Helpful Tips

Here are some helpful tips for the early stages of your new Christian walk, or as a reminder if you've been on the road a while. As you grow you'll learn how to pray, read and study your Bible, share your faith with others, and which church fellowship to become an active part of. Meanwhile, here are some things which you should begin to incorporate into your daily living, and practise regularly, in order to maintain a quality relationship with the Lord:

1. Talk to the Lord every day, and not just at a specific time, but whenever opportunity allows for it. Put aside some time just for prayer each morning or evening, remembering you have entered into a relationship with Jesus and you need to get to know Him better. Allow Him to speak to you also. This means fellowship with God through prayer, and sharing your heart with Him often.
2. Put aside time each day to read your Bible. Get a translation you find easy to read (Good News Bible, New Living Translation, New American Standard or English Standard Version are all excellent, as are the many study Bibles and available today for all ages). Studying God's Word is like having a spiritual meal. It provides food and nourishment for your spirit. You will grow as a Christian as your knowledge of His Word expands. To begin with, read the Gospel of John, and the Book of Acts. By the time you have finished these you will be able to ask someone what is best to read next, or you will have found out for yourself.
3. Don't be afraid to share your new-found faith with others. It is vitally important, and you will find out which of your friends are supportive and responsive to God and which are not. We are not ashamed of the Gospel (Rom 1:16). He died so that we might live. In sharing what we have received with others we might see them inherit eternal life also.
4. Find a church which is growing and has good teaching you can relate to and understand, a friendly place you are comfortable inviting your friends to. Contemporary worship music is also helpful. Become part of the activities there and get involved. God wants you to find a spiritual home, so when you find a good one, stick to it. God will continue to lead and guide you as you grow strong in Him.

This is the most exciting journey of your life. As you obey the Lord, He will bless and prosper you in all your ways (Joshua 1:6-9). There is no life more fulfilling than one which has been dedicated to learning and following after the things of God. You will soon find, as you do this series of studies, that it is an exciting and challenging journey of discovery which will take you as far as you choose to go in learning and knowing about God, His Word, His Church, and where you fit in the grand design of things - the design that God intended you to be an active, constructive and integral part of.

Now turn to the interesting special article over the page entitled:

"SALVATION — AN ONGOING WORK OF FAITH"

Special Article Of Interest

SALVATION — An Ongoing Work

The word '*salvation*' comes from the Greek word '*sozo*' ('*save*') or '*soteria*', which means deliverance, preservation, salvation, or to be made whole. It refers specifically to our being set free from the power of sin in our lives, along with sin's ultimate penalty, and results in what John 3 describes as the 'born again' experience.

We often hear words mentioned which we give little thought to, but which have profound meaning in the New Testament. Words such as:

- '**CONSECRATION**' meaning to perfect, or to dedicate to perfection
- '**SANCTIFICATION**' meaning separated to God, or for God's purposes

Salvation is not a once off, never to be repeated, total and complete experience that enables the fortunate recipient to have all the answers in one go, requiring no further work, personal commitment or development on the part of the individual. This lie is propagated by Satan, and sometimes our own wishful thinking. It causes many unsuspecting and naive Christians to encounter tremendous difficulties in their walk with the Lord.

By its very nature salvation is not a passive experience. It is active, progressive, alive and vibrant. It is the essence of life itself and must not be abused or rendered useless by a cynical disregard for its importance and purpose in a person's life.

SALVATION IS ONGOING WORK OF FAITH

The reason we cover this topic here is that some churches teach that once saved we are more or less always saved, no matter if we continue to behave in a ungodly manner, showing little or no fruit of salvation, or walk in constant disobedience and sin. This thinking is unbiblical and erroneous. Concepts such as repentance, obedience, accountability and consequences of ongoing and repeated sinful behaviour are often downplayed in light of His Grace — which is defined generally as the unmerited favour of God.

Accountability

In today's society, great emphasis is placed on circumstances, upbringing and background (environment or culture) when assessing a person's character development. This results in people being held less responsible for their actions than they otherwise should be, with a tendency to blame society and repressive religion (often the moral standards encouraged by Christianity) as the source of all their problems. The next logical (or illogical?) step is for people to attempt to eliminate God from the picture completely! The Bible deals much with the issue of accountability, and it is from this source we tackle this subject.

Ezek 18:23-31 God was very hard on the righteous man who turned his back on what he knew to be the truth, then wantonly and wilfully committed sin.

Luke 12:47,48 Jesus highlights this same principle - of those to whom much is given, much will be required.

Consequences of continual disobedience

- John 9:39-41** Jesus said those who claim to see and know the truth are held accountable for that which is revealed to them.
- James 4:17** When a person knows the difference between right and wrong, yet chooses the latter, they have sinned, and will be held accountable for it.
- Matt 12:31-37** We are accountable - by our words we will be justified, and by our words we will be condemned.
- 1 John 5:16,17** There is sin which is 'mortal', and we are not to pray for that. An interesting comment from the Apostle John.

The Bible has a lot to say about accountability, and the consequences of our continual refusal to obey the prompting of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of our consciences.

- Eph 2:8** Always remember that it is the grace (undeserved favour) of God, and not anything we have done or could do, that has earned us this great salvation.
- 1 Cor 6:19,20** We are not our own, we were bought with a price.
- Heb 2:3** How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?
- Num 15:27-31** He who sins with a 'high hand' shall be 'utterly cut off'.
- 2 Tim 2:3-7** An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.
- 2 Peter 2:20-22** It is better not to be saved than to backslide!
- Heb 10:26-31** If we sin deliberately after receiving a knowledge of the truth, the consequences are severe.
- Heb 4:6,11-13** There are those who will receive the 'Good News' but fail to enter into God's rest because of disobedience.
- Heb 5:7-14** Even Jesus, as a man, had to undergo times of testing and trial, learning obedience through what he suffered.
- Heb 6:4-8** It is impossible to restore again to repentance ...

One of the great blessings Christians receive, through the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, is the ability to come into the presence of God and intimately communicate with Him as our Heavenly Father (1 Timothy 1:19; 3:9), our conscience no longer condemning us as we fellowship with Him:

"How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"
(Heb 9:14. See also Heb 10:22)

This doesn't mean that God wants to 'expel us from heaven' for being naughty children. Rather, it is His will that all people should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. It's just that God hates sin, and must protect the rest of the sheep in his fold from those who **persist** in delusion, and the deception that they can do what they want and get away with it, because God will always find a way to forgive them!

This concept is simply not supported by Scripture!

If, as Christians, we persistently disobey God, and thereby grieve the Holy Spirit, we back God into a corner. We need to come into His presence pure and undefiled. Fortunately, the arm of God is not short - He is gentle and patient. But why press Him when we have a choice?

God's love and mercy will always reign supreme throughout, but there are times when God's patience is tested to the limit, and there is no longer any place for mercy, only judgment. In Revelation 3 Jesus said to the church at Laodicea that, because they were neither hot nor cold, he would *"spew them out of his mouth"*. Hardly the Words of a God who would allow sin to pile upon more sin; or would still continue to forgive anyone who persistently refused to change their ways!

In Matthew we find the following sobering passage from Jesus Himself:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matt 7:21-23)

Clearly He is speaking about people who believe, and who go so far as to be involved with other believers to the extent that they are able to prophesy, which is essentially a public proclamation (not something usually done in private), cast out demons and perform miracles. Yet they don't make it in the final judgement! Why is this? Because they were lawless, unaccountable, a law unto themselves, not submitted to legitimate spiritual authority - ***'mini-gods in the house of rebellion'!***

They were probably nice people, believed themselves to be right (and probably everyone who disagreed with them to be wrong), and practiced their own form of religious zeal. But they were deluded and deceived, and ultimately made a fatal error when it came to what God thought about what they were doing. What a tragedy to go through life and find out we were on the wrong path all along!

We need to prayerfully consider these Bible passages. Not to use as excuses for giving up, nor as ammunition against those considered close to the brink, for the Bible says to gently lead our brothers back to the path of righteousness, taking care not to fall prey to sin ourselves in the process. Rather we are to take the content of these Scriptures as sober warnings.

We are no longer our own, but have been bought with a price. Salvation has nothing to do with our being worthy of it, but rather it is a free gift from God, lest any man should boast. It is precious, and cost God the best that he had - His only Son, Jesus.

Take strength from Hebrews 10:32-36. We have need of endurance in order to receive what God has promised.

Lesson

2

Baptism In Water

WATER BAPTISM

Now you have committed your life to Jesus Christ, you should be eager to make it known to others. Such acknowledgment is always a sure sign of the sincerity of your decision:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16)

Water baptism is one divinely appointed way by which you may openly declare your commitment to the risen Saviour - by making a public declaration of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 6:1-11). In the early church, it was considered essential to repent, be water baptised for the forgiveness of sins, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit:

“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let each of you be baptised 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)

Baptism comes from the Greek word *‘baptiso’* and was in fairly regular usage when the Gospels were written. The word refers to something that has been *completely immersed* and changed by that immersion.

A good example of this is the dyeing of cloth. When being dyed, cloth is completely immersed and its colour is permanently changed. The Greeks would say that the cloth was *‘baptised’* in the dye. So it is with believers.

In New Testament times, when a Gentile became a Jew, apart from male circumcision, which was a more private affair, he signified his transfer of allegiance to the God of Israel by submitting himself publicly to water baptism. Therefore it was understandable that when Jews or Gentiles became Christians they should want to submit themselves to the waters of baptism.

Identification

There are some important truths concerning water baptism which are explained in part in Romans 6:3-14. It becomes clear from this Bible passage that one of the primary purposes of water baptism is identification with Jesus through his death, burial and resurrection.

The crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus broke the power of sin and death. As we identify with this fact in baptism we recognise that sin’s power is no longer at work within us.

“And in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Col 2:10-12)

Water baptism is an act which depicts the burying of our old way of life and our rising to a new life in Christ. It is actually “*circumcision made without hands*” (Col 2:10-12), pointing backwards to the work of God and forwards to the life of faith. It provides an opportunity for a new believer to make a public statement that a deep inner change has taken place. A real impartation of faith and understanding from God for the person being baptised can be expected as they are ministered to through the laying on of hands after rising out of the water.

Acts 8:38,39; Acts 16:33,34; Acts 19:5,6

Obedience

Jesus was not baptised as an outward evidence of repentance, for He had no sin to repent of. He was baptised that He might fulfil (or complete) all righteousness. He deliberately set the example and pattern for baptism, and all Christian believers are expected to follow him (Matt 3:11-17).

Jesus was always perfectly righteous. His righteousness was an inward condition of heart, which he always possessed. In allowing Himself to be baptised, Jesus “fulfilled all righteousness” by an act of outward obedience to the will of His heavenly Father. After doing so, He entered into His active life of ministry by which He ultimately fulfilled the plan of God.

Baptism is both a sign and a seal of a spiritual transaction (Rom 4:11). In the Old Testament this was by circumcision, but in the New Testament it is through water baptism.

When man rebelled against God, he chose to live according to his own strength and power. This attitude is called ‘*the flesh*’ by Paul in his epistles.

Separation

In the Old Testament men, in order to enter into God’s covenant, had to be circumcised. The act of circumcision typified a putting away of the attitudes of the flesh; and was prophetic of the work of separation God was to do in our lives in separating fleshly attitudes from spiritual ones.

The circumcision of the New Testament, as previously stated, is found in our obedience to God in water baptism:

Rom 2:28,29; 1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6 & 6:15

It is important to note, however, that outward signs are not enough in themselves. While the very act of baptism *can* bring an impartation of life, it does not change our heart. It is our obedience and continuing faith in what God has done, and will do, that gives this act real meaning.

In the New Testament people were invariably baptised the same day, or soon after, that they believed as seen in:

Acts 2:41; 8:12,37,38; 16:33; 18:8; 19:4,5

Examples from Scripture of how believers were baptised by immersion in water can be found in:

Acts 2:41; 8:12,13,38; 9:18; 10:47,48; 16:15,33; 18:8; 19:5

Ministering Water Baptism

Ministering water baptism is a relatively simple process. It can be administered in a river, in the ocean, a swimming pool or even a bath (if nothing else is available). The truly important aspect is the faith and heart attitude of the person being baptised.

If you've not yet been baptised let this study be an encouragement to you. If you have let it remind you that what has taken place has significance for you as a believer. Water baptism is not an **option** - it is a **command**!

We have learned about **identification**, **obedience** and **separation** from the world. These are important truths which must be adhered to throughout our walk if we are to see and experience God's best, and fulfil His divine purpose for our lives.

Three Good Reasons

We are water-baptised as believers for three very good reasons:

1. Jesus was baptised by John as our example: **(Matt 3:13-17)**
2. Jesus commanded we be baptised and baptise others also: **(1 Pet 3:21,22; Matt 28:18-20)**
3. It was the practice of the disciples and the early church: **(Acts 2:37,38; 10:48)**

The only qualification required to follow our Lord Jesus through the waters of baptism, is that you fully repent (Acts 2:38), having believed and been convicted that this step is of God and for you personally (Mark 16:16). The Bible states in Acts 2:41, *"they that gladly received his (Peter's) word were baptised and there were added about three thousand souls that day."*

"And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptised 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)

"And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptised shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned"" (Mark 16:15-16)

Christening

If you were christened as a baby, we encourage you to be baptised again as an adult believer, something you were not capable of being as an infant. Water baptism is for those who have repented of their sins, believed on the Lord Jesus, and been saved. Paul even commanded those who had been baptised under the baptism of John to be re-baptised (Acts 19:1-5).

Some things you should know

Jesus Himself Was Baptised In Water

Although Jesus had no need to repent of sin, He was nevertheless baptised in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. He set an example for us to follow.

"And it came about in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and was baptised by John in the Jordan" (Mark 1:9)

Jesus Commanded His Disciples To Baptise People

Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all the world, preach the gospel, baptising people in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that He commanded them to do.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20)

The Early Believers Were Told . . . To Be Baptised

After Jesus had ascended to the Father, and the Holy Spirit had come down on the day of Pentecost, many people were drawn into the kingdom by the power of God and the witness of Jesus' disciples. Peter told them when they asked what they must do to be saved that they were to: "repent, be **water baptised**, and then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

The Disciples Practised Water Baptism

Throughout the book of Acts we see the disciples witnessing in the name of Jesus and under the anointing power of the Holy Spirit. Everywhere they went they practised water baptism and commanded all new believers to follow Jesus' example for the forgiveness of sin (Acts 8:12; Acts 10:47,48)

The Apostle Paul Was Water Baptised

As soon as Paul realised He had been persecuting the Church of God he repented of his sin, was water baptised, and received the infilling 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 9:18).

Qualifications for Baptism

There are two simple qualifications for a person to be water baptised:

- REPENTANCE AND FAITH -

REPENTANCE refers to an inward change necessary for baptism. Baptism is an outward act which represents and inward work of the Spirit. Without true repentance baptism is a hollow and offensive to God (Matthew 3:7,8).

REPENTANCE happens when a person, sorry for their sins and disagreements with God, completely changes within, stops making excuses, turns from their sins and becomes totally obedient to God. This is also often referred to as being 'converted', 'born again', or 'saved'.

FAITH is necessary for baptism because the process is carried out in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. If a person does not have faith in Jesus then, again, their baptism is a meaningless ritual.

Children and Infant Baptism

As repentance and faith are necessary requirements for water baptism, it is not practical to baptise infants in the biblical sense. Children, who have not yet faced life issues requiring a choice for or against God; do not understand enough to hold faith in Jesus in their own right.

However, we should, and do, dedicate our children to God. In the baby dedication service we commit parents to bringing their children up in the "discipline and instruction of the Lord". Those churches who practice infant baptism are doing much the same thing, but it isn't believers' baptism, having more to do with church traditions, and should not be considered the same thing by Bible-believing Christians.

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4)

Lesson

3

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Day of Pentecost

A distinct experience

“And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4)

The Bible speaks clearly of a distinct spiritual experience called the *‘Baptism in the Holy Spirit’*. This experience is separate to, and follows on from, conversion. John the Baptist declared to the crowds:

“I baptise you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire”

See also Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:26; Acts 1:5 & 11:16

When Jesus was thirty years of age, he stood in the waters of the Jordan River being baptised by John. The Spirit of God descended upon him like a dove, filling him mightily and empowering him for supernatural ministry:

“Now it came about when all the people were baptised, that Jesus also was baptised, and while He was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, ‘Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased ...’” (Luke 3:21-23)

“And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led about by the Spirit in the wilderness” (Luke 4:1)

“And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit; and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district” (Luke 4:14)

Jesus’ experience should be duplicated in the lives of all who believe in Him. He encouraged each one of us to ask the Father for the Holy Spirit:

“Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” (Luke 11:11-13)

The Holy Spirit is received by the believer as an abiding, personal presence. Jesus always spoke of the Holy Spirit as a **PERSON**, never a mere *‘influence’*. He is an equal member of the Godhead, and to be worshipped, honoured and respected as such (John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:8,13-15).

Jesus taught that those who were baptised in the Holy Spirit would enjoy greater privileges and blessing than even the disciples (John 16:7; 7:38-39).

Manifestations of the Holy Spirit

Jesus needed the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to firstly commence, then maintain, and finally complete His ministry on earth. We should remember this when we are tempted to go it alone in our own strength, without the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide us, fill us and empower us.

The Holy Spirit was not given just to make us feel good, or so that we might enjoy dynamic excesses and manifestations - although these can be a legitimate expression of what the Holy Spirit may be doing in a person's life. Throughout history, from the experiences of the first disciples in Acts 2:1-4, to today, wherever the Holy Spirit moves with power and anointing, such as when we see or read about great revivals, strange things can happen - and often do! When the reality of the power and presence of Almighty God touches man unexpectedly and without warning, such as we read about in Acts, unusual and often unexplainable, miraculous things can occur.

For the disciples, it was the tongues of fire and the mighty wind, and the gift of tongues, which heralded in the present Church era. These were supernatural occurrences which caught the attention of the whole of Jerusalem and saw thousands of souls won for the kingdom that day.

For much of the 90's we heard about the "Toronto Blessing", Rodney Howard-Browne or the 'Pensacola Revival'. There have been others since, but what about these words, written over 100 years ago by Aimee Semple McPherson, the founder of the International Four Square movement, a established and respected world-wide Pentecostal denomination today:

"What about this being slain, prostrated, lying "under the power"? You do not think it looks dignified! I wonder whether Peter looked dignified when he lay in a trance and saw his vision (Acts 10:9-16). What of John on Patmos when he lay at Jesus' feet as one dead, or Daniel as he lay in a vision, or Saul when he fell in the dust of the road as Jesus revealed Himself? We might go on to mention Isaiah, Jeremiah and others who fell prostrate before Him. We have the clear record of prostration in the early Methodist Church, the Salvation Army and the Welsh revival. And today (over 100 years ago) throughout the whole world, wherever God is pouring out His Spirit, the same thing is taking place. When I go to heaven I expect to see angels and men before Him prostrate fall, as they "bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all".

However you may view these things, the fact of the matter is that while many traditional denominations are declining worldwide, the Pentecostal movement its exponential growth in many areas of the world. In the mid-70's there were some 20 million Pentecostals in the world. By the mid-90's there were over 400 million! Best estimates today indicate there to be over 644 million Pentecostal and Charismatic believers worldwide, making up the second largest Christian grouping after Catholics, whose primary growth in numbers is due to population growth in third world countries!

The Purpose of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit was given for a purpose. It is not by accident that you have come into the kingdom for such a time as this. We live in very exciting times indeed!

1. Jesus himself, in his own ministry before men, conclusively proved the value and need of a Spirit-filled life. If Jesus, born without sin, needed the power of the Holy Spirit in his own life, how much more do we?
2. To fulfil the promise of Scripture (Isaiah 32:15; Isaiah 59:20-60:1; Zechariah 10:1; Hosea 6:3; Ezekiel 34:26; Joel 2:28).
3. The Holy Spirit is essential to our fulfilling God's purposes for our lives. Without "power from on high" it is impossible to live a supernatural life and fulfil our destiny as children of the kingdom (Acts 1:8-9).
4. The Lord Jesus Christ promised us many wonderful things, providing we receive the Holy Spirit after we believe. The following assurances are examples of what is promised to us through our receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit:
 - a) Assurance of our salvation. We were never meant to function in our Christian walk without the power and confidence that is available through the Holy Spirit (John 14:16,20; 17:21-22; 1 John 3:24).
 - b) Enjoy the same access to the Father as Jesus, and have the same power in prayer (John 16:7,23-24; Romans 8:26-27).
 - c) Bring forth much fruit for the glory of God (John 15).
 - d) Enjoy divine, supernatural power to accomplish the miracles of God within our own and other people's lives (see John 14:12-14). The endowment of power from on high (Acts 1:8) quickens our physical, mental, moral and spiritual being beyond measure.

"... Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37-39)

When we are baptised in the Holy Spirit, we will hunger after righteousness in a way not experienced before. This supernatural baptism does not make us perfect, nor does it automatically give us all the answers that we may need in life. Rather, it is a well of living water springing up inside us. We just have to avail ourselves of its power to be victorious Christians, living lives unstained by the world.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

How do we know when we have been baptised in the Holy Spirit? If you ask anyone who has had this experience you will find that they just know when they've received it. There is often such a dramatic change in their lives that the adjustment to this new life 'in the Spirit' is nothing short of extraordinary. The Lord graciously endows the newly baptised person with a positive sense of His presence and a hunger for a deeper walk with Him.

The ability to speak in tongues is the most common gift mentioned in New Testament examples of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit being poured out (Acts 2:1-4; Acts 10:1-48; Acts 19:1-6). But there are others.

There is great reading to be found in 1 Corinthians ch's 12 and 14 regarding the gifts and various manifestations of the Holy Spirit, which is worth further study. Paul also mentions in these passages that he wants everyone to speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:5), and that he (Paul) speaks in tongues more than all of his audience (1 Corinthians 14:18).

It is clear from these passages that speaking in tongues is an important gift that helps confirm we have indeed been baptised in the Holy Spirit.

The story of how God led Peter to Cornelius' home (Acts 10:44-48 & 11:18) and then, to the Jewish believer's amazement, the Holy Spirit was poured out on these same Gentile believers, is one of the highlights of the book of Acts. The outward sign that convinced Peter, and later the other disciples, was the manifestation of '*glossolalia*', which Greek for speaking in tongues!

Paul's experience at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7) was similar. Although it would have been common knowledge and general practice to receive the Holy Spirit and pray in tongues as a believer by this time, these Ephesian believers, who the Bible confirms were disciples of Jesus (about twelve in all) had missed out. After a short period of time and a few simple questions it was fairly easy to ascertain that as believers they had not heard of the Holy Spirit, and then introduce them to this wonderful experience we call the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

As soon as Paul discovered these faithful men, he inquired as to whether or not they had: "***received the Holy Spirit when they believed?***" (Acts 19:2).

After baptising them in the name of Lord Jesus. When Paul laid hands on them they proceeded to speak in tongues and prophecy! We know they then started to move in the power of the Holy Spirit because history tells us many people were subsequently saved, and a large church was established in what was a key provincial city of the Roman Empire in Asia at that time.

To receive power for witnessing and ministry, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is essential, and the gifts of the Spirit come with the package!

An important point to note here, however, is that:

Your salvation is not dependent upon you praying in tongues

Unfortunately, there are a couple of fringe Pentecostal denominations that teach this, but it has no biblical foundation and the wider Pentecostal fraternity rejects this as false teaching.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is spoken of in several different ways, and by a number of different names, each describing a different aspect of this wonderful experience:

- ♦ **Baptism in the Spirit** (John 1:33) - full immersion into the Holy Spirit.
- ♦ **Gifts of the Spirit** (1 Cor 12) - emphasising gifts of the Spirit for believers.
- ♦ **Receiving the Spirit** (Acts 19:2) - refers to the actual moment of reception.
- ♦ **Filled with the Spirit** (Acts 2:4) - suggesting something poured into a person.

What's in a Name

Power to be Witnesses

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8)

Jesus promised His disciples that when the Holy Spirit came upon them they would receive **“power to be His witnesses”**. The change in their lives was dramatic, enabling them to be powerful and effective preachers of the Gospel.

When we are baptised in the Holy Spirit we too receive power to be Jesus’ witnesses. It does not mean that we will all become great evangelists! But there does come a joy, a freedom, and a boldness in sharing who Jesus is, and what He has done for us, with others.

It is so easy to be caught up in church life, enjoying the blessing of God and the company of your brothers and sisters in the Lord. This is not wrong, but we need to remember that we are commissioned to witness for Jesus, who came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). We are commissioned to do likewise:

“Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:18-20)

A very personal Experience

Obviously, the Holy Spirit plays an important part in the life of a Christian. To live effectively for Jesus we must make the Holy Spirit welcome in our lives, and allow Him to take possession of every area of our being as we yield ourselves to Him.

When Jesus baptises us with the Holy Spirit He does so in a very personal way that seems to suit our individual lives and personalities. Some receive the baptism when they are alone at home, others after being prayed for by another Christian. Frequently the baptism in the Holy Spirit comes through prayer and the laying on of hands. This was a common experience for the early church (see Acts 8:17; 19:6) although not exclusively so (Acts 10:44-46). God sometimes acts in sovereign and unexpected ways.

1. God gave the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost: He is here - it is up to us to receive Him (Acts 2:38; 19:2).
2. We receive the Holy Spirit by faith (Galatians 3:2,5,13-14).
3. The Holy Spirit is not received on our merit or personal holiness.
4. When we receive the Holy Spirit, we begin to learn some simple lessons of cooperation with Him - obedience should follow.
5. We receive a Person, not just an experience.
6. God’s evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is speaking in a previously unknown and unlearned tongue. The miracle is not that the Christian speaks, but in what he speaks - the first is natural, the other is entirely supernatural. When the believer feels the supernatural moving of the Spirit his part is to speak whatever sounds come. In Acts 2:4, the Word of God indicates that the Holy Spirit gave believers the words, or sounds, but they spoke them. The Holy Spirit prompted them to speak.

God's Desire is to Baptise you in the Holy Spirit

Jesus has given the most concise description of the need for every believer to strongly desire the fullness of the Holy Spirit in John 7:37-39.

Here, He indicates that there must be a deep thirsting, a definite desire, for the things of God. The person who thirsts after God is invited to come to Jesus and partake of the rivers of living water that He offers.

Hungering and thirsting after righteousness guarantees satisfaction in area of spiritual things according to Jesus (Matt 5:6). This is also the prerequisite to having the "rivers of living water" flow out of our being.

It is God's desire that you be baptised in the Holy Spirit. You must ask Jesus to baptise you with the Holy Spirit, and receive Him by faith.

Begin to thank God for this wonderful gift. Praise Him for His glory, majesty and power. Yield your tongue and your voice to Him, and respond to the sounds that are formed by the Holy Spirit.

At this point ignore your feelings, and any thoughts that may try to keep you from enjoying this exciting experience. Concentrate on Jesus, and allow the Holy Spirit to flow out of you in the form of the rivers of living water that Jesus has promised.

Some Question Answered from Scripture

1. What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit? (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5)
2. What was "the promise" referred to by our Lord? (Joel 2:28)
3. When did this outpouring commence? (Acts 1:1-4; Acts 2:16-18)
4. Why did the disciples need to wait? (John 7:37-39; Acts 2:33)
5. Was not this promise only for the Apostles? (Acts 1:12-15)
6. But was it not for the Jews only? (Acts 10:44-48; Acts 11:15-17)
7. Is this promise (the baptism in the Holy Spirit) for us today?
8. Are we not baptised in the Holy Spirit when we are saved? (Luke 10:20; Acts 8:12; Mark 16:16)
9. But have not all Christians got the Holy Spirit? (John 3:6; Acts 1:8; John 14:16-17)
10. What is the baptism for? (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8)
11. Is this experience necessary for all Christians? (Luke 3:22; Acts 1:4; Acts 8:14-16; 19:1-2; Eph 5:18)
12. Should we expect supernatural signs to follow our being baptised in the Holy Spirit? (Mark 16:17,18; Acts 2:33; 8:18; 14:18)
13. How did believers know when they had received the Holy Spirit? (Acts 2:4; 8:17,18; 9:17; 1 Cor 14:18; Acts 10:45-46; 19:6)
14. Were not these tongues given solely for preaching to the strangers frequenting Jerusalem? (1 Cor 14:2; Acts 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor 14:22)
15. But what is the use of tongues today? (1 Cor 14:2; Acts 2:11; 10:46; 1 Cor 14:5; 12:10; 14:4)
16. Are "tongues" languages spoken only on the earth? (1 Cor 13:1)
17. May we expect other supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit? (1 Cor 12:7-10,31; 1 Cor 14:1,39; Mark 16:20; Acts 4:12-14,30)
18. Were not these gifts intended to be transitory? (Rom 11:29; Jam 1:17; 1 Cor 13:8)

Lesson

4

THE BIBLE - GOD'S WRITTEN WORD

The Inspired Word of God

No other book in the history of mankind has affected the lives of men and women so deeply as the Bible. It contains significant divine wisdom and relevance to us as the living and abiding Word of God, expressed within the pages of the Canon of Scripture. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. It is the only book about which this claim can truly be made. It forms the basis of our understanding of the Christian faith.

The Bible is just as relevant today as it always has been. Even though it was completed more than eighteen centuries ago, when the greater part of the world was uncivilised, there have been no discoveries or inventions that add to, or subtract from, the moral and spiritual truths contained within its pages. Today, we know no more about the origin of man, the nature of the soul, the problem of suffering, or the future destiny of man, than did those early Christians who were able to study God's Word 1800 years ago. The teachings of the Bible are infinitely superior to the ideas of men. God declares in Isaiah:

*"My thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are my ways your ways" (Is 55:8-11)*

Logos and Rhema

Christianity, to be effective, must be based on **faith**; and faith, to be of any realistic value, must be based on **truth** and an understanding of the **nature** and **character** of **God**. The Bible, as God's Word to mankind, is our source of knowledge about God and all things spiritual. As Christians, we have an obligation, to study it regularly and systematically.

There are two words used in the Greek to describe God's Word:

LOGOS *simply means God's written, revealed word*
RHEMA *simply means the spoken word of God*

When we say God speaks to us, or that God is showing us something in our lives, we are referring to the '**RHEMA**' Word of God. When we want to know what the written, legal instruction about a matter is, we need the Bible, which is the '**LOGOS**' Word of God.

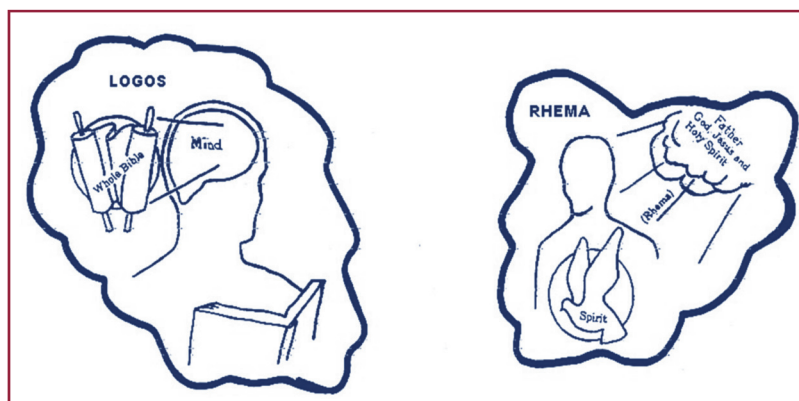
Whilst hearing a **rhema** from God is of vital importance, it must be subjected to the **logos** of God's written law. If you **feel** God is speaking to you about something, it must not contradict the **logos** of Scripture. Many an unwary and uneducated young Christian has been snared by the devil, and 'led' into stormy waters and much confusion because of the deception inherent in believing something that is essentially a lie.

If we are to be successful as individuals under God, we must align every 'leading' with God's written Word, and we must know our Bibles in order to be able to do this. To become familiar with the Bible's basic content takes time - lots of time, and much study. It is, however, a worthwhile endeavour, with great rewards for those who persevere and display a deep desire for ultimate truth.

The diagram below shows the difference between the **logos** word, which speaks to our mind (reason), and the **rhema** word, which speaks to our heart (spirit). Both are necessary, but the emphasis of this study is the '**logos**' word, God's written law and instruction manual, which is the Bible. However some explanation of these two words is in order.

The word **rhema** occurs often in the New Testament. It is used in both a general and a technical sense. In general, **rhema** means any kind of spoken utterance and was in very common use in the Greek world. In its more technical sense, **rhema** means a particular command, direction, promise or prophecy, especially where the idea of a mandate (a judicial or legal command from a superior) is concerned.

The other word frequently interchanged with **rhema** in its general use in the New Testament is **logos**. Like **rhema**, **logos** in general was often used to describe a conversation or utterance, but in its technical sense its use is distinctly different from **rhema**. Whereas **rhema** conveys the idea of a vivid, immediate, specific and (usually) brief utterance, **logos** conveys the idea of a more abstract and formal style of speech, an extended discourse, a story, narrative or report.



LOGOS without RHEMA is dead letter legalism
RHEMA without LOGOS is spiritual anarchy

Uses of Logos and Rhema

- ♦ **Logos** would be used for a whole language, but **rhema** for one saying, taken out of that language.
- ♦ **Logos** would be used to describe the Bible as a whole, but **rhema** for a particular verse of Scripture.
- ♦ The wisdom of God, in its totality, is the **logos** of God; whereas each promise of salvation, deliverance, or supply is a **rhema** of God.

For faith to function effectively in our life, it must be based upon a **rhema** from God. In other words, God's specific word to us, personally.

When we allow ourselves to be led by a **logos** that has not become a **rhema**, we operate in the realm of our understanding, or reason. When we allow ourselves to be led, by a **rhema** from God, then we function in the realm of the Spirit.

The need for Revelation

Man is unable to use his own ability - whether it be logic, intelligence, or any other form of analysis, to understand God.

Being finite, it is impossible for man to understand the infinite - the omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), and omnipresent (all present), God.

The only way we can understand our infinite God, is by His showing, or revealing, Himself to us in ways our finite minds can understand.

Our reference for truth must, therefore, be outside ourselves - not made by us, nor originating in us.

If we could actually understand God with our own mental capabilities, then He would become restricted to the size of our mind, our wisdom, or our understanding.

Christianity is not man's groping blindly in the dark trying to find God; but rather, God revealing Himself and making Himself available to man, through Jesus' sacrifice. This places its emphasis, not on our ability to rationalise or reason things through, but on divine revelation.

Two facts about the Bible

1. The Bible is the Inspired Word of God

God obviously did not write the Bible with His own hand; but men, inspired by the Holy Spirit, recorded the revelations of God down through the centuries. These men had diverse backgrounds and levels of education and experience, from kings and prophets, to fishermen and tax collectors.

The harmony of purpose and direction in the Bible's contents is such a literary feat that it would have been impossible for its writers to compose it without divine inspiration. The men responsible for compiling the Scriptures, many centuries ago, were also inspired in what they chose to include or exclude. The Bible is God's written Word to man, giving him instruction and counsel in every conceivable area of life. It is the ultimate book of absolute truth.

2. The Bible is the Infallible Word of God

Infallible means that it lacks error. It is a book of absolute truth - the only such book available to man on the earth today. God used the faculties of about 40 different writers over a period of over 1,600 years to compile the Bible, which is actually a library of 66 books (39 Old Testament; 27 New Testament). It contains a wealth of infallible revelation, brought to us through fallible men, under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The Purpose of the Bible

God gave us the Bible so that we are able to understand His will and purpose for all things, whether spiritual or natural; and especially, so that we can know His direction for our lives and the world in which we live.

We should read the Bible diligently, study it, believe what we read is true, and act upon it accordingly. It is the ultimate authority for our lives, and a foundation pillar of our faith.

The Make-up of the Bible

The Bible is not simply one book, but a library of 66 different books, all bound together in one volume. The Bible has two main divisions:

- ♦ **The Old Testament** is the covenant God made with his people, Israel, before Jesus.
- ♦ **The New Testament** is the new covenant made possible, to the whole of mankind, through Jesus.

The content of the New Testament consists of the revelation of God's new covenant with man, through the recorded words of Jesus Christ and his followers. It is comprised of 27 distinct pieces of writing, by 9 authors (8 if Paul wrote Hebrews). These documents were written over a span of about 50 years, from AD45, at the earliest, to around AD100.

The four Gospels themselves are a unique account of the life of Christ, written to specific audiences of the time. Each author had a different vantage point from which to write, and a different set of people to write to.

The Four Gospels

Matthew: written to the Jews, who were eagerly looking for the Messiah; presents Jesus as Messiah/King.

Mark: written to the Romans, a people who recognised power as supreme; presents Jesus as the Conqueror.

Luke: written to the Greeks, whose ideal is of the perfect man; presents Jesus as the expression of that perfection.

John: written to the Church; presents the truth of Jesus' deity.

Understanding the Bible

Three things are essential to understanding the Bible:

1. You must be a child of God, born-again by the Spirit of God.
2. You must read and study it carefully and regularly, with a willing heart to hear what God may be saying to you personally.
3. You must receive teaching and instruction in the ways of God by becoming part of the local family of God (a church), and learning from inspired, mature and balanced ministry.

Using the Bible

Most sects, cults and 'alternative religions' use some part of the Bible to justify their often strange and misleading doctrines. The problem is that they use Scriptures out of context with the true meaning of the original, and often even re-word the Bible to suit their own peculiar beliefs (for example, the Jehovah's Witnesses use the *Watchtower Bible*, which you will find has been modified, and is quite different from the one we know as the Holy Scriptures); or add other books to 'complete' what is lacking in the Word of God (such as the Mormon *Book of Moroni*).

When formulating doctrine it is important to ascertain what the whole Bible says about a matter. This means researching all that the Scriptures say, and thoroughly checking and cross-checking the facts. Taking one verse and making major decisions for your life, without first identifying whether that verse has been correctly interpreted or not can be dangerous, and can potentially lead you into error.

As you read the Bible, keep a notebook and pen beside you, and make notes on all the things you don't understand. Then ask someone in the church who has some maturity in the Lord to answer your questions and explain any confusing Scriptures to you.

The Bible teaches that it is our own individual responsibility to seek out truth:

“Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction and understanding” (Prov 23:23)

“Now these (Bareans) were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11)

Paul's exhortation in 2 Timothy 2:15 should also be applied in our lives:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15)

In 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, we see how important it is to have a love for the truth. We are to walk in truth and reject all falsehood. There is no greater truth than to know, and understand, God's Word - the Bible - and to be one who spends time studying, meditating, praying and seeking after the truth that it contains. All we need to know about life, love, fulfilment, destiny and hope are found in the pages of this marvellous, infallible, divinely inspired book.

The Canon of Scripture

The term **“canon”** means:

“The collection of sacred books that constitutes the authoritative rule and practice of the Christian church”

The word **“canon”** comes from a similar Greek word (*kanon*), which probably came from the Hebrew word *“kane”*, meaning a reed or a rod. From this the word came to mean “rule” or “standard”, and later still was applied to any list of writings that made up a rule of faith or practice.

To Christians, it signifies the divinely inspired Scriptures that are the authoritative rule for our faith. The term occurs in Gal 6:16; 2 Cor 10:13-16; Phil 3:16. It was first used in its present meaning about 350 AD.

The idea of a “canon” of Scripture involves three things:

1. That God has actually inspired and controlled the writings of each individual part of the canon.
2. That God has providentially supervised the preservation and collection of the canon, so that no uninspired work has been included, nor any inspired work omitted.
3. That God has divinely guided first the Jews, and then the Church fathers, in recognising the canon.

The information in the preceding section under the heading “THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE is courtesy of Ken Chant, Vision Christian College, “The Bible”, introduction to Lesson Two

THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE LAW	HISTORY	POETRY	MAJOR PROPHETS	MINOR PROPHETS
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon	Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel	Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE GOSPELS	HISTORY	PAULINE EPISTLES	GENERAL EPISTLES	PROPHECY
Matthew Mark Luke John	Acts	Romans 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus Philemon Hebrews	James 1 Peter 2 Peter 1 John 2 John 3 John Jude	Revelation

MAIN CHARACTERS AND EVENTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

BOOKS	PEOPLE AND EVENTS	DATE
GENESIS	CREATION	
	ADAM	c. 4,000 BC
	NOAH	
	TOWER OF BABEL	
	ABRAHAM	c. 2,000 BC
	ISAAC	
	JACOB	
	TWELVE SONS	
	TWELVE TRIBES	
	CAPTIVITY IN EGYPT	
EXODUS LEVITICUS NUMBERS DEUTERONOMY	MOSES RELEASED FROM EGYPT 40 YEARS IN WILDERNESS LAW GIVEN	c. 1,500 BC
JOSHUA JUDGES RUTH	JOSHUA JUDGES	
1 SAMUEL 2 SAMUEL PROVERBS PSALMS	SAMUEL DAVID SOLOMON	
1 KINGS 2 KINGS 1 CHRONICLES 2 CHRONICLES	ISRAEL KINGS JUDAH	c. 1,000 BC
MAJOR PROPHETS MINOR PROPHETS	CAPTIVITY (ASSYRIA) BABYLON CAPTIVITY	c. 720 BC c. 600 BC
EZRA NEHEMIAH	RETURN TO JERUSALEM	c. 530 BC

USEFUL READING TOPICS

OLD TESTAMENT

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|---------------|
| 1. | THE FALL OF MAN | Genesis 3 |
| 2. | NOAH & THE FLOOD | Genesis 6-8 |
| 3. | ABRAHAM & ISAAC | Genesis 21-22 |
| 4. | JACOB CHANGES | Genesis 32 |
| 5. | THE LIFE OF JOSEPH | Genesis 37-49 |
| 6. | ISRAEL'S 12 SPIES | Numbers 13-14 |
| 7. | JOSHUA IN BATTLE | Joshua 10 |
| 8. | THE CALL OF SAMUEL | 1 Samuel 3 |
| 9. | THE CALL OF DAVID | 1 Samuel 16 |
| 10. | DAVID & GOLIATH | 1 Samuel 17 |
| 11. | ELIJAH AT Mt CARMEL | 1 Kings 18 |
| 12. | ELIJAH & ELISHA | 2 Kings 2 |
| 13. | THE FIERY FURNACE | Daniel 3 |
| 14. | THE CROSS FORETOLD | Isaiah 53 |
| 15. | THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH | Isaiah 60-61 |

NEW TESTAMENT

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|----------------|
| 1. | JESUS' BIRTH | Luke 2 |
| 2. | JESUS DEATH & RESURRECTION | Matthew 26-28 |
| 3. | YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN | John 3 |
| 4. | JOHN THE BAPTIST | Luke 3 |
| 5. | THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT | Matthew 5-7 |
| 6. | PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM | Matthew 13 |
| 7. | FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND | John 6 |
| 8. | JESUS IN ACTION | Luke 8 |
| 9. | THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH | Acts 2 |
| 10. | PHILIP THE EVANGELIST | Acts 8 |
| 11. | PAUL'S CONVERSION | Acts 9 |
| 12. | PAUL IN PRISON | Acts 16 |
| 13. | FAITH | Hebrews 11 |
| 14. | PROPHECIES FOR THE CHURCH | Revelation 2-3 |
| 15. | JESUS' SECOND COMING | I Thess 4-5 |

Lesson

5

THE CHURCH ...

Participation and Responsibilities

In this study, we are going to look at four specific areas of personal church involvement:

- ◆ Church Attendance
- ◆ Communion
- ◆ Praise and Worship
- ◆ Tithes & Offerings

Each of these subjects is a study in itself, and you can get some good reading and study material from any good Christian bookstore, your local church, or even online if you wish to go into more detail than is covered here. We will briefly touch on each subject, and as you open yourself up to the Holy Spirit, He will speak to you about your involvement in each area.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near” (Heb 10:23-25)

God never intended us to be alone in our Christian walk. As born again believers, we are spiritually re-born to function as members of the Body of Christ (Rom 7:4). We are not called to independence, but to union (or inter-dependence) with others, as part of God’s divine plan of the salvation for all mankind. In the New Testament, this union often happened locally in homes or community halls where believers got together to worship God, and share their faith with each other and their friends (Acts 2:43-47).

As the early Church grew they formed themselves into larger, more organised groups, often naming themselves after the city or town where they gathered (eg The Roman, Galatian, or Ephesian churches). Both house churches and city churches are spoken of in Acts and in Paul’s Letters.

It should be noted that it was not often that 3,000 (and later 5,000) people came to know the Lord at one time as they did in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. As early believers travelled forth from Jerusalem their message of hope and salvation spread wherever they went. Apostles and evangelists would often find a small group of believers in a town (such as Ephesus in Acts 19:1-7), and spend time encouraging and teaching them God’s Word. They became linked by this network of God’s ministers to the Body of Christ universal, and became known as “local churches”.

The early church met on “the Lord’s day” each week, sharing communion and worshipping. By the second century this was almost universally on a Sunday and has largely remained so. Believers have always gathered together regularly with other believers to worship God. Some churches meet on a different day from Sunday, but it really doesn’t matter.

We need to be Involved in Church

Because of early church concerns over the Jewish “Sabbath”, Paul declared it was up to the individual or group to determine which day they preferred - *one day to be holy or every day to be holy* - God will bless us anyway if we are faithful and obedient (Rom 14:5). We just need to make sure we get together regularly with other believers to worship God.

We receive valuable teaching, and enjoy rich fellowship, when we meet together to worship the Lord. We are also commanded not to neglect this part of our spiritual walk, as some do (Heb 10:24,25), but to spur each other on to love and good deeds.

It is unhealthy, even unwise, to not meet regularly with other believers. We are made to function spiritually as members of the Body of Christ (Rom 7:4). We are not called to independence, but to inter-dependence with others as part of God’s strategy for the salvation of all mankind.

The word “church” comes from the Greek word “ecclesia”, which means a “people called out from” or an “assembly of people”. We are called to be in the world, but not of the world, and are commanded to renew our thinking when we become Christians.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2)

As a Christian, it is essential that we become an active part of the Body of Christ, through the local church. Becoming an active member of a local church means meeting and making new friends; finding your place or role in the body; as well as becoming part of its ministry outreach; and learning how best to use your God-given gifts and talents.

Church is our spiritual family in Christ. This does not mean neglecting our natural family in any way. Indeed, people in true communion with Christ, and His Church, should be able to function better in every area of their lives, including their relationships at home, work or school.

God has placed *all things* under Jesus’ feet (Eph 1:18-23), and appointed Him to be the head over everything for the Church. The Bible calls the Church *‘the Bride of Christ’* (Rev 19:7-9). Marriage is a pattern of Jesus’ relationship to His Church (Eph 5:25-27) which He is preparing for that great day when we get to go to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

ATTENDING MEETINGS

It is important to attend church, not only because God commands it, but because it is good for us to come together regularly for teaching, fellowship, praise and worship, and in order to build a sense of community with other fellow believers.

Sunday Meetings

You are encouraged to attend Sunday services every week. It is vital that you do not neglect this important duty to your new faith. If possible, attending both Sunday and mid-week meetings is beneficial in many churches because they have different emphases.

While all meetings, whether Sunday services or mid-week Small Group meetings, last around the same time - about an hour and a half - they all have a different emphasis and purpose, tending to emphasise different aspects of need and expression, teaching and worship.

Sundays promote corporate worship, with lots of music and singing, communion, testimonies, announcements and preaching making up the bulk of the service. Sunday meetings are designed to make new or return visitors feel welcome, with planning going into making each and every service relevant, understandable, exciting, inspiring and challenging.

Ideally, Sunday services should be user-friendly, easy to understand and attractive to all visitors and new people, churched or unchurched as the case may be. The songs bright and uplifting, the message inspirational and challenging, and there may even be an altar call for prayer if need be after the meeting. Refreshments should also be offered after every meeting to give people time to talk and catch up with one another.

Small Group Meetings

Small group meetings are generally held in various locations where people are able to get together around a common theme, interest or activity in a more informal environment. Small group meetings focus on several priorities, depending on the reason for their existence in the first place. Some are prayer oriented, others cater for new believers such as this Foundations course. Other small groups cover Bible study and discussion as their main focus. Yet others may meet around topical subjects that include youth, junior youth, young adults, seniors, worship teams, women's and men's meetings and business networking breakfasts. Everything from spiritual meetings to social occasions with dinners, movies, fashion shows or anything imaginable really.

Every member of a vibrant and active local church is strongly encouraged to become involved in a small group that meets their particular needs and suits their particular interests - and there is usually something for everyone in an established church! Small groups especially help people to integrate into the life of the church and make new friendships.

PRAISE AND WORSHIP

As a charismatic, or Pentecostal church (for the purpose of this study, the words "*charismatic*" and "*Pentecostal*" are interchangeable), our style of worship is often different from what people have come to expect from a more traditional church. We are not ashamed of our exuberance. It is quite biblical to raise your hands in the air (Psalm 63:4), clap & shout (Psalm 47:1), dance (Psalm 149:3), sing (Psalm 30:4), and generally have a good time in God's presence (Psalm 132:9,16). We choose to use contemporary worship music and encourage a freedom of expression not usually found in more traditional churches. If we can get excited about such worldly pursuits as football or a rock concert, how much more should we get excited about coming into the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the creator of heaven and earth!

God is moving mightily by His Holy Spirit in the world today, and the most obvious expression of this is our style of church music. People are attracted to modern, contemporary worship more so than traditional styles, and it is important to recognise this reality as we seek to attract new converts and see God's Word reach a new generation of people. Music is extraordinarily powerful as a medium, and we neglect at our peril. In truth, churches have always used contemporary music to attract followers and converts. We must be careful not to get bogged down in how things used to be when the world has moved on and no longer cares. Being relevant is foundational to reaching people with the power of the gospel message.

Church must be relevant, powerful, and infused with the presence of God! Praise and worship is a primary vehicle by which we enter into the realm of the Spirit, and few would argue that modern church music today is not exceptional at reaching today's generation.

The Difference Between “Praise” And “Worship”

Praise is our gateway into the presence of God. Psalm 43:1 encourages us to praise the Lord as a matter of *choice*. No matter what our situation, circumstances or problems (Eph 5:15-21); whether we feel like it or not, we are still required to offer the “fruit of our lips, which is the sacrifice of praise” (Heb 13:15,16). Praise is something we do as an act of our will.

Worship is more spiritual in nature. It is essentially a *response*, which comes from our desire to fellowship with the Spirit of the Lord as He moves in our midst (Rev 4:8-11). It is sometimes solemn and quiet, at other times boisterous and noisy, especially when we enter into spiritual warfare. The Lord moves in different ways for different reasons and we are called to be sensitive and responsive to him and not quench the moving of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 5:16-22).

Sometimes we can be scared to let go of our inhibitions, but the benefits of experiencing the presence of God personally and intimately is worth any initial sacrifice or anticipated embarrassment. We can enter into amazing praise and worship by ourselves, in a group, or any time we assemble together as a body of believers in the local church.

Key to Miracles People often ask what is the key that will open the heavens and release God's hand to bless them? Try praise and worship and see for yourself. There are many different keys, such as binding strongholds of darkness (Matt 16:19), and forgiving those who have hurt you (Matt 18:21-35), speaking to the mountains (Mark 11:23-25) and others we need to study and learn as we grow and mature our faith. But entering into the Holy of Holies with the Lord through the avenue of praise and worship is one of the most simple and effective methods used in Scripture. Paul and Silas were singing hymns, and praising God, at midnight, after being severely beaten (Acts 16:22-30), when God set them free and opened the prison doors. David was a man who knew persecution and discouragement, but he left a legacy in Psalms for us to read, which clearly shows his dependence on praise and worship, no matter his circumstances.

COMMUNION

Communion is one of two ordinances (instructions) given to the church by the Lord Jesus Christ, which we are expected to obey. The other is water baptism.

In the story of the last supper (Luke 22:7-20), the bread represents the broken body of Jesus, whilst the wine symbolises his shed blood. Jesus said to “do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:23-26):

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Cor 11:23-26)

We are instructed to ensure we have a clean heart, and pure motives, when we come together around “the table of the Lord”. Paul said that not to do so can have serious consequences (1 Cor 11:27-32). Communion is a time of intimate fellowship and remembrance. If we partake of it in this manner, we will indeed remember all that Jesus Christ has done, and continues to do for us, and come before him in humility and thanksgiving.

When partaken with a humble and contrite heart the communion table can have significant value (1 Peter 5:6,7), and be a source of refreshment and healing, especially when this follows a time of quality worship.

The Passover Feast Becomes The Communion Feast

There is nothing “magical” about the bread or the wine. What we do at communion is honour the Lord Jesus Christ by remembering His death, burial and resurrection until He comes again. But we need to understand the significance of the symbolism used. Communion came to the church as a direct result of Jesus’ command, which He gave at “*The Last Supper*”.

It is significant that Jesus chose to institute this ordinance of the church at the time of the Passover feast. The Passover was instituted by God when the children of Israel were coming out of bondage to Egypt. You can read the story in Exodus 12:1-14. God said that Israel was to consider the first Passover to be the “beginning of months”, and the “first month of the year”. The angel of the Lord was going to come upon the Egyptians and slay the first-born of both man and beast, but He would “pass over” the Israelites, if they performed a certain ceremony involving the blood of a lamb being sprinkled over the doorposts and lintels of their homes. This was known as the Lord’s Passover (Exodus 12:11).

Shortly after this the Ten Commandments were given and the Law of Moses was instituted. The Passover continued until Jesus made the perfect sacrifice, and the temple veil was torn in two (Matthew 27:51). The institution of the Communion ordinance effectively replaces the need for the Passover ceremony, at least for non-Jewish Christians.

Communion heralds in a time when miracles of healing and deliverance (through the broken body of Jesus; 1 Peter 2:24) and forgiveness and cleansing (through the shed blood of Jesus; 1 John 1:7-9) are made available to all who believe and accept the work that was finished on the cross of Calvary, for every believer in Christ.

Our approach to Communion

We seek to make our Sunday meetings ritual-free and user-friendly in order for them to be understood by the unchurched visitor. We want to see people touched with the awesome and majestic presence of God. As such we want communion blessing for those who choose to partake.

Communion is a celebration, and should be received in this manner. Our view is that communion is more about relationship than ceremony. More about forgiveness and serving one another than something mystical. Some churches have communion weekly, some monthly and some less often. It doesn't really matter. In my view a meal together is closer to both the spirit and the practice of the Passover in the traditional sense than our pieces of cracker and thimbles of wine. However communion is served, and received, it is the spirit and attitude of those participating that is of most importance, not the actual choice of wine or grape juice, bread or crackers, or style of ceremony conducted.

TITHES AND OFFERINGS

One of the vital areas we must come to terms with early in our walk with the Lord is the financial area of material possessions. The objective of every born-again believer should be to manage their finances biblically, and the basic principle applying to all of this is that **God owns 100% of everything:**

***“For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.
I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves
in the field is Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you;
for the world is Mine, and all it contains” (Psalm 50:10-12)***

We are stewards, not owners. This refers to our own life, and everything in it (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23). Nowhere is our spiritual understanding made more obvious than in what we are prepared to return to God for the furtherance of his kingdom here on earth.

Salvation is meant to have a life-changing impact upon every area of our life. This includes our involvement with finances and material possessions. Though many consider discussion about Christianity and money at the same time to be incompatible with true faith, the Bible begs to differ, and contains a wealth of information and instruction concerning its use and abuse.

The Bible says a great deal about our financial priorities, stewardship and related responsibilities. Though the Bible contains many cautions against the love of money, greed and worldly dependence on material possession, nowhere does it indicate a blanket condemnation against its value and use. Many biblical principles can be found concerning the proper use and function of finances. It's all about being a kingdom focused believer, rather than a carnally (or worldly) focused one.

Establishing Correct Financial Priorities

One of these principles concerns the concept of tithing. Tithing is another word for giving and is a most important issue that can and does affect the life and prosperity of individual believers, as well as the local church.

- ◆ Hag 1:3-11 Consider your ways, says the Lord
- ◆ Prov 11:24-28 He who scatters, prospers
- ◆ 2 Cor 9:6-8 He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly
- ◆ Deut 28:1-14 Prosperity is promised conditionally (Deut 29:9)

The Principle Of Giving

- ◆ Luke 6:38 Give and it will be given unto you
- ◆ Gal 6:7-10 What a man sows he also reaps
- ◆ Lev 27:30-34 The tithe belongs to the Lord
- ◆ Mal 3:8-12 Will a man rob God?
- ◆ Matt 23:23 Do the latter, without neglecting the former

*The tithe is God's primary means of funding
and supporting the ministry of the Local Church*

Running a church (and its various ministries, missions and outreaches) costs money. Apart from the costs of maintaining a building and paying salaries, there are a host of other hidden costs that need to be met each week - mostly out of the weekly offering.

God chooses to use the local church as a means of providing the necessary funding to reach lost people and build a community of believers. The tithe is one way that financial provision is made to enable this to happen.

In Malachi 3:8-12, the last book of the Old Testament, we see that there are definite advantages to tithing, and definite disadvantages in failing to do so. Tithing is the only subject in Scripture in which God actually tells us - His children - to "prove" or "test" Him. He promises us a blessing we cannot contain if we are faithful and obedient.

"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the Lord of hosts. "And all the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the Lord of hosts" (Mal 3:8-12)

What is the Tithe?

In simple terms, a tithe means a percentage (10%) of our "first-fruits", or increase (income). God has ordained that whatever we receive for our labour, or as income, should be tithed on. Although everything we earn actually comes from God, we get to keep most of it - 90% in fact. He asks for a mere 10% in return for all that He has given us, and promised to give us if we are faithful and obedient.

God calls the tithe “His portion” and it is to be brought into His church for the benefit of the ministry, and to further His kingdom. Man will testify that when we obey His simple command the 90% we keep, to spend or invest as we wish, has a habit of stretching much further 100% ever will.

It is important to understand that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:6-8), and we are told that as we sow, so shall we also reap, for God will not be mocked (Gal 6:7-10). Tithing is one way by which we “sow to the Spirit”, and reap some generous rewards “in this life”.

Tithing is a requirement of both Old and the New Testaments. The Lord Jesus, while attacking the Pharisees for their hardness of heart, encouraged them to maintain the tithe as a part of our spiritual worship (Matt 23:23).

Testimonies of miraculous provision from those who have discovered this amazing principle and applied it to their lives are numerous, and evident in every church where this principle is practised. Excellent teaching is available from any Christian bookstore, or online from respected biblical teaching sources.

What is an Offering?

The main difference between **tithes** and **offerings** is the tithe is a foremost requirement of our Christian faith, and is meant to be brought into the local church you choose to commit yourself to as your spiritual home. Offerings are over and above your tithe, and are what we voluntarily choose to give to Christian organisations, or people, that we feel the Lord wants us to help financially, or sow into at various times. Do not confuse the two otherwise not only will the church be robbed of its provision, but the blessing and reward for your obedience will not be as it should be.

What are Alms?

Alms are commonly known as “gifts for the poor”, and are separate to both tithes and offering in Scripture.

Charitable giving can be termed “alms for the poor”, although it would probably not be very politically correct today to use such terminology.

*“Honour the Lord from your wealth, and from
the first of all your produce” (Prov 3:9)*

*“The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are
riches, honour and life” (Prov 22:4)*

*“Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your
consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone.*

*For wealth certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle
that flies toward the heavens” (Prov 23:4-5)*

*“Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken
together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your
standard of measure it will be measured to you in return” (Luke 6:38)*

*“Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he
who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as
he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for
God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to
you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an
abundance for every good deed” (2 Cor 9:6-8)*

Lesson

6

Separating Facts from Myths

MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

We are going to study the nature and character of the Godhead - the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We will then see how God, in His divine wisdom, decided to make Man in His own image - spirit, soul and body - and after His own likeness.

From the opening pages of Scripture an indisputable fact is established about the character and nature of God, and of His creation. God's eternal truth is established. Namely that we are created in His image, and after His likeness. Once such an important biblical truth is embraced it is relatively easy to see the flaws in the eastern religious viewpoint and "New Age" mythology, which declares that we are all "gods", that we can become part of some central cosmic "oneness", or get more than one shot at becoming divine through a process popularly known as "reincarnation". This insidious and erroneous assertion has stealthily crept into every level of Western thinking - mostly during our lifetime. Such distortions of truth have infiltrated our society so deeply, and especially our secular education system, that new Christians are often confused about what truth is. The Bible teaches that God is truth. Jesus says:

"I am the WAY, the TRUTH, and the LIFE" (John 4:6)

John 4:24 declares we are to worship the Father in "**SPIRIT** and **TRUTH**".

With a view to the pervasive influences mentioned above it would be good to remember these two simple, but profound, summary biblical statements:

- ◆ **There is a God** - an individual, intelligent and personal being; and
- ◆ **You are not Him** - you were created by Him, as was everything else

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:1-3)

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt amongst us . . . full of grace and truth" (John 1:14)

The Trinity and Unity of God

Christians worship one God, who reveals Himself to mankind in three ways:

The Father - The head and authority figure to whom Jesus himself submitted during his earthly walk, and continually referred to as He taught His disciples how to pray (Matthew 6:9), how to know God (Matthew 11:27), and from where His authority came (Matthew 28:18).

The Lord Jesus Christ - The earthly manifestation of God, the Word become flesh (John 1:1-3,14). He referred to himself as being one with the Father (John 10:29), and was the only one who could come down and truly pay the price required for forgiveness of sin (John 17:1-5,24; Acts 2:36).

The Holy Spirit - The active agent of the Godhead in the earth today. He is our counsellor (John 14:26), leading us into all truth. We receive power (Acts 1:8) as He comes upon us, and He is responsible for the distribution of various gifts (1 Cor 12:11). Salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:21,22 & 5:5).

The Concept of Trinity

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, have been together from the beginning, and work in perfect harmony with one another. The name we use when addressing them collectively is the Godhead, or *“Trinity”*.

The concept of the Trinity is often a bit of a mystery to our finite and limited minds. We try to reduce God to our understanding, and put Him into boxes we can comprehend, yet He still escapes our unenlightened understanding.

Each member of the Godhead has a task to perform, and cannot be separated from the other. They are always one, communicating and working out the perfect purposes of God.

However, by submitting to the Holy Spirit, and searching the Scriptures in the simplicity of our faith, we are better able to comprehend the wonderful personality of God and, by revelation, even the Trinity begins to make sense.

MADE IN GOD’S IMAGE

In order to better understand the triune nature of God, we must go back to the beginning, to the book of Genesis, and take a close look at the creation of the very first man - **ADAM** (Genesis 2:7). According to the Genesis account in Gen 1:26-28, on the sixth day God made man in His own image.

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Gen 1:26-28)

This doesn’t mean that we all look the same, or that God looks exactly as we do, because physically that is not the case. God is a Spirit (John 4:24), and our likeness to Him is more spiritual than it is physical. However, it does mean that just as God is one person in three parts, each part working in harmony with the other, and each making one perfect whole, so are we. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 describes what we call the tri-partite nature of man:

**MAN is Primarily a SPIRIT
He Possesses a SOUL
He Lives in a BODY**

Man is collectively made up of three parts - *spirit, soul* and *body*. Each important, each in harmony with the others, yet collectively we are one person, not three. When we see ourselves as created in the image of God, and we understand how we are put together, we can then understand more about the triune nature of the Godhead. Our soul is also tri-partite - being made up of our mind, our will and our emotions.

When God said, *“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness, and let them rule...” (Gen 1:26)*, He was making a statement of such significance that few have truly grasped its depth and meaning.

We are made in God’s image and likeness. We are not gods, or anything remotely resembling the concepts of a god as some would believe. God is God, we are not Him, but we are created by Him, and we were made in His likeness.

The Spirit of Man

As God is creative, we are creative. As God is spiritual, we are spiritual. As God functions in faith, we must function in faith, etc. If we take every thought captive (2 Cor 10:5), and learn to tune out the world's corruption, refusing the temptation to be conformed to its image (Rom 12:2), there is no limit to what God can accomplish through you and me - no limit whatsoever.

Proverbs 20:27 says that, *"the lamp of the Lord searches out the spirit of man"*. God dwells in our spirit. It is the innermost part of man's being, and is the part of our nature which gives us God-consciousness.

From our spirit, we get our *conscience*. When we hear an "inner voice" telling us that something is not quite right, it is the part of our being that is linked into the spiritual dimension. This spiritual perception can be damaged, or seared (1 Timothy 4:2), by abuse or rebellion, but it is nevertheless the part of our make-up by which we get to understand "instinctively" the difference between right and wrong. We also gain whatever *intuition* we may have from our spirit.

When we receive Jesus into our hearts as our Saviour, we become 'born-again' (John 3:3-8). Our spirit is renewed and comes into unity with the Spirit of God. Although we have a spirit as unbelievers, for eternal purposes it is dormant and useless without the born-again experience. The Spirit of God bears witness with our (human) spirit (Romans 8:16), that we are the children of God.

The Soul of Man

Self dwells in the soul. It is where our personality - the inner, expressive part of our being - comes from. It is the source of our *mind*, *will* and *emotions* and is the part of our nature which gives us self-consciousness.

The soul is man's personality. It represents man, and expresses his individuality. With the soul we are able to *reason*, and through reason to understand the world around us. If reason is devoid of conscience, and separated from the spiritual truth upon which all understanding must be founded, then the end result is what we see in the world around us - the confusion and fear, poverty and pain, and the profusion of false religions and cults which search in vain for "truth" outside the confines of God's Word.

It is the soul's decision as to whether the spiritual or natural world reigns in a believer's life. This represents the *free-will nature* of man. The spirit is powerless to rule if the soul prevents it, and God has chosen to respect this. So, by our own choice we either serve God or reject Him; but we will ultimately partake of the fruit of whichever direction we choose to take - *"for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap"* (Gal 6:7).

It is the soul's task to preserve a right relationship between the spirit and the body: ie **the body is directed by the soul; the soul by the spirit; and the spirit by God**. The spirit cannot act upon the body directly, only through the soul.

The Body of Man

The senses dwell in the body - the vehicle through which our soul finds expression in the world. It is the outer and effective part of man's nature, and gives us world-consciousness.

Our body thirsts and hungers, has needs and desires, and must be cared for carefully if we are to enjoy full expression in life. The five physical senses, or God-given attributes, of *sight*, *hearing*, *touch*, *taste* and *smell* are integral parts of our body which enable us to *sense*, or *feel*, the world around us.

We can choose to care for, or abuse, our bodies. The Bible tells us that as Christians, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 6:17,18), and as such should be concerned about, and care for, God's dwelling place.

THE FALL OF MAN

Before the fall of man, his soul was governed by his spirit (not to be confused with the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead), and man was in perfect harmony with God.

After the fall (Genesis 3), man's spirit became separated from God and consequently "died". The "born-again" experience (John 3:3) brings about a "rebirth" of spirit, which brings man back into a proper relationship with God once more.

This is not to be confused with "rebirthing", encouraged and practised within the New Age movement. This teaching is not scripturally based, and does not put sinful man in touch with the living God through the Lord Jesus Christ, but rather encourages spiritual experiences strongly discouraged in Scripture (Deuteronomy 18:9-14; John 14:6).

The "unregenerate" man, whose spirit is totally submerged in the soul life (which in turn is entirely influenced by the body's senses), is out of touch with his God-ordained inclination to be a spiritual person. Hence, he will often seek alternatives to truth as portrayed in God's Word. For example, the humanistic concept teaches that man has a dualistic nature (body and soul, without spirit). This is simply not true, and the bible strongly refutes this concept.

The cross, and the shed blood of Jesus Christ, is the **ONLY** way by which man can be saved. Unfortunately, there are still those who, in their rebellion and pride, prefer a counterfeit religious experience to the real thing. This, they will discover, places them right into Satan's evil hands.

God's redemptive plan is to release man from the curse of the fall, and transfer him into the kingdom of His Son, by regenerating his spirit with new life in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Proverbs 20:27, tells us that ***"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts of his being"***.

The Spirit

It is important that the believer distinguishes the difference between his spirit and his soul. Without this discernment, he will remain ignorant of true communion in the Spirit with God, and mistake the voice of The Holy Spirit for his soul's thoughts and emotions. Our sensitivity to conscience, our spiritual perception, and our communion with God, are functions of the human spirit.

The Soul

The function of our soul, which finds expression in self-awareness or self-consciousness, is different from our spirit. The soul is the seat of our personality, intellect, thoughts, ideals, feelings - our ability to choose and to make decisions. It encompasses our mind, our emotions and our will.

The Body

Our bodies are inseparably linked to our spirit and soul, and are affected positively or negatively by the condition of the "inner" man. Diet, rest and exercise are not sufficient to totally guarantee a healthy, trouble-free life. God's command to the Israelites (Exodus 15:26 and Deuteronomy 7:15) makes this connection plain, and gives instructions on how to avoid the common diseases and sicknesses of the day. This same principle applies today (3 John 1:2). Serving God brings spirit, soul and body together in divine unity, much as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in perfect unity.

Lesson 7

God has Commissioned You

GO INTO ALL THE WORLD

This passage at the close of Matthew's gospel is universally known as "*The Great Commission*".

"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'" (Matt 28:18-20)

We have been commissioned by God, not just as soldiers, but as builders, labourers, ministers, counsellors, encouragers - as people who carry the presence of God and the anointing of the Holy Spirit into a lost and dying world. The Believer's Study Bible notes have this to say about this passage:

The great commission is Jesus' final earthly command to the church! It is customary for a person, who knows his time to die is close at hand, to speak only those things which are of the utmost importance. Oftentimes profound things are uttered by people as "last words" before they expire. Their words are often remembered long after the individual has gone to their reward. Jesus knew He would soon physically leave and be with the Father. He wanted to make sure His final words were both profound and memorable. "Go ... and make disciples" was what He chose to say!

God's passion is for lost people. Therefore the ultimate goal of the church is to populate heaven"

So even as a new believer we have been commissioned, called into service, called into ministry - the ministry of sharing our faith - and God requires us to be prepared.

What Does It Mean To Be Commissioned By God?

Enlistment in the army of the Lord is voluntary, not compulsory. However, once in we are signed up for the duration unless we go AWOL (Absent Without Leave - an armed forces term, otherwise affectionately known as 'going over the wall'). If we go AWOL, or fail to grasp the responsibilities we have as new believers to be committed to the cause of Christ and find a good church through which we can express this commitment, we can miss out on partnering with God's great passion for a lost humanity.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet 3:9)

Your commission cost God dearly, and this cost is reflected in the Lord's attitude to your life once you claim to be a believer.

***"For you have been bought with a price,
therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:20)***

***"You were bought with a price;
do not become slaves of men" (1 Cor 7:23)***

Once we enlist, we are commissioned to serve the kingdom of God in any way the Lord requires. However, while we await our specific orders as soldiers in the army of the Lord, we are to be trained, and prepared for our commission, and for promotion:

"No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything" (2 Tim 2:4-7)

The Purpose Driven Church

Rick Warren says in The Purpose Driven Church:

"The fruit of a believer is another believer. Considering the Great Commission that Jesus gave to the church, I believe the definition of fruitfulness for a local church must include growth by conversion of unbelievers. The Bible clearly identifies numerical growth of the church as fruit. Many of the kingdom parables of Jesus emphasise the unavoidable truth that God expects His church to grow. In addition, Paul connected fruit bearing with church growth (Col 1:6).

Is your church bearing fruit and growing? Are you seeing the fruit of new converts being added to your congregation? Churches that have few or no conversions often attempt to justify their of ineffectiveness with the statement, *"God has not called us to be successful. He has called us to be faithful."* I strongly disagree because the Bible clearly teaches that God expects both. Any church that is not obeying the Great Commission is failing in its purpose, no matter what else it does.

Both faithfulness and fruitfulness are required by God. But how do you define faithfulness? Are you being faithful to God's Word if you insist on communicating it in an outdated style? Are you being faithful if you insist on doing ministry in a way that is comfortable for you, even though it doesn't produce any fruit? Are you being faithful to Christ if you value man-made traditions more than reaching people for Him? I contend that when a church continues to use methods that no longer work, it is being unfaithful to Christ (remember, Saddleback is a Baptist church). Sadly there are many churches today who are completely orthodox in their beliefs but are still unfaithful to Christ because they refuse to change programs, methods, style of worship, buildings, or even locations in order to reach a lost world for Christ.

The commission of Jesus was to the whole church in every age. The imperative word in the commission is “make disciples of all the nation”. However, the baptising and teaching ministries have the force of a mandate because they follow logically the imperative “make disciples”. Matthew concludes his Gospel with the blessed promise of our Lord’s presence as we endeavour to carry the gospel to all people. Acts 1:8 informs us that it is by the precious Holy Spirit that we are empowered for our global task. The presence of the Saviour and the power of the Spirit are God’s twin certainties that we are to lay hold of and continually keep dear to our hearts as we serve our risen Lord until He comes.

The great commission is Jesus’ final earthly command to the church! We are to go, preach, teach, baptise and make disciples. For those of us genuinely born again by the Spirit of God this is not a divine suggestion, or an attractive option - it is a command!

Jesus intended the church to grow, and as members of His church we are to reproduce ourselves by witnessing of His miraculous, life changing, sin destroying, sickness annihilating, bondage breaking, overcoming love and power! Our friends, neighbours, family and acquaintances desperately need to hear *and respond* what we have to say, even if, at first, they don’t always appreciate the urgency or the need.

Personal Testimony

The most powerful and effective tool in spreading the gospel and motivating people to seek the Lord, which every believer must always keep current, is their ***personal testimony***.

In the early church there were no newspapers to speak of. Radio, TV, social media, the Internet and other forms of mass communications were unknown. People lived simpler lives, but they were hungry for something more than what they had, and Jesus gave it to them. When the Holy Spirit fell on the early church in the book of Acts a boldness rested on the people of God. They had seen the Son of heaven come to earth, live as a man, die on a cross and be raised from the dead. They were in awe of God. They were excited by what was happening.

The early Christian Church took the command to ***“Go into the world and make disciples of all men”*** seriously. They were simple people. They only had their experience. The personal testimony of their experience with Jesus was all many of them had, but it was enough! They only knew what they knew, and what they knew they wanted to share. They had a passion to share what they had received freely from God. They had no Bible - the New Testament was being written as they went. But they did have the Holy Spirit, and they had each other. Very few even had access to the Torah, or any Scripture to speak of. They found, however, as they shared what they had been given, that the spiritual kindling in the lives of their friends, their families and their neighbours was so dry that a little spark became a flame, and that flame became a bushfire, and that bushfire swept the then known world off its secular and religious feet.

Our country, our city, our friends, relatives and neighbours are as dry and hungry for spiritual truth as the people of the first century were. Despite the prevalence of TV, radio, streaming services, mobile devices, Internet, advanced technology and mass communications capability, the principles that fired the early church, and turned the world upside down, are as effective today as they were then - maybe even more so.

Jesus said, ***“The harvest is white, but the labourers are few”*** (John 4:35)

Remember, we have been commissioned for service, and we are commanded to share our faith, make disciples, baptising them and teaching them to obey God’s Word and Jesus’ commandments.

Keys to Growth

When people get saved, churches grow. When churches grow, everyone gets excited and nothing stays the same. Growth brings many rewards for the church as a whole, and there are great personal benefits poured out among the individuals who participate and partake of it.

A SENSE OF ADVENTURE - The book of Acts is a book of high adventure. Wherever we read about revival we read about adventure, excitement, miracles and changed lives. We all long for it, but are we willing to work for it. Revival, and church growth, doesn’t come cheap. There is a cost, and it must be paid by those with a vision to *bring* revival, not just enjoy the fruit of it when it arrives!

A SENSE OF PURPOSE - The Disciples and the early church were galvanised into action after Calvary, and found their life’s purpose in Christ and the preaching of the gospel. Whenever the power and presence of the Holy Spirit begins to move in a church, people shake off the old religious practices and come into a new awakening.

A SENSE OF PERSONAL FULFILMENT - Nothing fulfilled the early church like the results they gained from sharing their faith. They were so excited and passionate about their witness, and their trust in Jesus, that they willingly suffered persecution, imprisonment, even torture and death, echoing over and over Paul’s words in Phil 1:21 ***“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain”***. Not everyone suffers for their faith, but everyone who is sold out for Jesus, fulfilling the Great Commission to ***“make disciples of all men”***, carry within their heart and soul a great sense of personal fulfilment and destiny.

IT RESULTS IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH - Nothing enhances spiritual growth like witnessing, missions and outreach. Confrontation with a world at enmity with God produces believers of strength, character, integrity and maturity. Opposition will come, criticism will come, even persecution may come, but out of all this will grow an army of battle hardened believers, willing to go “all the way” in their service for their God and King, Jesus Christ!

IT BRINGS SPIRITUAL CONFIDENCE - Nothing compares to beating the enemy at His own game. Winning lost souls into the kingdom breeds confidence, and the anointing of God rides on confidence. Faith begins with believing something can be done, then doing it!

IT IS AN ENDURING INVESTMENT - We spend such a lot of our time thinking and planning for our financial future, for our family's health and wellbeing, for our own self-development, or even just trying to survive in the present! But Jesus clearly stated:

"Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things (material needs abundantly met) shall be added to you" (Matt 6:33)

Earlier in the same chapter Jesus continues to encourage His disciples with the following words:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt 6:19-21)

Why did He say such things if He did not expect us to listen, understand and obey! Let's follow on with some thoughts from Peter, who was one of the twelve disciples, and who knew what it meant to give everything up in order to serve his trusted friend and personal Saviour, Jesus:

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!" (2 Pet 3:10-12)

Nothing you invest in has the kind of enduring investment potential that investing in the kingdom of God can provide, and I know something about investments after spending over 45 years in the Australian financial planning industry!

Nothing will reward you better in your heavenly retirement than putting your time, talents and finances behind the work of God, as represented in the community by the local church.

THE HONOUR OF BEING GOD'S AGENTS - It is an honour to serve as an ambassador for your country, and it is a position keenly sought by those who understand these things, and who wish to serve in such a capacity. We are God's ambassadors on earth.

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20)

"And pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph 6:19-20)

Are you fulfilling your role as an ambassador for God? Is your life sold out for Him? Do you represent Him with your words, your deeds, your service? When people see you do they see Jesus? Food for thought, isn't it?

Mobilising the Church

How to mobilise the church for action is what all pastors spend a lot of time trying to figure out. One man can only do so much, but a motivated, enthusiastic, dedicated and focused team of people can accomplish much more.

The great task given to the church as a whole is **EVANGELISM**. But in order to do this effectively we must endeavour to do three practical things:

- a) Identify those within its members who are especially gifted by God to win men and women to Christ.
- b) Devise programs which will enable those so gifted to fulfil their role.
- c) Mobilise the remainder of the people to serve God in their particular area of expertise and calling.

I cannot think of a better way of saying what needs to be said on this topic than quoting from Ken Chant's excellent teaching booklet entitled *'Building The Church God Wants'*.

The exert on the next page comes under the heading *"Mobilising Soul Winners"* from chapter 14, pp 1 & 2.

*"We are all involved in soul winning ...
We are not all soul winners" (Ken Chant)*

We do everything we can to encourage and motivate everyone to become involved in the process of soul winning. However, the Ken Chant exert is always in my mind because I believe what Dr Chant says is true – *"to find such foolish and ridiculous behaviour you have to visit the church"*. A sad fact, but true.

We need to get everyone involved in soul winning, and we need to change our approach to how we go about doing it. Winning the lost at any cost is what we're here to do.

God has a passion for lost people. We have been commissioned by God to go out into our world, seek them out, and then come up with strategies to win a sometimes antagonistic people to Christ by any and all means possible. Eternity depends upon it - both theirs and ours!

Communication The Key to Growth

The key to effective witnessing lies in our ability to express ourselves clearly and precisely to those with whom we wish to communicate. Of special concern to many Christians who desire to share their faith, but lack the confidence to do so, is how to begin a conversation about the Lord. (Romans 1:16; 10:8-15)

Creating The Right Circumstances

Almost anyone who loves the Lord can witness effectively, especially if they are also baptised in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). But if we wait for the right circumstances to come along before we start seriously sharing our faith we will end up like many Christians who, after years in the faith, still lack confidence in this vital area of basic Christian ministry, and find that leading someone to the Lord is a rare or perhaps non-existent experience!

Ken Chant Article

One way to help each member of a congregation find his or her proper place is to reduce all ministries and offices in the church to *four major functions: evangelist, shepherd, exhorter, servants*. But first, here is an illustration of the principles upon which I have built this premise:

"Many years ago I worked as the accountant of a group of furniture stores in the suburbs of Melbourne. The firm had at least a hundred other employees. Some of them worked as shop sales people; others sold on commission from door to door; others drove trucks, packed the goods, repaired damaged items, and so on. Then there were the handful of us who worked in the administration building.

I was employed there for over a year, during which time I never once saw any of the shops, nor a single item they sold, nor even one customer.

How did that happen? Simply because my job was upstairs in the accountant's department, in a separate head office building. The nearest shop was miles away from where I worked. So ledgers, journals, accounts and countless columns of numbers engaged all my attention. Yet no one in the organisation was any more committed than I to the success of its primary business, which was to sell domestic furniture and hardware to the citizens of suburban Melbourne.

Now imagine this scene. Suppose the owner has called all his workers into his office to rebuke them for declining sales. "The task of this business", he roars, "is to sell goods. A downturn in our profits cannot be tolerated. I want our sales turnover doubled in the next few weeks. All of you drop whatever you're doing and get out onto those streets and sell, sell, sell!"

So we all down tools - clerks, drivers, packers, mechanics, bookkeepers, typists, shop assistants - and off we go to join the commission sales agents, cold canvassing the streets of Melbourne, trying to persuade reluctant customers to buy our goods!

If such a thing were to be done, what do you suppose would happen to the business?

You know the answer: swift chaos and total ruin!

True, the success of the enterprise did depend upon constant growth in its sales. But there was only one way to achieve that goal: each employee had to do well just the job he or she was employed to do.

In my case, that meant balancing the books of account to the last penny each month, which was done. There was no need for me ever to see a customer or sell a chair. Indeed, I would have harmed the corporation, not helped it, if I had abandoned the job in which I was skilled (accounting), and had taken on a job for which I was ill-suited (commission selling)."

Of course the story is silly. No owner in his right mind would do anything so foolish. To find such ridiculous behaviour in real life you have to visit the church, where you see this in operation constantly!

Effective Communication

Generating favourable circumstances is not hard, merely an interesting challenge really. When we master the art of effective communication, knowing what questions to ask, how to phrase them for maximum effect and when to ask them is a skill which every believer can and should learn.

When it comes to communication, of particular benefit is understanding this basic principle:

He who asks the questions is generally the one who controls the conversation

Five Common Communication Problems

Let's look at some common errors Christians make whilst they are learning to be effective communicators. Sometimes out of sheer enthusiasm, and at others times out of ignorance or arrogance, we find ourselves falling prey to one or more of the following five most common causes of communication breakdown (Proverbs 19:1,2):

1. **Failing To Listen (Prov 18:13)** Failing to listen is something we all do sometimes, but when it comes to communication, and especially witnessing, it is not simply what is being said that we need to hear, but also what is not said. Listen carefully to what the other person is trying to say, or avoids saying. Asking specific questions that gently but firmly lead the conversation in the way you believe it should go can be both revealing and informative. Listen to what people have to say and make sure you have the complete picture before you offer your advice.
2. **Anticipating The Answer Expected (Jam 1:19-20)** If we are not careful, we can find ourselves anticipating what someone is trying to say and then finish the sentence for them. The problem is that it really doesn't matter whether you anticipate correctly or not because you won't make many friends by doing this. It is perceived as rude and arrogant. Hear people out and consider carefully your reply, for this is wisdom.
3. **Jumping To Conclusions (Prov 18:17)** Answering a matter before it is heard is spoken of in Proverbs as being unwise and foolish. Jumping to conclusions (sometimes wrong conclusions) can be the same. It is one thing to know by a gift of intuitive knowledge, which the Holy Spirit may send us, and quite another to operate in the carnality of our own thinking. Don't be too quick to jump to hasty conclusions.
4. **Ignoring Vital Signs (Prov 16:1-2)** There are "vital signs" which are transmitted by a person which can indicate where they are up to in any conversation. Subtle body language movements or side comments often reveal what might otherwise be hidden in the heart. The Holy Spirit will cause this to come about as we are faithful in our sharing and sensitive in our listening.

5. **Being Too Ready To Give Advice (Prov 29:20)** This is a common problem for many Christians. We oversimplify complex issues, offer text book advice rather than individual solutions to problems, and generally try to have all the answers. Wisdom dictates that we know our limitations and defer to more experienced counsel when required. Even with a special move of the Holy Spirit in a person's life, people with deep or long standing problems will usually need further help, at least for a time.

A detailed study of these five areas will help us better understand the important role communication plays in everyday situations. This is even more obvious when we are called upon to share our faith and be a witness for Jesus Christ. Once these common weaknesses and errors are isolated and recognised, skills can be developed to overcome them and enable us to function more effectively.

We should always be eager to find ways to improve our effectiveness as Christian witnesses. As we look deeper into the art of effective communication and the skills that are needed to influence people positively to our way of thinking, we find that they have universal significance, both inside and outside of the church.

Whatever our personal opinion, we should not discount the things we can learn from other sources, which may include the sales and business world. But for the application of what we learn to be effective here we must apply the integrity and sure foundation of the Word of God to every situation. Also, just because we become very good at influencing people doesn't necessarily mean we have to win every time. Sometimes wisdom or the Spirit of God will dictate otherwise.

Universal Communication Principles

Jesus strongly infers that the children of this world are often wiser than the sons of light in regard to their own kind (Luke 16:8). Not only does the business world frequently run rings around the church in the area of communication, but cults and pseudo religions that deny the deity of Christ and preach a gospel foreign to the one we believe often take their lead from the world's system and become very effective at winning converts, influencing them strongly in negative ways (Prov 18:21; 2 Tim 2:1,2).

Witnessing is about communicating. It is a skill which must be learned as few are natural born communicators. However, all Christians are called to be Jesus' witnesses. To be effective witnesses we must practice and perfect our skills and follow appropriate communication principles to such an extent that it becomes second nature, as much a part of our life as eating, washing and sleeping. It will gradually develop into a useful tool which can be used in almost every area of life to lasting effect.

It is commonly agreed by experts in the field of communication that certain patterns of behaviour and response are common to man. Even after allowing for such things as cultural differences, language or education, the similarities are still quite amazing. Perhaps this is why the simple gospel message has been so successful around the world for two thousand years.

Picking Your Moment Wisely

You can create the right circumstances by picking your moments wisely and beginning a conversation with questions rather than statements. Everyone is interested in talking about themselves, their interests and their opinions. No one is really interested in yours - at least not at first - and especially if you are going to preach to them! Learn what to say, when to say it and when to keep silent! One of the most effective ways of convicting someone is silence (John 8:3-11).

Of course these principles are not just useful when we find ourselves in a witnessing situation. An ability to communicate effectively and influence people positively towards our way of thinking is a valuable skill which we all should endeavour to learn and practice. Whether applied in a personal, work or educational environment, in relationships, in confronting difficult situations or just getting your point across, a thorough knowledge of human dynamics and the art of effective communication is essential to guarantee success.

When we speak of effectively sharing our faith we mean that what we say becomes a tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit, able to sow something positive about the gospel message into the life of the person or persons being ministered to in this way.

There are many instances where Jesus Himself skilfully held the attention of a hostile crowd or gently but firmly persuaded someone of the error of their ways. Jesus was the foremost communicator of His day. An outstanding example of this can be read in John 4:7-42, which details Jesus' experience with the Samaritan woman at the well. This story shows graphically what can be done using teachable communication skills. We need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading and an avid student of better communication skills if we are to be properly equipped to evangelise and lead others to the Deliverer, Healer and Saviour of the world.

Lesson

8

THE CHURCH ...

Structure and Authority

Spiritual Home

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Paul likens the Church to the 'Body of Christ'. The members of the church make up the different parts of the body, and must neatly fit together to form a whole, just as the human body must, in order to function correctly.

We are all created to be different, and we each have our own individual role to play as part of the Body of Christ here on earth. As a Christian, it is important to find which particular part of the local Body of Christ we are going to make our spiritual home. It is from this perspective that we can then find our own individuality in Christ - not as an independent Christian, but as someone inter-dependent, and committed to seeing God's purposes on earth fulfilled through his chosen vessel - the Church:

"And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:23)

Just as it is with our own natural body, it is imperative that the Body of Christ functions in harmony and unity. There are so many different churches around that it can sometimes be confusing. Who is right? Who should I listen to?

As we grow in faith it becomes easier, in a spiritual sense, to discern right from wrong, and therefore to avoid churches that have a form of religion, but deny the power of it (2 Timothy 3:1-17), or who may preach a compromised gospel.

There are many different denominations of God-fearing, Spirit-filled churches, and God will lead you as you grow. The Holy Spirit promises to lead us into all truth (John 16:13), and the Bible, the Word of God, is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105).

1 Peter 2:9 states that:

"We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God"

In Romans 12:4,5, Paul declares:

"For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ"

Becoming part of the Body of Christ

As Christians it is essential that we become an active part of the Body of Christ, and this is achieved by becoming a committed part of a local church. A lone Christian is just about as useful as an arm or finger left lying on the sidewalk, and ***casual Christians often become Christian casualties!*** Joining a local church will mean meeting and making new friends, and becoming active in what is now your new spiritual family in Christ.

This does not, however, mean neglecting your natural family in any way. Indeed, a person in true communion with Jesus Christ and his Body, should be able to function better in every area of their lives, including their relationships at home, work or school.

In John 15 uses another analogy - that of the vine and the branches. *Read this chapter through carefully.* Jesus says that it is by bearing much fruit that the Father is glorified, and by this we prove to be His disciples (v8). We are also His friends, if we do what He commands (v14).

Local Church Structure

God has placed **all things** under Jesus' feet (Ephesians 1:18-23), and appointed Him to be the head over everything for the Church. The Bible calls the Church the Bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7-9). Revelation 21:2 refers to the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, as a bride adorned for her husband. A marriage relationship is a pattern of Jesus' relationship to His Church (Ephesians 5:25-27), which He is preparing for that great day when we get to go to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Whilst all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18), He chose to delegate great authority to His Church. The Kingdom of God is the Church (Mark 4:30-32), the Body of Christ.

The Bible teaches that we are not of this world (John 15:19; 17:14), but we have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). As such we must take our place as responsible citizens of the Kingdom of God if we expect to see God's blessing continually released into our lives.

We have been given the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 16:19), and instructed to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. In this way all our needs will continually and abundantly be met (Matt 6:33; John 10:10).

All power and authority rests with the Head of the Church, which is Jesus Christ. Apart from the Head there is no authority, for the Head is the source of all authority. All other authority exercised is delegated authority (Romans 3:1). By actively participating in God's kingdom structure, and becoming one with it, we become candidates for the channelling of God's divine power and authority in our own lives.

The Church is not nearly as fragmented as people think. There has only ever been one, true Church. It covers many denominations, and is not restricted to any particular creed or dogma that man has created. When God moves by His Spirit and people get saved, their needs met, and wounds healed, then we are operating as His Church. When we cease to do this and settle into a form of religion that no longer preaches the uncompromising Word of God, but adds or subtracts from it in various ways, then we are not functioning within the Scriptural definition of His Church, being outside of what the Holy Spirit is doing in the earth.

Many will be surprised at who is rewarded, and who is cast aside, when the final glorious day of judgment arrives (Matthew 7:21-23).

There are two streams today

Over the years **Pastor Hal Oxley** stated many times that **two streams** exist within the established church, and as time goes by these two streams will become more and more obvious as their differences emerge and come to the attention of the church as a whole. Some of these traits can already be obvious to many. Hal states:

- a) There seems to be two clearly discernible streams in Christianity today. One, a slowly dying stream which statistics, worldwide, confirm. The other, a vital, vibrant and fast growing stream mainly, but not entirely, characterised by Pentecostal/charismatic believers and their experiences and doctrines of the Holy Spirit.
- b) It is understood that 34% of the world's population claim to be Christian, against 20% Muslim and 13% Hindu - the three major world religions. Of the 34% Christian (around 2 billion), 36% of these are practising Pentecostal/Charismatics with Roman Catholics just over 50%, leaving the remaining 14% Christians who do not fall in the previous two categories, such as traditional churches.
- c) Taking non-Catholics only, 72% of people worldwide are Pentecostal/Charismatic, and 28% are the other Protestant and Anglican denominations. (Source IBMR).
- d) These two Protestant streams flow through all denominations and consist of:
 - ♦ **Those who are completely surrendered to the Lord** (Phil 3:7-8) consecrated, obedient to the word (Luke 6:46), completely committed (2 Tim 1:12), with a believer's walk (1 John 2:6; 1:7), "sold out" for God.
 - ♦ **Those who are lukewarm** (Rev 3:16) lacking commitment (Jer 48:10a), the fruit of good works (James 4:17; Prov 21:13), and without dedication to truth (Rom 12:1).
- e) Hal believes we will eventually see a separation of the two streams - one into a world church involving all major religions, and the other into the True Church, which the Lord Jesus prophesied would be the light of the world (Matt 5:14). The beginnings of this can already be perceived.

Church Growth Continues

Hal Oxley goes on to say that strict churches are experiencing the greatest growth. A strict church is one that has a clear authoritative doctrine, rigorous religious practices and demanding membership requirements.

Its serious approach to religion (Christianity) creates a strong identity that distinguishes a strict church from non-religious organisations or liberal religious organisations.

What most people want most out of religion is - religion! Liberal churches that try to accommodate the secular world by offering a refined, reasonable, intellectual faith keep losing people to the even more reasonable pleasures such as gold, a warm bed or more pleasing company. Therefore evidence would appear to confirm that:

A strong and gifted senior pastor is a major key to church growth!

The Chain of Command

The Church, as part of God's kingdom, has a predetermined chain of command, with proper authority, structure and accountability:

"And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:11-13)

"Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account.

Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you" (Heb 13:17)

Men may argue and fight over position and power, but God's men are known by the fruit, and the gifts, of their ministry. It is the character and integrity of the individual, as well as their ability to put their gifts to effective use, which determines the quality and success of their ministry. Jesus even had trouble with His disciples at one point (Luke 22:24-30), and had to instruct them on what it meant to lay down their lives and serve one another. We haven't changed much over the centuries!

The Father gave headship of this kingdom structure to Jesus Christ, who now functions in His Body (the Church), through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Col 1:18; Eph 1:22,23). God has delegated authority to overseers to administer the Church. By relating in this way to God's ordained structure we are, in fact, being obedient to the Head, which is Christ (Heb 13:17).

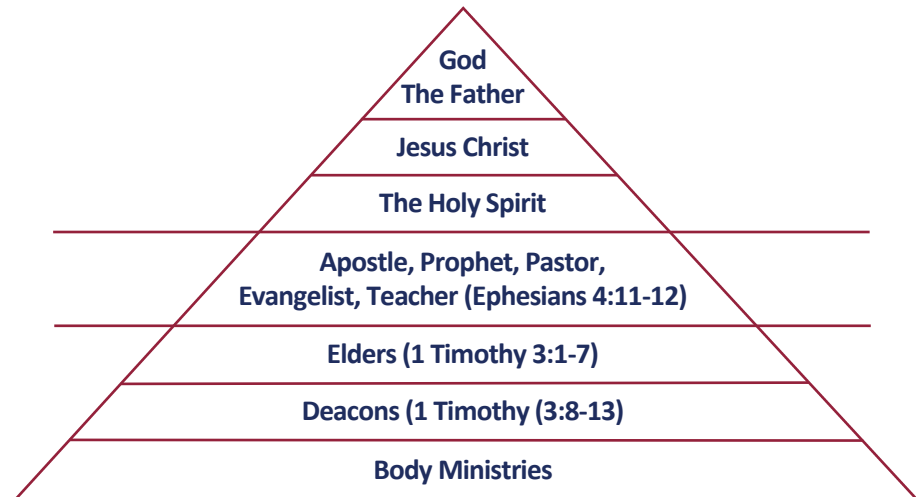
God placed "Gifted Ministries" (also known as: **Ascension Gift Ministries**) in the Body of Christ. These **Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers** (Eph 4:11-13), must in turn appoint leaders within the Church. They are to train the saints to function as ministers to the Body of Christ, and properly equip them for the task of extending the Kingdom of God on earth. In the New Testament these appointed leaders are called **Elders** (1 Tim 3:1-7) and **Deacons** (1 Tim 3:8-13), and those believers equipped to serve are called **Body (as in Body of Christ) Ministries** (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12).

Almost anyone in Pentecostal ministry these days is considered a **Pastor** (*Gifted Ministry*). "**Ministry Team**" is the term often chosen for the leadership team of the church, consisting of pastors and elders. Deacons (Gk: *diakonos*, meaning *servant*) function under a wide variety of titles from administration to business to finance to building maintenance, and much more besides.

The biblical pattern is open to broad interpretation as far as church governance is concerned, from papal to congregational to presbytery to the top-down style of many Pentecostal churches. However, as far as character qualifications and gifting are concerned, these are far more critical to the success of any local church.

The following diagram helps illustrate the leadership structure of the Church, as God ordained it in the Bible. It shows the proper authority order that has been prescribed according to Scripture.

The Authority Structure of the Church



A Source of some Confusion

One of the main points to remember is that no denomination on earth can claim exclusive right to the position of God's Holy Church. No denomination can therefore, by inference or direct claim, exclude the rest of the Body of Christ, or sections that suit them. It is arrogant and deceptive to make such claims. History clearly shows no one has all the truth, all of the time.

This is a great source of confusion to many, who often spend their whole lives believing that membership of a particular denomination is all that is required to get them into heaven! It can come as a complete surprise when they are faced with a real-life encounter with the living Christ, and become born-again by the Spirit of God, that what they assumed was a relationship with God was nothing more than a relationship with a religious institution!

A period of deep soul-searching often follows as they get used to the fact that membership of their church is not always the same as membership of the Body of Christ. The early church had similar difficulties from the very beginning, and John's Revelation (Rev 2 & 3) gave us an insight as to what Jesus truly thought about them at the time. His words are still very relevant to the church today! These words are sobering, considering the authority they are spoken with, but it didn't stop men getting it wrong then, and it doesn't stop them getting it wrong today.

As Christians we must be on our guard to love all men, especially those of the family of God (Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 2:17), and not be too critical if we have moved out of one church structure into another. What didn't work for one person might work quite well for someone else!

We would counsel every new believer to be cautious of returning to a prior denomination if these last few paragraphs describe your experience. A young Christian needs building up in their faith. Even a Christian of some experience, who is just coming out of a lifeless church or denomination, will still need building up in their faith. Returning to their old church can seem like a good idea at the time, but can often be disappointing, and very challenging.

Our faith needs to be built up, and this is done by hearing - as in hearing the Word of God preached (Rom 10:17) - and by gathering together in fellowship with true saints of God (Heb 10:25) with whom we are in agreement. If we didn't find Jesus after years in a prior church setting, we may not find its leaders, and possibly the members also, much interested in hearing what we have to say about our new experience with Jesus, particularly if it originated in a church they may not approve of such as a "Charismatic" or "Pentecostal" church, even though that was basically the makeup of the New Testament church.

If you have also been baptised in the Holy Spirit you are not only a "new creature in Christ" (2 Cor 5:17), but you have also received "power from on high" (Acts 1:8), and probably have some experience of the gifts of the Spirit, such as praying in tongues. This can cause great anguish to churches that preach and teach against these type of experiences and can cause a young believer great confusion and hardship if they think they can return to their "old church" with the power and life of the Spirit upon them and teach them something new. It will cause a reaction, and this may not always be a positive thing.

Some Strange Opinions on Church

Jesus died for His Church. He called His Church a rock, and taught that the gates of Hell would never prevail against it (Matt 16:18). Despite the power and authority vested in the church by Christ, there are still many contrary views on what the church is, and what it is supposed to do.

For example, a group of young people, when asked to describe the picture that came into their minds when they heard the word "**church**", said this:

- ◆ Ancient grey building, ceremonies, robes, candles
- ◆ Dithering, unmanly, sentimental, weak
- ◆ A place of charity, welfare, helping the poor
- ◆ A place of learning, a kind of school
- ◆ Where people find God and learn how to pray
- ◆ Long sermons, a big bore, a waste of time
- ◆ People who think they are better than anyone else

Most of these comments are a far cry from God's intention, and indeed, the reality of much of the church of Jesus Christ. Let's compare this to some of the things the Bible says about church.

The Church of the New Testament

The word **church** comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, used to denote a meeting of all the citizens of a city (polis). This "calling out" (ex=out, klesis=call or invitation) was for the purpose of being "called together" for a meeting. "*ekklesia*" (or "*ecclesia*") is used 115 times in the NT, and can be analysed as follows:

- ◆ The Universal Church 12 times
- ◆ The Local Church 60 times
- ◆ Local Churches 35 times
- ◆ Other Usage 28 times

Here are some of the terminologies used in the Bible to describe the church. Perhaps you can think of others?

- ♦ **Body:** primarily the universal church
- ♦ **Temple:** cornerstones, foundations, bricks
- ♦ **Household:** clearly defined membership, privileges, discipline, responsibilities, orderliness, shared resources, leadership
- ♦ **Lamp stand:** light, oil, separately accountable to Christ
- ♦ **Field (or Garden):** ploughing, sowing, cultivating, fertilising, protecting, pruning, harvesting, tares
- ♦ **Vine:** No life apart from Christ, discipline and pruning, possibility of being lost, fruitfulness, answered prayer
- ♦ **Bride:** submission to Christ, Christ's love of the church, Christ nourishing and caring for the church
- ♦ **Flock:** need for a shepherd, analogy of sheep, under-shepherds
- ♦ **Army:** warfare, battle, formation, strategy, conquest, victory

Church is not an afterthought of God. We are not here just to bide our time until the "glory cloud appears". Church is the divine instrument God has chosen to display His glory to the earth.

Jesus Christ is Lord

In order to understand God's plan and to see it effective in action, we must understand certain spiritual and biblical premises about church.

All power resides with the head. Jesus Christ is not just the head of the church. **All Authority** rests with Jesus Christ.

Matt 28:18; Dan 7:13,14; Matt 11:27-30; Rom 14:9; Col 1:13-23

There are three divinely ordained structure or institutions in this world of authority and covering:

- ♦ **The Government** (Rom 13:1,2; Tit 3:1,2; 1 Pet 2:13-15,18,19)
- ♦ **The Family** (Eph 5:22-33; 6:1-4; Col 3:18-21; 1 Pet 3:1-9)
- ♦ **The Church** (Heb 13:17; 1 Cor 11:3; Eph 1:22,23)

When we understand and accept God's ordained authority structures for this world, and how spiritual authority is an integral part of this them, we can begin to work with Him instead of against Him in order to see lost people won to Christ, and the kingdom of God established and extended in the earth.

THE CHURCH IS TOUGH AND INDESTRUCTIBLE

THE CHURCH HAS DOMINION

The Church Dominates Satan - and has Dominion over him!

Picture the scene - Jesus with a group of fishermen, tax collectors, publicans and peasants. Twelve men, one under suspicion. He promises to turn them into a body tougher than the proverbial **"gates of hell"** (Matt 16:18)!

The term "gates of hell" was a common idiom in the Greek world. Today we might say "mighty as a nuclear weapon" or "deadlier than a patriot missile". When a Greek wanted to express irresistible, invincible force, he could think of nothing stronger than the **gates of hell**.

According to Ken Chant of Vision Bible College, Jesus' statement could therefore be reasonably interpreted this way:

"Until now you have known nothing mightier than the gates of hell ... but I am about to create a new thing, My Church, against which the gates of hell will be as impotent as a paper sword against granite".

Satan is real, active and malevolent. He is a thief, a murderer and a liar (John 10:10), who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Pet 5:6-11). Submission to God, coupled to resistance towards evil (Jam 4:17) is the only path to true spiritual victory.

Christ has given us authority to crush our enemy under our feet. No matter how cunning Satan's plans, how wicked his designs, how dreadful his power, how immense his resources. His efforts will ultimately be in vain.

Spiritual health, spiritual power, personal fulfilment, prosperity and blessing, mastery over Satan - all of these arise from close fellowship with the Church of Jesus Christ, and from active participation in its worship, and in its witness.

Notice carefully that the promise of Christ is that **the gates of hell** cannot prevail against **the Church He is building**. Any other church, whether a particular denomination, an independent local assembly, or a gathering of disaffected believers, may fail if it has ceased to be a true expression of the church of Jesus Christ, or if it was never built by Him!

In Biblical days governors, councillors and judges often held court near the gates of a city. Gates therefore became synonymous with government and authority (eg London, Washington, Canberra). In the same way the Church is synonymous with authority in the Spirit.

Luke 10:17-20; Mark 16:17,18; Col 2:13-15

Here then is the secret of personal triumph. The logic is irrefutable:

**"Those who belong to an invincible church
will themselves be invincible! ...
... The more closely you are bound to this church,
the more you will share in its divine strength"**

Lesson

9

Small Group Concept

SMALL GROUP PARTICIPATION

For several decades the idea of small groups have been promoted by various ministries, with patchy results in the Western church but extraordinary results in the Third World and Asia.

- ♦ Yonggi Cho promoted the idea of cell groups for years, and pastored the largest church in the world in Seoul, South Korea, with a membership of nearly a million believers.
- ♦ It is said that China now has more Christians than Communists, with the majority of them meeting in small groups, often in homes. This was initiated by the Holy Spirit due to the intense persecution Chinese believers, and it has worked extraordinarily well ever since.
- ♦ In the '70s and '80s Cell Groups were promoted by US teachers such as Bob Mumford and Derek Prince. The concept was initially very popular but over time became abused by small-minded leaders with agendas to control and manipulate people instead of caring for them as shepherds. Discipleship became a dirty word and cell groups fell out of favour for several decades. The idea was right, as was much of the teaching, but it was taken to extremes and attracted disaffected believers, often with unconventional ideas and doctrines, who could not fit into a local church structure.

It has taken many years for Australia to recover from these questionable practices, but recover we must because the idea of small groups is very biblical, and works wherever it is followed faithfully by dedicated and committed Christian leaders with the best interest of those involved being held first and foremost. Isolationism and extreme theology should always be questioned, and avoided. However, whenever faithful leaders, who are accountable relationship with recognised spiritual authority and anointed senior leaders, then the risks of being led astray are greatly minimised.

I have pioneered several churches in Australia over the years. Each one began in our home until numbers grew sufficient to justify Sunday meetings in our own hall, and from there the churches were developed and established. This is what God called us to do, and it has been a effective for us. While we believe in and encourage small group meetings in our ministry, our main focus always remains on the local church as the primary corporate entity under which such groups function.

So we believe wholeheartedly in Small Groups. All churches that grow and succeed must ensure there are sufficient Small Groups meeting to involve everyone who wants to be involved in the life of the church outside the Sunday meetings. Such groups enable speedy integration of new members into the mainstream work and vision of the church, and are a great forum for fellowship, mentoring and the building and maintenance of long term friendships.

Emphasising Small Groups

Any church of any decent size that does not sponsor and encourage a small group network will struggle with connectivity in their congregation, with people not feeling like they “belong”, struggling to find an identity within the larger church.

Any church worth its salt will have an emphasis on small groups to facilitate regular contact and foster a sense of community. Ideally they will be represented by good leaders who are accountable to one another and the pastor and ministry team.

Small groups are not an end in and of themselves. They are more a part of how a diverse body of people of varying ages, gifts, interests and needs, come together to form a local body of believers, which we would call a local church, coming together corporately on Sundays to celebrate together through worship, communion, teaching and fellowship.

Small groups take various forms and can be as diverse as one can imagine. By their very nature they are groups of people meeting over common interests or for a common purpose. They may exist to reach out to non-churched or unchurched people, be spiritual in emphasis, or have a non-spiritual purpose, such as business, crafts, children, hobbies etc.

However it is important to remember that the underlying reason for a small group to exist is to promote the local church, its vision and ministry, and to care for those who consider it to be their spiritual home.

Small groups exist to encourage people in their faith and to introduce them to what being part of a local church is all about in an intimate, user-friendly, non-threatening way, and to encourage attendance at Sunday meetings.

For new people it is a way to integrate into church life quickly, through Foundations courses such as this one (which are best conducted in a small group setting). For others it is a way to be mentored in their faith, meeting regularly with a smaller group than meets on Sundays, and getting to know people more intimately in a more intimate setting of their choosing. Small groups encourage fellowship, promote teaching and study, and give us all a forum for meeting and getting to know others with similar interests.

Some years ago a senior pastor friend made a pertinent observation during a lunch meeting in Sydney. He said he didn't think the way we do church in Australia, in general terms, was working at any serious level, and that unless we made some significant changes we were in danger of becoming irrelevant to the general Australian community.

It was 2001 and at the time I thought he was onto something. I still think the same after all these years.

He said we were in serious danger of failing to fulfil the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) in our generation, and we needed to come up with something radically different if we were going to survive, and prosper (his words) as churches in 21st Century Australia. It confirmed again my commitment to small group ministry in the church, something that had been out of favour for a couple of decades at the time due to the abuses of the so-called 'discipleship' movement.

Seven Core Values for Small Groups

Much time has passed since, but nothing has changed my views on need for small group ministries in the church. I felt it was a 'word in season' for me at the time, and nothing has happened since to change my mind.

Churches need to encourage, organise and promote small groups as a primary vehicle to train and equip the saints (Eph 4:12-16) for the work of the ministry, and to integrate people into the life of the local church.

1. Value relationship and agreement

A church must be founded on principles of relationship and agreement. Those who are willing to become a part of what God is doing will feel very much at home in such an atmosphere and culture. It is part of the core value system of a church to attempt to build deep and lasting relationships with all who call the church their spiritual home. The church should be known as a friendly and open church, which visitors feel drawn too look deeper into. This is not propaganda, but a very real outworking of God's grace on a church fellowship.

"Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3)

Agreement with those whom God calls us to work closely with in the church is imperative. We must teach and practise agreement at every level. In general terms we need to agree with what we stand for together as a people. The vision God has given us, and the way we do things, are part of understanding our journey of faith together collectively. The higher a person rises in the leadership structure of a church the greater the need for agreement. It is a part of life that we all need to deal with our tendency to disagree (or be disagreeable) at times, and refrain from negative and divisive comments and attitudes along the way. At the same time we must understand that agreement is something worth fighting for. No matter what it costs, working towards agreeable solutions at all times must be an integral part of the DNA of a local church, or problems will inevitably arise.

The devil, Lucifer, whose name means "*accuser*", is always on the lookout for those whom he can deceive into believing that a lower standard is an acceptable one. He will try and convince you that it is not possible to walk in such agreement, but this is patently untrue. If we seek to working in agreement with others wherever possible, we have a much greater change of success in any group dynamic. It is a question of integrity, and obedience to God's Word.

"Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven" (Matt 18:19)

If two or three, in agreement, can obtain anything they ask from the Father, no wonder the devil wants Christians to believe it can't be done! Agreement is definitely worth fighting for!

"Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgement" (1 Cor 1:10)

This is not to say that we must agree on absolutely everything, like robots or mindless automatons. Churches worldwide have been guilty over the centuries (and this is no less true today) of programming their followers to believe that only their particular biblical world view is right. Consequently everyone else, by default, must be wrong. Nothing is further from the truth.

It is possible to have divergent views on a wide range of issues and even biblical interpretations and still have both unity and agreement on every level that is important, without compromising either faith or integrity.

Paul strongly encouraged the Corinthian believers to agree together. Later in the same letter we get an insight into divisions and disputes, and the reason why they must come up occasionally, even in healthy churches:

“For there must also be divisions (factions) among you, in order that those who are approved may become evident” (1 Cor 11:19)

You see, it is not wrong to be different, or to disagree, but it is wrong to try and walk together and maintain that disagreement.

There are matters of importance such as relate to church vision, direction, leadership style and function, and how we go about relating and caring for one another that it is important to agree with, otherwise you might just be in the wrong church! If you prefer hymns to more contemporary worship music, we may never agree. The same goes for the ones who enjoy church liturgy and religious ceremony. That sort of doesn't fit so well into a charismatic/Pentecostal style of service, but if you enjoy it you should find a place where it is practised to your liking. If you do not enjoy the Pentecostal flavour and are inclined to support a more traditional approach to church and ministry, then that is where you may belong.

There is plenty to choose from in Christendom so no one should ever miss out on fellowship because of such differences. We all belong somewhere, and if we can't find a church that suits us, then we need to look closer to home. Perhaps the fault lies within. If this is your tendency, you'll need a good church with strong leadership to help you sort it all out!

The goal of the local church should always be agreement, and unity, in the power of the Holy Spirit, especially among those in leadership positions, or in positions of influence over others.

Remember, agreement is worth fighting for. This is not a contradiction in terms, but a statement of fact, and worth remembering.

2. Value godly spiritual authority

A good church will generally have some emphasis on spiritual authority, although this is very much in a relational sense rather than an autocratic or dogmatic one. Understanding spiritual authority is foundational to our faith, and such a problem to so many believers! Though this shouldn't be so but often is the case. Understanding relationships and authority structures in the church, is essential if we are to walk in agreement together (Matt 18:19-20).

Many believers are frustrated with a spiritual journey that should be a joy, frustrated by ineffective leadership in the church, and lose their way. Still others get caught up in the spiritual 'excesses' which can put other areas of life out of balance. There is much to be said for good church management, sound balanced leadership, and good, Holy Ghost inspired and directed spiritual authority.

God created us to be in good relationship to one another, and to achieve this He ordained three primary authority structures to guide us and protect us in the world. In simple terms these structures are:

- ♦ **The Government** (Rom 13:1,2; Tit 3:1,2; 1 Pet 2:13-15,18,19)
- ♦ **The Family** (Eph 5:22-33; 6:1-4; Col 3:18-21; 1 Pet 3:1-9)
- ♦ **The Church** (Heb 13:17; 1 Cor 11:3; Eph 1:22,23)

We must all learn to relate to each of these structures as God directs.

Understanding spiritual authority, especially as it relates to the church, is imperative if we are to agree together, tear down the strongholds, and see the kingdom of God established.

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Heb 13:17)

3. Value leadership that empowers people

The local church should be led by those with leadership gifts (see ***Foundations 8 - The Church, Structure and Authority***).

The primary task of a leader is to create an environment in which people are being equipped and released to serve God and fulfil His purpose for their lives (Eph 4:11-16).

4. Value the organising of ministry around people's gifts

Every Christian has at least one gift where they can excel in serving God and their local church. Identifying and understanding such gifts determines the role each person should play (Rom 12:3-8). People will always do better in any endeavour they embark on when it is closely connected to either their passion or their gifts.

5. Value passionate Christian living

Full devotion to Christ is normal for every believer, and results in:

- ♦ A passionate desire to read the Bible regularly.
- ♦ Being committed to a active prayer life.
- ♦ Continually meeting with other believers to build each other up, not neglecting the Church family.
- ♦ Seeking opportunities to share their faith with unbelievers.
- ♦ Managing their time, talents and treasure for the honour of God who has entrusted them to us (Rom 12:11-12).

6. Value church structures that work

We believe that good organising structures in the church are those which allow ministry to be done without hindrance. The Bible, not tradition, is our guide in how we develop effective organisation. A good church should be committed to simply structure and “uncluttered Christianity” (Mark 2:27).

Sunday services should be dynamic, relevant and inspirational to the target audience at all times. Small groups should be the same. All messages should be inspirational, challenging and easy to follow and understand. We should be user-friendly and, as in most things, keeping things simple is often best.

7. Value Small Groups

Ongoing and positive life changes happen best in small groups. A lively and caring small group is one where believers:

- ♦ Are challenged to put the Bible into practice in their daily life.
- ♦ Receive encouragement and help in real need areas.
- ♦ Use their gifts to minister to others in the group.
- ♦ Work together to reach out to new people (Acts 2:46-47).

Small Group Dynamics

Jesus intends His followers to become like Him in attitude and behaviour. The church exists to save and transform people. Small groups provide the best environment for this transformation to take place. Significant relationships occur best in the context of a small group gathering.

A small group of believers who love and care for one another can experience the life Christ promised at the deepest level possible. Connecting people in a group like this is not an optional sub-ministry of the church - it is the church in its smallest organised unit. Without this connection people may attend meetings but they aren't truly participating in church life as it can and should be experienced.

The biological cell (the small group is based upon the concept of 'cells') is a basic building block of life. Each new cell looks identical to the original cell because the DNA branded nucleus multiplies itself before the cell reproduces. In this way, the first cell is as healthy and productive as the newest cell formed. The cells work together to make the body function as a true miracle from God.

A small group is similar to a biological cell in concept. We gather together to edify one another and increase kingdom effectiveness by sharing our experiences and encouraging others to attend. Sometimes a group grows and multiplies, forming a new group or groups. More often a small group meets a specific need and remain stable over a long period of time. Both models are viable in a local church setting.

Small Group Meetings

Small group meetings are held in various locations where people are able to get together around a common interest or activity, usually in an informal environment, but not exclusively so. Meetings focus on several priorities, depending on the reason for the Small Group's existence in the first place.

Some are outreach oriented, while others cater for the needs of the new believer. Other small groups are spiritually inclined with Bible study, discussion or prayer as their main focus. Yet others are topical, allowing people with common interests to gather and invite friends along. Such wide reaching special interest (topical) groups include all facets of youth and young adults, worship and music teams, women's and men's meetings, business networking, and other special interest groups. These can cover everything from spiritual issues to social occasions with dinners, movies, fashion shows and the like.

Every church member is strongly encouraged to become involved in a small group that meets their particular needs and suits their particular interests.

Small groups really help people to integrate into the life of the church. It is our way, as born-again believers in Jesus Christ, of helping to fulfil the Great Commission found in Matt 28:18-20 and reaching out to a community that largely doesn't know, and consequently doesn't care, much about God at all.

Small Group Goals

Where possible **every person** should be connected to their fellow believers in a small group setting.

In a small group you will:

- ◆ Be cared for by a trained small group leader.
- ◆ Build strong, encouraging friendships that can last a lifetime.
- ◆ Have a safe place to develop the gifts, talents and abilities God gave you.
- ◆ Grow in your faith as you apply biblical teaching to your every day life.
- ◆ Be supported in reaching out to your friends and family.
- ◆ Be a part of actively building the church as your group invites friends or new people in church along to join them.

Lesson

10

PRAYER ... Simple, Intimate Communion with God

PRAYER - Communion with God

Mention prayer to people who have only been trained by church tradition and religious liturgy, and the effect will be instantaneous. Noses turn up, faces wrinkle, and the subject quickly changes into something more interesting. Yet what could be more interesting than communicating with the living God, the creator of heaven and earth? The problem is that for most people a real spiritual connection has never been made.

Prior to becoming a Christian your own experience of prayer was probably confined to periods of desperation, when there was simply no other option available. In this situation various promises are usually made in the hope that they will “appease” the God who has allowed adverse circumstances to come upon us, and when things change, and the pressure is off, the promises are quickly forgotten - until the next time!

This is a sad indictment of the shallowness of our spiritual awareness prior to becoming a Christian, and is not a pattern that we should emulate now that we have found ourselves in a place of commitment to the things of God.

As a Christian, coming into relationship with Jesus Christ through the born-again experience is like having dead batteries brought back to life, fully charged to capacity. We are suddenly off and running, feeling good and knowing God is with us. Nothing can stop us - until the batteries run low and we start to feel that God has deserted us.

Prayer is not complicated. It is one of the simplest biblical commands, and everyone, even a little child, can pray effectively. To pray is to enter into an intimate communion with the Lord.

Intimate fellowship and communion with God has got to be the highest possible achievement a man or woman can aspire to. To be intimate with God means to be at one with Him, to share deeply, and to communicate with Him in a fashion which indicates that the relationship is one based on love, honour and respect.

We enter into this communion through prayer. Prayer is not one-way, but rather two-way communication. Those who are serious about prayer will usually wait around long enough to hear what God has to say. Our lives need to be steeped in prayer, our thoughts and decisions filtered through and covered in prayer. We cannot be a Christ-like people unless we are also a praying people.

This is not always as easy to practise as it is to discuss. The fact is, everyday life does not naturally lend itself to prayer. Time is often against us. Situations that shouldn't have such prominence overshadow our thinking and often eat away at the time we had planned to spend with the Lord.

Magnificent in Simplicity Powerful in Effect

Prayer is magnificent in its simplicity, but its effect is extraordinarily powerful. Nothing on this earth can touch the power of positive, faith-inspired prayer:

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up ... The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (James 5:14-16)

Nothing in this world, or the next, can stand against someone who bathes themselves in the anointing oil of God’s Holy Spirit through prayer. Prayer that touches God’s heart and releases His power on earth is one of the most necessary parts of our Christian walk. Yet we neglect it with such easy abandon, then wonder why the power is missing from our lives!

Men and Women of Prayer

The course of nations can be affected by one man’s prayer. The prophet Elijah was a man like ourselves, with similar passions (James 5:17,18). He prayed that it would not rain in Israel except by his word, and for three and a half years it didn’t rain (1 Kings 17:1).

David was a man of prayer who meditated regularly on God’s law (Psalm 1). The Bible says that he was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14). There are constant references in the Psalms which highlight the quality of David’s heart attitude towards prayer and worship.

The list goes on and on. The Bible is full of miraculous stories - such as barren women bearing children; parents having their dead children raised back to life; and God providing miraculously when everything looked lost and hopeless.

Healing the sick and casting out demonic spirits occur largely as a result of our exercising our God-ordained authority over the works of the enemy (Mark 16:17,18), along with prayer in the name of Jesus. There is nothing that can’t be accomplished by a person who faithfully builds up their most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost (Jude 1:20).

Jesus is our Example

If it were possible for man to get by with only a minimum of prayer, and still accomplish God’s purposes for their life, then Jesus would have been the person to do it. He was God’s Son, a perfect man, without the natural tendency towards sin that we are born with, yet even in His case He needed communion, through prayer, with the Father.

Jesus’ life before He was baptised by John in the Jordan is largely a mystery. We do know, however, that by the time He embarked on His chosen ministry of preaching the gospel to the poor, meeting their needs, healing wounds and releasing captives (Luke 4:18,19), He was a person well-disciplined in prayer, and well-versed in the Scriptures.

Jesus would often stay out all evening just charging His spiritual batteries, staying in touch with His Father and tapping into the Holy Spirit, who was the source of His power during His earthly ministry. Sometimes He was even ministered to by angels (Mark 1:12,13). Frequently He arose before dawn and went to a lonely place to pray and seek the Father.

Jesus set an example we are to follow as closely as possible. We are told that, ***“greater works shall we do than He did”*** (John 14:12), but this won’t happen unless we know how to use some of the biblical keys that He used to obtain, and maintain, this anointing of power from on high (Acts 1:8).

God is Spirit (John 4:24), and those who worship Him must do so in spirit and truth. This is an important principle - which we ignore at our peril. Prayer is a requirement of our Christian walk. If we consistently fail to be obedient to what God asks of us, or pretend to hold down a pious relationship with the Lord when in fact we are out of fellowship with God, He will probably ignore our prayers altogether (Isaiah 1:10-20).

When this happens we get upset and complain, and wonder why God isn’t with us anymore. Although He promises never to leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5), He is quite capable of ignoring our pleas until a more appropriate moment, usually after we have repented of sin which may have tripped us up or adjusted a wrong attitude we are carrying. God loves us too much to let us get away with what our corrupt, former flesh-nature still desires.

Prayer is not an Option

Prayer is not an option - it is a command! In what is commonly referred to as ***“The Lord’s Prayer”*** (Matthew 6:9-13), Jesus gave us a format, or a basic design, from which we may structure our prayers for maximum effect. We could do worse than to follow it!

The Bible clearly teaches that we are to come to God in prayer:

- ◆ “Seek His face continually” (1 Chron 16:11).
- ◆ “Ask ... Seek ... Knock” (Matt 7:7).
- ◆ “Watch and pray that you do not fall into temptation” (Matt 26:41).
- ◆ “Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1).
- ◆ “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Eph 6:18).
- ◆ “Pray continually” (1 Thess 5:17).

Key to Effective Prayer

The key to effective prayer is obedience. From the very beginning prayer has been closely associated with sacrifice which, in the Old Testament, was often the only way of coming into the presence of God without being destroyed. It was also considered an appropriate way to get God’s attention when making some intercessory request in times of great need.

However, God has always been far more interested in obedience than sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22,23), and although we need to maintain a clean and repentant heart towards God, prayer is a command, not an option. If it requires a sacrifice of our time, or our priorities then so be it (Heb 13:15), because to fail to make this sacrifice is to disobey God, and when we know what is right to do, and fail to do it, God considers that sin (James 4:17).

Prayer is Intercessory

From the time of Moses, to the time of the Kings and beyond, one of the main emphases of prayer was intercession. For example:

Genesis 18:22-33 Abraham's intercession for Lot, and his family, when God had decided to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

Exodus 32:11-14 Moses' entreaty to restrain God from destroying Israel over the golden calf incident.

1 Samuel 7:5-9 Samuel's entreaty to the Lord for Israel's deliverance from the Philistines.

1 Kings 8:22-61 Solomon's prayer of intercession for His people at the dedication service of the Temple of the Lord.

2 Kings 19:14-20 Hezekiah's prayer of deliverance when he laid Sennacherib's defiant letter before the Lord.

To intercede means to stand in the gap. Jesus intercedes for us before the Father (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25), and the Spirit intercedes for us, when we are not sure what to say, in "sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26-27). When we pray to God in an intercessory way, we are choosing to "stand in the gap" for someone, or for a particular situation. This type of praying is challenging and pleases God, who seems to enjoy having his people "press through the barriers" in this way. Not only does it develop our character, but it also requires a certain selflessness and sacrifice.

Sometimes God says 'No'!

Throughout the Bible, prayer was usually effective (Genesis 19:17-22), but not always (Exodus 32:30-35). Jeremiah was even forbidden to pray for a rebellious people (Jeremiah 7:16). Presumably, if he had prayed, he would have been answered in the negative.

Through prayer prophets of old heard from God (Dan 9:20-23; Is 6:1-8), although sometimes they had to wait a long time (Hab 2:1). For Jeremiah, at least, it was often an agonising experience (Jer 20:7-18).

Jesus encouraged persistence in prayer (Luke 11:5-13), taught that prayer should be humble and penitent (Luke 18:10-14), simple (Matthew 6:5-15), forgiving (Matthew 18:21-35), and expectant (Mark 11:24). Jesus himself needed time alone with His Father (Luke 5:15,16), especially in times of spiritual conflict (John 12:27-32). He offered thanks (Luke 10:21,22), sought guidance (Luke 6:12), and interceded for His disciples (John 17:6-26).

Seven Keys to Powerful Prayer

1. Dealing with Unforgiveness

Forgiveness is critical to opening a pathway to communicating with God. Coming with unforgiveness in our heart will hinder our prayers and even contaminate our relationship with Him (Matt 6:14-15). Forgiveness is a choice we need to make in order to access the throne room in prayer. It is less about how we might feel and more about being obedient to clear biblical instruction.

"And when you pray, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25)

2. Faith must be present

Without faith we cannot please God (Heb 11:6), so it is an important commodity of prayer. Faith is not believing that God **Can** do something, because we all believe that He can do **Anything**. Faith is believing that God **Will** do something specific, for you, according to His Word. Without faith we are largely wasting our time and energy because we pray in **Unbelief**, hoping that God hears us and that, if He hears us, then hoping He will answer. Faith **Knows** that He hears us, and we are therefore **Confident** we will obtain our petition according to His Word.

“Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith” (Matt 21:22)

3. Be single-minded

There is no room for double-mindedness in our prayer life. When we pray we must believe that God is there, and that He hears us. Do not doubt or fear, which is unbelief. Such things have the opposite effect on God to the one we are seeking. Strive at all times to be a person of single-minded focus and avoid double-mindedness when it comes to prayer (James 1:6-8) Expect an answer and expect it to be good (Matt 7: 9-11). Mark these words carefully - you will get exactly what you expect and more besides. This principle is spiritual and works equally well in the negative as it does in the positive (Job 3:25).

“But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8)

4. Pray according to His Word

As important as faith is, it must be subjected to God’s Word, and His revealed will for our lives. Faith is so powerful that it can have a tendency to twist the arm of God into granting us petitions that are not in our best interest. If we are unwise, we will pray according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit. This type of faith is a corruption of true faith and does not please God. When we are not sure what to pray we should find out before we pray, or ask God to show us, so that we can direct our prayers positively, and in the direction He wants us to go.

“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him” (John 5:14-15)

5. Maintain a good confession

Hebrews 3:1; 4:14-16;

What we believe in our heart, we will often speak out, as Jesus said:

***“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”
(Matt 12:34; Luke 6:45)***

We must ensure that we are not undoing all the good we have prayed into existence by our negative and contrary confession. By all means think negative thoughts - we all have them at times, but we must overcome them if we are to succeed at any worthwhile endeavour in life. Don't give the devil a foothold by telling him, and anyone else who listens, that you agree with his version of truth. Prove your faith by holding on to a good confession that agrees with God's word and His purposes for your life.

6. Be persistent

When we have done all we can to ensure that we are operating in faith, with a positive confession according to God's Word for our lives, then we should wait expectantly on God for His answer. This is often the final test we must go through before God releases His abundance into our lives.

It can also be a difficult time to experience because we must hold onto something intangible such as a desire, a vision, a promise, or a goal. Yet hold onto it we must - until it comes to pass.

Sometimes God tests our perseverance, other times the enemy is resisting us (Dan 10:10-21). No matter what the reason for any delay, trust God to bring the answer to your prayer, according to His time scale, and necessarily ours.

"Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Matt 7:7-8)

7. Pray at all times in the Spirit

The Bible indicates strongly that "praying in the Spirit is an important part of any healthy and effective prayer life.

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Rom 8:26)

Praying in the Spirit is a term that can refer to spiritual warfare, and we will speak to that point shortly. Essentially it means being in harmony with the will of God. The Spirit knows God's will and can interpret this to us if we allow Him to do so. This requires us to develop and close and intimate prayer life.

"Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (Eph 6:18a)

Listen to God

So the challenge for believers is to hook into what the Holy Spirit is wanting us to focus on. This means not just petitioning Him with our needs or requests for others, which are valid prayers at times, but also spending time listening to what He has to say. Real, effective prayer is about spending time building an intimate relationship with our Lord and Saviour via the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Warfare

Psalm 46:10 asks us to ***“Be still and know that I am God”***. Spending time in His presence waiting on Him and being open to what he wants to share with us. This is often hard to do in our busy world with all its distractions, but it is very necessary. Our Christian walk requires us to be in relationship with God, and to be sensitive to what He might want to say or do through us at any given time.

Spiritual Warfare is a topic on its own, and an important aspect of a healthy prayer life. The Bible says we do not war against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces arrayed against us and will do everything in their power to frustrate both the will of God and His plan for our lives.

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12)

When we pray in the Spirit we access the authority Jesus now has following His death and resurrection. All authority now rests in the head of the Church, who is Jesus our Lord.

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’” (Matt 28:18)

Although these spiritual forces are powerful, they are as nothing when we use the authority God has provided us with, as you will discover when you read further into Eph 6:10-18. There are three distinct pieces of artillery in our spiritual arsenal that will empower us to victory in spiritual warfare:

- ♦ **The Word of God:** Building a strong foundation in the Word of God is essential, praying according to His Word and always aligning ourselves with what it teaches.
- ♦ **The Blood of Jesus:** Understanding the power we have through the blood of Jesus, who didn't just die that we might live, but that we would walk in the victory He won at the cross through His shed blood.
- ♦ **The Name of Jesus:** He has a name that is above every name, and one day every knee will bow to it, and every tongue will confess He is Lord.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11)

Understanding the authority we have been given to wield in the name of Jesus is essential, as the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish High Priest, learned the hard way in Acts 19:13-16. It is sobering reading. They clearly had no born-again relationship with Jesus, so their use of His name was not recognised by the demons who they were seeking to cast out!

Praying in Tongues

We cannot close this section on praying in the Spirit without a brief mention of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, and of the ability to pray in new tongues which flows from this experience. Praying in tongues often defies logical explanation because it is a gift which is spiritually discerned and cannot easily be explained naturally. Once we receive our new prayer language we must not neglect it, but use it each day to develop a closer relationship with the Lord.

The ability to pray in new tongues (“glossolalia” in Greek), is given to us as a sign and referred to frequently in the early church records of the book of Acts.

Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-4; Acts 10:1 48; Acts 19:1-6

In 1 Corinthians (chs 12-14) there is good reading for the interested student on the various gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul mentions in these passages that he wants everyone to speak in tongues (1 Cor 4:5), and that he (Paul) speaks in tongues more than all of the Corinthians (1 Cor 14:18). It is clear from these passages that speaking in tongues is for today and should be an integral part of every believer’s prayer life.

The wonderful thing about the gift of tongues is that it doesn’t make any sense to our minds. We can be occupied in other activities such as driving, working around the house or garden, walking or, in fact, doing almost anything and still pray in tongues either out loud or quietly. This has a direct effect on our spirit and will cause us to be renewed and refreshed as we persevere and discipline ourselves to honour God in this simple but profound way.

As human beings we are designed to operate spiritually, and as Christians we cannot be overcomers and walk in victory on a daily basis unless we avail ourselves of this power from on high.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8)

Praying in tongues allows us to access this power direct from the Holy Spirit, and as we pray regularly and consistently in this way God will reward us for our faithfulness.

In Acts 19:1-7 Paul inquired of the small band of new Christians at Ephesus (about twelve in all) as to whether or not they had “received the Holy Spirit when they believed ...” It’s a question we should ask today as we watch some churches use organisation and tradition as a substitute for the lack of spiritual power in their experience. Paul then proceeded to lead the Ephesian Christians into a new and thrilling experience which we call the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. They prayed in tongues and prophesied, and we know they then started to move in the power of the Holy Spirit because history tells us that many people were subsequently saved and a very large church was established in what was a key provincial city of the Roman Empire, in Asia, at that time.

Praying in tongues allows us to access this power direct from the Holy Spirit, and as we pray regularly and consistently in this way God will reward us for our faithfulness.

**Give God One
Hour A Day
Barbara Bartocci**

The following article has been in my files for several decades and been shared with countless people. I know the author is Barbara Bartocci. I copied her name when the original article disintegrated from overuse. The magazine was probably Readers Digest, which I subscribed to for many years. It is not a new article, but a challenging and moving story, almost a parable of sorts, and highly recommended reading. I trust I have given the correct credit for it in this brochure and the posted article on prayer.

One Hour That Can Change Your Life

It was my birthday, that wintry morning all those years ago, and I felt harried as I grabbed my briefcase and headed for a business breakfast. Life had been good to me overall. My small advertising agency was thriving. My husband and children were well. Yet something seemed to be missing - something that did not even have a name. I felt it only as a small emptiness inside me.

At the restaurant I joined Don Campbell, a tall, lantern-jawed man of 60-odd years. He was a successful marketing consultant with an unusual empathy for people. I was always struck by his calm, peaceful manner.

Over the meal we discussed our advertising project and then, business behind us, I mentioned my birthday and confessed to my nagging feelings of emptiness.

"Want to fill it?" Don asked. "Sure," I replied.

"Start your day with an hour of prayer."

"I don't have time for that!" I gasped.

"Exactly what I said twenty years ago. I was head of an advertising agency, running every which-way just to keep up. I believed in daily prayer but couldn't find the time for it. I had the distinct feeling my life was getting out of control. Then a friend told me I was going about things backwards."

"'You're trying to fit God into your life', he said. 'Five minutes here, ten minutes there. You need to fit your life around God, and you do that with a commitment. An hour a day - now that's commitment.' The idea is to take a chunk of time big enough to mean something to you - and then give that chunk to God."

Don's eyes twinkled. "I thought my friend was off his rocker. To find an extra hour for God I'd have to get up an hour earlier. I'd lose valuable sleep and ruin my health." The twinkle turned into a grin. "But I haven't been sick in twenty years."

Twenty years! I left the restaurant in turmoil. An hour of prayer? Preposterous! Yet I couldn't get the idea out of my mind.

Saying nothing to our three teenagers or my husband I set my alarm for 5:00am. Where we live it's cold and dark at five o'clock on a winter morning. I wanted to curl back under the blanket, but forced myself to

get up. The house wrapped around me, dark and gloomy. I tip-toed into the lounge room, ignoring Burt, our Labrador Retriever, and settled on the couch. It was peculiar being alone with God. No church rituals. Just me, and God, for an hour.

I glanced at my watch and cleared my throat. "Well, God, here I am. Now what?"

A Warm Presence

I would like to report that God replied immediately, but there was only quiet. As I watched the first tinges of sunrise, I tried to pray, but thought instead of my son, Andy, and the fight we'd had the day before. I thought about a client whose business had hit a rough spot. I thought of inconsequential things. Yet gradually my erratic thoughts slowed down. My breathing slowed, too. I began to sense a stillness within me. I grew aware of small sounds - the refrigerator hum, Burt's tail slapping the floor, a branch brushing a window. Then I felt the warm presence of Love. I know no other way to describe it. The air, the very place in which I sat, seemed to change, as the ambience of a house will change when someone you love comes home.

I had been sitting for 50 minutes, but only then did I really begin to pray. And I discovered that I wasn't praying with my usual hurried words or my list of demands. All my life I'd been told that God loved me. On that day I experienced His love, and the immensity of it was so overwhelming that I sat in quiet thanksgiving for nearly fifteen minutes. Then Andy's alarm went off, and Burt gave a small 'woof'. The ordinary day had begun. But all through the rest of the day I felt warmed by the memory of that love.

One More Day

The next morning the house seemed even darker and colder than before. But, shivering, I did get up. 'One more day', I thought. And the next day, one more day.

Day by single day, many years have now passed. There have been plenty of crises in those years: - difficulty with one of our teenagers, marital turbulence, a big financial loss. Through every crisis, I have found a quietness of soul in that hour with God. It gives me time to put things into perspective, to find God in every circumstance. Once I find Him, there seems to be no problem that cannot be resolved.

God's Waiting Room

On some mornings I am quickly filled with the wonder and glory of God. But on other mornings I feel nothing. That's when I remember something else Don Campbell said. "There will be times when your mind just won't go into God's sanctuary. That's when you spend your hour in God's waiting-room. Still, you're there, and God appreciates that you came. What's important is the commitment."

Because of that commitment, my life is better. Starting my day with an hour of prayer has filled the empty space - to overflowing.

Lesson

11

THE DARK SIDE

Understanding Spiritual Reality

Life is full of conflict and confusion. Wherever we turn, we see men and women in conflict with one another. Whether individually, as a community, or as a nation, it seems that conflict and violence are a very real part of life as we know it. What is more, it has always been this way and, according to the Bible, will remain so until the end of time.

We cannot avoid conflict, but by learning what God says about it, and the forces that are behind much of what we perceive as being bad in the world, we gain a fresh understanding of why the world seems so hell-bent on destroying itself, and why mankind, with all its wisdom and technology, is powerless to stop it.

As Christians our battle is spiritual and conflict, at its source, is spiritual also. Without being overly conscious of evil and its deceptions, it is necessary to understand that there is a world of spiritual power which will affect you whether you are aware of it or not. These powers are both good and evil, and are opposite to, and oppose one another.

Ultimate Authority and Counterfeit Authority

The ultimate authority in the spiritual realm is God, who represents everything that is good, righteous and holy (Lev 11:44-45). He is perfection (Psalm 50:2), and with Him nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37). He is the creator of heaven and earth, and there has never been any challenge to His authority, or His power, in the ultimate sense.

The opposing force of the universe is the person of Satan, his demons, and those who choose to follow after his ways. He is evil personified, and seeks to destroy anything that represents God, His goodness, and His kingdom authority.

Satan is a terrorist working covertly, in the dark, and rarely manifesting his true colours. He is a very real and very powerful being who hates mankind because we represent God's heart. In his perversion Satan believes that by hurting or destroying man, God's creation, he can hurt God - in the same way that an enemy, by hurting or destroying your children, can seek to destroy you.

War in Heaven

Sometime before the creation of the world, there was a war in heaven. To some degree, this war continues to this day. Just as in many areas of the world today, where an enemy is defeated, guerrilla tactics and terrorist activities sometimes continue for many years. So it is with the conflict in the heavenlies. Eventually however, the enemy is completely vanquished and peace is restored.

Where an enemy chooses to be difficult hostilities can drag on for a very long time, usually until such time as a victorious government has the will, and is prepared to expend the resources, to completely wipe the enemy from the face of the earth.

Well, God has a **plan**, and the **will** and **resources** to complete it. However, it is part of His divine strategy to allow the conflict to continue for a while yet. Bible prophecy gives us some very positive clues as to what the ultimate end will be, for the saint in heaven and the devil in hell, but not the exact timing of the final battle. Only The Father has this information (Matt 24:36).

So, we have been born into a pre-existing war (Rev 12:7-11) that began before we came along, and will most likely outlive us, unless Jesus comes back first.

It is not our job to pine or sue for peace, or wish for another reality. We are born into a spiritual war and expected to make war, in the Spirit, to fulfil the purposes of God whenever necessary. We are recruited as soldiers into the army of the Lord. We are warriors and fighters, and have the power of the Holy Spirit on our side. The end of the book tells us we are already victorious through Christ our Lord, and that we have nothing to fear (2 Tim 1:7), because we overcome by the blood of the lamb, and the word of our testimony (Rev 12:11).

Lucifer the Lightbearer becomes Satan the Accuser

Before the earth was formed and Man was created in God's image (Genesis 1:26), God created the heavens (Genesis 1:1). It would appear that there are several orders of created angelic beings, some of whom we read about in the Bible, such as Michael, Gabriel and Lucifer.

In the beginning the angel, Lucifer, whose name means "Lightbearer" was a powerful and very influential cherub, in charge of as much as one third of the angelic host:

"You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: The ruby, the topaz, and the diamond; the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper; the lapis lazuli, the turquoise, and the emerald; and the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, was in you. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, until unrighteousness was found in you" (Ezek 28:13-15)

Apparently, Lucifer became proud of his beauty, gifts and talents, and sought to be equal with God. This was a fatal error on his part. At some stage he lost sight of who was the creator, and who was the created, something we should all bear in mind on occasions.

Lucifer's rebellion probably occurred over a very long period of time. I'm sure God would have tried to do whatever was possible to avoid the conflict that arose, and to bring Lucifer to his senses. During this period of time it appears Lucifer sowed his poisonous seeds of rebellion in others who served under him, because eventually he had an army of angels willing to take on the other two thirds of heaven, in a war which would make our best Special FX movies pale into insignificance by comparison.

“By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendour. I cast you to the ground; I put you before kings, that they may see you. By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade, you profaned your sanctuaries. Therefore I have brought fire from the midst of you; it has consumed you, and I have turned you to ashes on the earth in the eyes of all who see you. All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have become terrified, and you will be no more” (Ezek 28:16-19)

Lucifer was determined to set himself above the throne of God, and for reasons which we may never quite understand fully, he actually thought he could accomplish it.

Satan is Defeated

Jesus made an interesting comment when the seventy disciples had returned from ministering deliverance to people in the surrounding districts, revealing His true eternal nature in the process:

“And the seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.’ And He said to them, ‘I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven” (Luke 10:17-20)

In the book of Revelation, we get another insight into this war that happened in heaven before time, with Lucifer referred to as “the dragon”:

“And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him” (Rev 12:7-9)

In this passage, we see the emergence of a new name for Lucifer. He is no longer referred to by his glorious, angelic name of Lucifer (the “Lightbearer”) but rather is referred to as the “devil”, and “Satan”, his name having been changed from “Lightbearer” to “Accuser”.

“And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night” (Rev 12:10)

Finally, in the book of Isaiah we get a picture of how far Satan has actually fallen, and his present condition according to prophecy.

We see his pride and arrogance as he makes five statements, about his intentions, beginning with “*I will ...*”. We then see the results of his futile exercise, and gain an insight into his real condition when Isaiah said, “***Is this the man who made the earth to tremble ...***”:

“How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, To the recesses of the pit. Those who see you will gaze at you, They will ponder over you, saying, ‘Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, Who made the world like a wilderness and overthrew its cities, who did not allow his prisoners to go home?’” (Isaiah 14:12-17)

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, and replace them with the abundant blessings and provision God has reserved for His children. We are now joint heirs with Christ, according to his unchangeable promises:

Galatians 3:29; Ephesians 3:6; Titus 3:7; Hebrews 6:17

God has promised we shall be victorious, and we have everything we need pertaining to life and godliness (1 Peter 1:2-4), available to us. The cross of Calvary defeated the power and authority of Satan forever but in His wisdom God chose to defeat Satan’s works before taking him completely out of the picture. The Church Age sees the believer with the necessary tools for victory at their disposal, and nothing is impossible if we believe and have faith in God (Mark 11:22-24).

TWO MAIN ADVERSARIES

As Christians we have two main adversaries. We must learn what we can about them so that at all times we are prepared and able to deal with them effectively, to the glory of God. One is the flesh, which does not refer to our physical bodies but to our old, carnal, sinful nature that should no longer be playing an active role in our lives (Heb 3:12; 1 Pet 2:11,12). The other is the enemy of our souls, Satan, and his horde of demons and evil spirits (John 10:10; Eph 6:10-18).

Our Old Nature The Flesh

Our old nature is dealt with by a process of mind renewal:

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2)

We are told in the Scriptures that the eye is the lamp of the body. If the eye is good the whole body is full of light (Matt 6:22-23). What we allow in through our physical senses, such as our eyes and ears, will ultimately have an effect on our whole being, and especially our spiritual lives.

It is our responsibility to make sure that what our mind dwells on is acceptable to God (Phil 4:8-9). Remember also, that bad company corrupts good character (1 Cor 15:33), so do not be deceived.

You should not be misled into thinking you can continue as before after you have been born again. On becoming a Christian, we must also become selective as to what we allow into our life, from that time forth, and change the things that are in our power to change. There are things which we may not, or should not, expect to change necessarily, such as our career path (assuming what you do is not illegal or immoral) or our family. In this case we should shine as a light where we are planted and be a testimony to God's saving power by our good deeds (Heb 10:24). The kind of books we read, the music we listen to and the media we watch are, however, completely under our control and must remain so if we are to be successful in our spiritual journey.

Satan, enemy of our Souls

The Bible tells us everything we need to know about Satan (also known as the Devil, Lucifer, Beelzebub, Lord of the Flies, Prince of the Power of the Air, God of this World, Angel of Light, etc.), and his place in the scheme of things. We know from Scripture where he comes from, what his evil purpose is on the earth, and what his eventual end will be.

Satan is very powerful. Jesus said to the people of His day that they were of their father, the devil (John 8:42-47). One of the first things to realise is that the devil is real, that he hates God and everything God stands for, including man. He also knows of his ultimate fate, and is feverishly trying to avoid it, or postpone it, by confounding God's purposes and trying to confuse God's people.

As already mentioned, Satan was once a powerful archangel; one of three named in the Bible. The others are Michael and Gabriel. Satan had much responsibility and was very close to Jesus. He got so caught up with his own beauty and authority that he forgot it all came from God in the first place (Isaiah 14:12-17). He decided to try to take control, and in the process one third of the angels in heaven followed suit. Their pride and their folly became manifest, and they lost their place in God's kingdom forever (Rev 12:7-12; Luke 10:18).

The Nature of Evil

We often misunderstand the nature of evil, thinking of the devil as being an amusing and quaint comic-book-character, dressed in a red suit with horns, pitchfork and tail. This is as real an image of Satan as Father Christmas is of God, or the Easter Bunny is of Jesus. Satan is evil personified. He is a liar, murderer, deceiver and thief. There is nothing "nice", or "quaint", about Satan whatsoever.

We get a brief glimpse of Satan's manipulation and hatred when we look at Job, the oldest book in the Bible (Job 1:1-12; 2:1-10). Satan asked God for permission to deal with Job in a way that he thought would bring Job undone before God. God was confident, knowing Job's faithfulness and righteousness, and He gave Satan conditional permission. God had good reason for allowing Job's testing, which also suited His purposes.

Satan, in his lust for blood, missed the plot completely and became a tool in the unfolding of God's plan for Job's life. The Bible records the events that took place.

Let's take a look at one of the bleakest days of Job's life, and note the horrible things Satan unleashed on him. It should also be noted, that Job was actually expecting something evil to befall him (Job 3:25), which is never a good state of mind to be in to begin with:

1. His oxen and donkeys were taken in a Serbian raid, and all but one of the servants were killed (Job 1:14,15).
2. His sheep and herdsmen were burned, consumed by fire (Job 1:16).
3. His camels were stolen, and all but one of the servants killed with the sword in a Chaldean raid (Job 1:17).
4. His sons and daughters perished in a mighty wind (Job 1:18,19).
5. Later, as if this wasn't enough, Satan requested, and was conditionally granted, further permission to torment Job - this time physically. He was then struck down by sickness and terrible boils (Job 2:7-8).

It is obvious from this and other Bible passages, as well as from our own life experiences, that Satan comes to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). In total contrast to Satan's nefarious schemes, Jesus came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly.

Satan is Cast Down

Satan has been defeated, cast out of heaven (Isaiah 14:12-17) and his end is assured in the lake of fire (Rev 19:20; 20:10). However, in the meantime, we still need to remember some very important points concerning Satan and his present authority:

- ♦ Satan, though powerful, is subject to godly authority (Phil 2:10,11)
- ♦ All authority in heaven and earth rests with the Son (Matt 28:18-20)

See also: Dan 7:13,14; Eph 1:18-23; Phil 2:5-11; Col 2:8-15; 1 Pet 3:22

The Bible tells us we overcome by the blood of the Lamb (Jesus); the word of our testimony (Rev 12:11); and by loving not our lives even unto death.

All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus (Matt 28:18-20), and this is now effectively passed on to us through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Satan is only as strong as the ground he is given to walk on.

Do not be afraid when opportunities to overcome present themselves to you. These are challenges to our faith which the Lord wants us to welcome, not avoid. They build strength of character, and develop godly qualities within our lives (Luke 10:19,20).

Remember: Satan is defeated. He is already finished because the work of the cross is complete (Col 2:13-17). The only power he has over our lives, is that which we forfeit to him, through our disobedience and sin.

This doesn't mean we will be free from persecution. Satan will try to make our lives as difficult as he can (John 15:18-21). It does mean, however, that we do not have to be affected by what happens around us, or to us, if we are in right-standing before God. He will work all things together for good (Rom 8:28), if our lives are run according to His purposes.

**Choose whom
you will Serve**
Josh 24:14-15

We can either submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit, and experience His power in our lives through salvation and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or we can choose to ignore his Word, disobey his commands, and become (intentionally or otherwise) a tool of the enemy.

To choose Jesus is to choose sides, and to enter into a pre-existing spiritual war which has always been there and which, for the most part, we were not responsible for. However, spiritual warfare is part and parcel of the salvation package. We previously walked in spiritual darkness, but now have Jesus and walk in the light. Even when all around us seems confusing we must remember that Jesus, and the early Christians, had their wilderness experiences too (Matt 4:1; 27:46), and still loved not their lives, even unto death (Rev 12:11). We are commanded to take up our cross and follow Him daily (Luke 14:26,27).

Sometimes we can be saved and baptised in the Holy Spirit but fail to walk in the Spirit, thus fulfilling the desires of the flesh and falling under Satan's dominion and condemnation. Even if this experience is only for a season it is still a matter of personal choice.

In our Western culture we are sometimes so sophisticated, or think we are, that we are unaware of this side of spiritual reality. This is not so in Third World countries, where evil spirits and demons are very real to their inhabitants. Is Satan, therefore, not at work in our culture? Or is it that we are simply not aware of it in quite the same way?

There are powerful forces that hate us with a vengeance loose in this world. They will try to undo God's plan for our lives, but we are not to be afraid for absolutely nothing can separate us from God, His love, or His power at work in us (Rom 8:38-39; 2 Tim 1:12).

**Some Practical
Steps**

Here, then, are some practical steps, which we can all take, to help us to enjoy the victory, which is ours in Christ, and to avoid the pitfall of falling into any trap set for us by the enemy:

1. It is imperative that we be born again by the Spirit of God, and filled with the Holy Spirit and power, as soon as possible after we are saved. We are now engaged in spiritual warfare, and must overcome the works of the enemy within our own life, and in the lives of those around us.
2. We must maintain a clean heart at all times. When we have problems, or make mistakes, then we must quickly repent, forgive those who wrong us, and go on from there with sin behind us, not before us. God is faithful to forgive us, but we must remain open and teachable (1 John 1:8-10), and not easily given to offence.
3. Do not be afraid when opportunities to overcome present themselves. These are challenges to our faith, which the Lord wants us to welcome, not avoid. They build strength of character, and develop godly qualities within our lives, and they are a useful form of training, especially when we do overcome (Luke 10:19,20).

4. Understand that the source of all things is God. Jesus Christ is the source of our eternal salvation, and it is through obedience to him, that we overcome the world (Hebrews 5:7-10; 1 John 5:4,5). Jesus is the high priest of our confession, and the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 3:1; 12:1,2). The world is the Lord's (Psalm 50:10-12), and all it contains.
5. Satan is defeated. He is already finished because the work of the cross is complete (Colossians 2:13-17). The only power he has over our lives, is what we allow him by our disobedience and sin. This doesn't mean that we will be free from persecution, for the devil will try to make our lives as difficult as he can (John 15:18-21). It does mean, however, that we do not have to be affected by what happens around us, or to us, if we are in right-standing before God. He will work all things together for good (Rom 8:28), if we live our lives according to His expectations of us.
6. We have been given weapons to use when the battle is engaged. These weapons are the Blood of the Lamb, The Word of God, and the Name of Jesus. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God to the pulling down of strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).
7. Above all, understand that the battle is not ours, but the Lord's. Although we engage the enemy on His behalf, we are only a small part of the overall picture - which is much bigger than we can usually see at any given time. Seeing God's purposes, in this way, stops us from thinking only of our particular circumstances and personal problems, and allows us to see things from the only perspective that counts for anything - God's (See Samuel 17:43-47; Joshua 5:13,14).

Some additional Scriptures worth reading are:

Deuteronomy 7 & 8	John 16:33	Romans 8:35,37
Revelation 3:19-21	Revelation 12:11	1 John 5:4,5
Romans 12:17-21	Romans 16:17-20	2 Cor 11:13-15

Strongholds

- ♦ **Strongholds speak of authority** (2 Cor 10:3-5), particularly Satanic authority. Satan maintains his kingdom by fear, intimidation, bribery, lies, deception and through ignorance.
- ♦ **He who controls the strongholds has the authority.** Strongholds are high places, fortified positions which are hard to assail and hard to overcome. They are chosen carefully for their strategic value.
- ♦ **Satan, though powerful, is subject to Godly authority.** This Godly authority is given to the church, and the individuals that make up the body of Christ.

**Know your
Position
in Christ**

God could wipe Satan out tomorrow if He so chose, but He didn't. Now we have the task of taking possession of the land by force of arms.

Strongholds are held in place by a sort of squatter-mentality on the part of Satan. He knows He must leave when challenged, that the weight of the law of God is against him and that he cannot resist for long when confronted openly; but he will try to hold out as long as possible. He will not leave without a fight.

What Satan fears most, is a Holy Ghost-filled church. He is not as intimidated by us as individuals as he is by us as a body. When we work as a team, and start to move in the anointing and power of God, nothing can stand against us.

We must have a clear and precise strategy, if we are to overcome in the land of Promise, and ultimately possess the land.

We must congregate as a people against Satanic strongholds that have taken control of the city or region where we live. God may not give you the nations individually, but he has given them to Christ (Psalm 2:7-12), who is head over all things to the Church (Eph 1:22-23) which is His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. A praying church, united and in full knowledge of their position in Christ, is a powerful spiritual voice. In the heavenlies.

We must pray and challenge the enemy daily until he releases his hold and moves on. There is a way to live, a way to reign with Christ, that will cause you never to be defeated. The Bible shows that there is a very clear way in which victory can be achieved and maintained. God has promised that through Christ we can 'reign in life' (Rom 5:17). What a promise!

It is vitally important that all believers come to an understanding of our legal position in Christ. Jesus won a "legal" victory on the cross, and has appointed the church to enforce it. If we neglect to claim our victory and walk in it we will have failed in our experience, but the legal victory is ours if we believe what the Word of God declares, and walk in it.

We cannot experience actual victory over our circumstances, over our flesh, or over the enemy, unless we first understand the principle of legal victory. This principle is simply a matter of identifying with Christ on the cross, with His death, burial, and resurrection. Through our union with Christ, by faith, God has raised us up, and enthroned us, with Christ in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:2-8). It is from this position that we can all reign in life.

Lesson

12

THE SECOND COMING

In this study we are going to be looking at '**Judgement and The Second Coming of Jesus Christ**', concentrating on its relevance to us as new believers in Christ. It is an important topic. An understanding of Jesus' imminent return will revolutionise your life regarding obedience, service, and hope for the future.

Jesus will Return

When Jesus was taken up to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9-11) right after his resurrection, and whilst his disciples stood staring after Him, two men (angels) dressed in white said:

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11)

This statement, coupled with many which Jesus actually spoke regarding His ascension and imminent return during His earthly ministry, sparked off one of Christendom's favourite speculative pastimes over the centuries. Each theory regarding the return of our Lord Jesus Christ has been fervently supported by those who either "knew" that God was coming very soon by "special revelation", or believed they had special insight into what God's Word said about the subject. More than a few cults, and "pseudo-Christian" religions, have been founded on such a premise (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons etc.).

Provocative Commentary

Many theories abound regarding when and how the Lord will return. By careful study of what the Bible teaches it is possible to piece together a personal 'eschatological' (Second Coming) theory. You may even become quite convinced that this theory is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. You will not be the first to follow this well worn path, and certainly won't be the last. However, you may also find that over time, and with some experience, your viewpoint alters as you gradually change your mind about the specifics, and realise that the more you learn, the more you do not know - and cannot know - because some truth will remain hidden '*until He comes*' (Matt 24:36; Acts 1:7). When Jesus finally arrives, His chosen method will probably please some and disappoint many!

The preceding paragraph is meant to be a little provocative, and I trust it does not offend you. There are few subjects that are as controversial as the doctrine surrounding the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the coming Judgment.

One thing is Certain

That He is coming back is a certainty. On the millennial (1,000 year) rule, there is little disagreement. That there will be an Armageddon battle, and a new Heaven and a new Earth, few will argue; but how, when, and in what order, remains a subject for the best seller's list at any Christian bookstore.

The one certain thing is that ***Jesus is coming back!*** He is coming in power and glory to take His bride (the Church), and to deal once and for all with the forces of darkness that work against Him.

Remember also, that the return of the Lord is imminent for each of us. He may not come back in the way we had it worked out, but our eternity is only a breath away, and should our lives suddenly end we will be settling accounts with our Maker sooner than anticipated.

As far as how this will be accomplished, take your pick. There is the Pre-Millennial, Post-Millennial, and A-Millennial theories. There are those who believe the Rapture will happen before the Great Tribulation. There are also those who do not, or that there will not be a rapture. There are even some odd groups that believe He has already secretly returned some years ago. This final one has no Scriptural basis, and must be rejected as error, but the others - well ... ?

It goes without saying, if we assume that speculation on the exact nature of the Lord's return is all theory, then the best theory to settle on is the one you feel most comfortable with. Jesus said that neither He, nor the angels in heaven, know when He would return, only His Father does (Matt 24:36).

What we are encouraged to do is observe the signs, study the teaching of Scripture, and live our lives as if Jesus was coming back very soon (Matt 24:29-44), for when He does come, it will be as a "thief in the night" (1 Thess 4:16-18), and many will be caught by surprise.

So if you have strong beliefs - be prepared to defend them. If you do not know what you believe - be prepared to learn and be challenged. We will avoid drawing final conclusions on what we believe as a church in this study because, while we believe firmly in what the Bible teaches, and it is firm on many issues of Jesus' return, it is vague on many aspects. We can only know what God reveals to us through His Word. All else is speculation.

You are free to choose whichever theory you prefer, as long as it is sound and biblical. It will have little lasting effect on your relationship with the Lord unless you make the fatal mistake of majoring on this topic, in which case you must guard against becoming a little 'off-balance' as a Christian.

Our main objective here is to prove, from the Bible, that Jesus will return, and to show, as far as Scripture allows, something of the manner of this return. To go further than this is outside the scope of this study, although Christian bookstores are full of interesting and controversial books on the subject, many of which make excellent reading.

The most productive thing that results from this type of study is an increase in our awareness that the age we live in is coming to an end. With this in mind, we should surely live with the same attitude that the early church lived with - expecting the soon coming return of our Messiah.

If you are so inclined, and as long as it does not become an obsession, become a student of eschatology (doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ). It will not harm you to be more aware in this area of biblical study.

The most Productive thing

Raise your sights and change your perspective from being earth-bound, to being more heaven-bound - for we are God's chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9) - and our eternal destiny can never be fulfilled on this earth.

Judgement and Mercy

The Bible is very clear about matters of judgment and mercy. It is the mercy of God that all men should come to a point of repentance, and accept the saving work of Jesus Christ in their lives (John 1:12,13).

The world's popular idea of "doing good and keeping the golden rule" will not carry any weight before the great Judgment Seat of God, because ***"ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23).***

TWO FINAL JUDGEMENTS

There are two final judgments spoken of in the Scriptures:

- ◆ Firstly, there is the judgment by Father God of sinners whose names are not found written in the Book of Life. The Bible teaches their unfortunate destiny is an eternity in Hell (Matt 10:28; 23:33).
- ◆ Secondly, there is the Judgment by Jesus Christ of his Church. This second judgment is more an acknowledgment for good deeds done and rewards for obedience (John 14:1-6).

As Christians, it is important that we have an understanding of the difference between these two judgments, and that we are aware of the fact that the Bible speaks about certain "rewards" being made available for those who "run the race", and in so doing, "complete the course".

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor 9:24-27)

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7)

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1)

Judgement of Sinners

Scriptures: Matt 23:23; Rev 20:11-15; Rom 1:20; Pet 2:20-22; John 5:28-29; Dan 12:1-4; Matt 12:36; Heb 9:26-27

The Bible clearly indicates that, ***"it is appointed for men once to die, and after that the judgment" (Heb 9:27).*** For those who die without Christ as their Saviour this judgment will be a thing greatly to be feared. Even for those who once believed but fall into a "backslidden" state in a fairly consistent and determined way, the Bible has this warning:

“it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

Jesus is ***“the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6)***. No one comes to the Father except through Him. For those who choose not to follow Him, despite all of the opportunities surrounding us each and every day of our lives, there is an no alternative but eternal separation from God. This place is often referred to in the Scriptures as Hell, or Hades. This is not a nice place at all - a place anyone in their right mind would avoid.

Those not cleansed by the blood of the Lamb cannot survive in the glorious presence of the Lord God Almighty. Hell is God’s provision for them, by default. It was never intended for Man, but for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41). However, if we persist in choosing to walk a path of disobedience we leave God no choice. He has made a covenant with us that He will save those who come to Him freely, accepting the work of the cross and becoming born-again. On the other hand, He has declared He will banish those who won’t accept Jesus as their Saviour in this life to an eternity of separation from Him, in a place called Hell. This decision reflects both the justice and mercy of God.

Those who accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord are not subject to this judgment, as the cross of Christ, and the shed blood of the Lamb of God, washes away our sin. He remember our sin no more, it having been removed from us ***“as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12)***.

So, as God’s representatives on the earth, and the beneficiaries of the free gift of eternal life and heaven as a reward, we are commanded to share our faith with those who have yet to inherit eternal life, and whose end is eternal spiritual death and Hell without Jesus.

Judgement of Christians

Scriptures: **John 14:1-6; Heb 10:34; 1 Pet 1:3-9,13-23;
2 Cor 5:10; 1 Cor 3:11-15; Rom 2:6,16.**

For those who choose Jesus as their Saviour and Lord, eternal life is their reward. By the grace of God, Christians are exempt from that fateful day, when those who die in their sins receive their just reward.

However, our reward is not based upon our goodness, for no one is good but God alone (Matt 10:18). Rather it is based upon how much of the character of Jesus we have allowed to permeate our being, and how obedient we have been according to His specific Word for our lives.

The main thing to note about the Judgment Seat of Christ is that salvation is a free gift from God. Our eternal rewards are based upon our application of faith, good works, and obedience to His Word. Here are a few passages relating to this great day when God rewards his obedient servants:

- ♦ The Crown of Life - James 1:12; Rev 2:10
- ♦ The Crown of Righteousness - 2 Tim 4:8
- ♦ The Crown for Soul Winners - 1 Thess 2:19
- ♦ The Crown of Glory - 1 Peter 5:2-4
- ♦ The Eternal Crown - 1 Cor 9:25

The most important thing for a every Christian to understand is that we are eternal beings, and we will live forever. Eternal life is bound up in our creation. Wherever our ultimate destination, it will be for all eternity!

What we accomplish on earth will be reflected in the heavenly realm one day. As the fire of God sweeps through our works and burns up everything that is not pure, we will see our reward for honouring Jesus as Lord in this life. Jesus encourages us to make sure that our spiritual “house” is built on a solid foundation - and He is that foundation! What we build on this foundation will be either gold, silver and precious stones, or wood, hay and stubble, and it will all be made evident:

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor 3:10-15)

In Summary: What it all means

1. Jesus Christ is coming back again, to take his church unto himself, and to set up his kingdom permanently, with a new heaven and a new earth. Our responsibility is to be ready.

We are not to be led astray into following false Christs, and false prophets, who preach doctrines that tickle our ears, but proclaim a different gospel from the one we preach (Gal 1:6-10; Matt 24:24). Neither are we to love this life to the point where it has greater value than the eternal things of God (1 John 2:15-17).

2. No one knows the day, nor the hour, of His return. Although we may speculate we will never know for sure until the day actually arrives. However, there are definite signs that will warn us that His return is close. We must be aware of these signs and be prepared, for He will ultimately come “as a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:1-11).

What we do know is that in the last days will come times of stress, where men will be lovers of self, holding a form of religion but denying its power (2 Tim 3:1-5). We know there will be wars and rumours of wars. Major famine is another sign of the imminent return of Jesus, as is the increase in incidents of ethnic groups rising up against one another across the world (Matt 24:6-8). However, this does not necessarily signify the end. We know that men will be unable to endure sound doctrine (2 Tim 4:1-5), but turn instead to teachers of their own choosing, turning away from the truth.

3. Many Christians support the pre-tribulation rapture theory despite little biblical foundation for this view (see article on the origin of this theory). We may well be the generation that sees the return of our Lord despite many generations before believing the same thing. We need to be ready should we be called to suffer for our faith.

It is only by God's grace we weren't born into a country with a history of persecuting Christians. We were never promised immunity from this, for if the world hated Jesus it will also hate his true disciples (John 15:18-25). We should not seek out persecution either, which would be stupid, but we are wise to be prepared for it if it comes, or perhaps God sends us somewhere where this is prevalent.

4. We should not sit around waiting for the Lord's return. We know Jesus will return very soon, but at the same time we are encouraged to plan for our grandchildren's future (Prov 13:22). We must have a responsible and mature attitude towards daily activities such as our careers, studies and relationships.

There are those who would prefer for Jesus to take them out of this troubled and strife-ridden world right now. For the most part, at least in this country and culture, trouble and strife are mostly self-induced; and even on the occasions when they come from external forces the resulting problems can be perpetuated by stubborn and inflexible attitudes. These days, with the advent of social media, conspiracy theories abound. Remember, God wants to prosper us and give us abundant life (John 10:10). If we believe in, obey and trust Him to the end He is well able to do this, no matter what our circumstances might indicate.

5. The Scriptures clearly state (Mark 10:21; Luke 6:23) there are eternal rewards dependent upon our performance and obedience in the world. So ask yourself this question, "*What is the state of my treasure in heaven?*" Will it stand the test of fire that is coming upon it to burn all that is not pure and undefiled? Is there sufficient gold, silver and precious stones in my heavenly vault? We should perhaps be giving some serious, ongoing consideration to this as it has such significant consequences for our eternity (Rev 21:1-5).

Finally, let us consider the subject of death. Before judgment can begin, death must first be overcome. The last enemy to fall is death itself (1 Cor 15:26). With the work of the cross complete, Jesus now has the keys to Death and Hades (Rev 1:18). We can therefore have confidence that death is not the end because death itself will be destroyed, and all the prisoners of death will be released to face their various fates (Rev 20:13-14). Death is actually their captor, not their destroyer (1 Cor 15:22-26; Rev 21:4).

Jesus Christ is coming again! We do not know the exact hour or day. But He is coming, and it is imperative that we are ready to meet Him when the time comes. We should look forward to this day with joy and a great sense of excitement and anticipation. Death no longer holds power over us.

Room Enough In Heaven

Let us take a verse from The Book of Revelation as the basis for computation. The text is Rev 21:15,16 and reads as follows:

“The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia (that is, about 1,400 miles or about 2,200 kilometres) in length, and as wide and high as it is long”

This represents a space of **151,521,889,400,000,000,000** cubic metres. It sets aside one half of this space for the Throne and the Courts of Heaven, and one half of the balance for streets. This would leave a remainder of **37,880,472,350,000,005,000** cubic metres.

If we then divide the remainder by 366 (the number of cubic metres in a room 10 metres square with 12 foot ceilings) this will produce **103,498,558,333,333,346** rooms of the size indicated.

Proceeding upon the hypothesis that the world contains, always has contained, and always will contain **3,000,000,000** inhabitants, and that there are three generations to each 100 years. This gives the total number of inhabitants each century as **9,000,000,000**.

Now, let's assume that the world will stand for 1,000 centuries before the return of our Lord (or 100,000 years). This would give a total of **9,000,000,000,000** inhabitants for this period of time.

We must therefore reach the conclusion that if 100 worlds of the same size and duration, and containing the same number of inhabitants as earth, were to also find their way to heaven, there would be more than 100 rooms of the size indicated for each person.

Based upon these calculations we should have no problem in finding enough room for every believer. It also shows us somewhat graphically why Jesus needed to return to heaven to prepare our mansions for us.

Food for thought!

Article Written By An Atheist

If I firmly believed, as millions say they do, that the knowledge and practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another, then religion would mean to me everything.

I would cast away earthy pleasures as dross, earthly cares as follies, and earthly thoughts and feelings as vanity. Religion would be my first waking thought, and my last image before sleep into unconsciousness.

I would labour in its cause alone. I would esteem one soul won for heaven worth a lifetime of suffering.

Earthly consequences would never stay my hand or seal my lips. Earth, its joys and its griefs, would occupy no moment of my thoughts. I would strive to look upon eternity alone and on the immortal souls around me.

I would go forth to the world and preach to it, in season and out of season, and my text would be, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul".

That is what I would do, if I firmly believed!

Pre-Tribulation Rapture Origins

David McPherson, director of the Heart of America Bible Society of Kansas City, in his pamphlet, "Why I believe the Church will pass through the Tribulation", states the following concerning the origin of the pre-tribulation rapture theory.

Edward Irving was a minister in the Church of Scotland. His magnetic personality drew large crowds to his church in London, England.

In 1830, Irving was expelled by the London Presbytery, because he wrote a booklet in which he claimed that Christ's human nature was sinful! However, he rejected their decision and continued his ministry. In 1831, disturbances began to take place in his services. He was removed from his church the next year, and died two years later.

On April 30th 1831, a Mrs J.B. Cardale, who later joined Irving's church, had uttered a personal revelation in a home prayer meeting that Christ would soon return, but she was only echoing a Scottish girl's novel 1830 revelation of a rapture before the tribulation!

It was from this supposed revelation that the modern doctrine and modern phraseology regarding the pre-tribulation rapture arose. It did not initiate from Scripture, but from what many see as that which falsely pretended to be the Spirit of God.

Irving accepted this teaching, and it was taught as prophetic at meetings at Powerscourt House in Ireland, attended by Plymouth Brethren organiser John Darby. Irving's views influenced Darby, C.H. Mackintosh and C.I. Scofield, whose Bible popularised the new theory. Later, however, some of the leading Plymouth Brethren scholars, including Benjamin Newton, and S.P. Tregelles, rejected this pre-tribulation theory.

For some 1,800 years, the Church had believed only in a post-tribulation coming, which, during persecution, was occasionally thought to be imminent. There is not a shred of historical evidence, before 1830, that the Church ever believed in a double coming, or rapture, before the Great Tribulation!

McPherson goes on to explain that Margaret McDonald was the young woman who originated the pre-tribulation rapture theory. According to Robert Norton's book "The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Catholic Apostolic Church" (London 1861), she claimed (page 15) to have received a "revelation" in Scotland in the spring of 1830, while living in Port Glasgow, that Christians would be raptured before the Great Tribulation - something never taught before 1830. Before 1830, the Church taught only one coming, which was after the period of Tribulation!

Margaret McDonald's revolutionary "revelation", split the second coming of Christ into two phases: (i) a first pre-tribulation rapture, then later, after the tribulation, (ii) the return of Christ to earth. Her own statement covering three pages in Norton's book, clearly contains most of the major tenets found today in pre-tribulation dispensationalism:

"Meeting the Lord in the air, secrecy, suddenness, invisibility, imminence, pre-tribulation separation of believers and unbelievers, and distinction between the raptured bride and the tribulation elect"

Darby's pre-tribulation view soon sprang from her partial rapturism.

F.R. Coad's "A History of the Brethren Movement" (Eerdmans 1968), page 63, states: "Darby, at Newton's suggestion, had already investigated (in 1830) these prophecies in the course of visits paid to their first place of occurrence in Scotland and had rejected them". Darby was 29 at the time, Newton was 22.

By February, 1831, Benjamin Newton was strongly opposing Irvingism and Margaret McDonald's underlying "revelation" of 1830. Coad, on page 128, writes "This rejection included a feature of prophetic interpretation which Darby had adopted, the doctrine of 'secret rapture of the saints'". Plymouth Brethren organiser John Darby rejected Margaret McDonald's miraculous gifts of revelation but accepted her novel two-phase coming.

As recorded in Robert Baxter's 'Narrative of Facts' (London 1833), on page 18, Baxter himself had a 'revelation' in an Irvingite prayer meeting on January 14, 1832, that Christ would return in three and a half years on July 14, 1835. Not to be outdone, Darby also set dates. In his 'Etudes sur L'Épître aux Hébreux' Darby wrote (page 146), "There are excellent brethren in all countries who have sought to calculate these days ... some have fixed 1844, others 1847. I myself have made several calculations in times past, and in the same sense."

And this same Darby influenced Scofield.

IN CONCLUSION

We trust you have had a wonderful time working through this series of foundational Studies with us.

Now that you have spent some time building into the foundations of your faith through completing this study series, do not stop here. Continue your journey by seeking to go deeper into the things of God.

Pathway Church is a local church in Hervey Bay and would welcome you at any of our Sunday or mid-week meetings. Our philosophy, and teachings, are designed to assist the genuine “*seeker after truth*” to find their place in the kingdom, and in whatever ministry call God has on your life. We encourage you to participate. Check out our website at www.pathwaychurch.org.au for more information

Let me also encourage you to continue to increase your knowledge and understanding of the things of God by reading good Christian literature, whether in analogue or digital form, attending teaching seminars and meetings, and by carefully guarding your eye-gates and ear-gates from the corruption that is ever prevalent in the world (2 Peter 1:4). The Word of God is more than adequate to meet your needs, answer your questions, and train you up in righteousness:

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17)

Become a life-long student of the Word of God and you will find a joy, purpose and fulfilment not available from any other source this side of eternity.

I wish you every success in your faith, your life and your chosen ministry.

May God bless you on your sacred journey into truth,

Tony Case
Pastor and Author
Pathway Church