

*The pathway
of our pilgrimage*

VICTOR HALL
WITH PETER HAY AND DAVID BAKER

THE PATHWAY OF OUR PILGRIMAGE

Victor Hall

with Peter Hay and David Baker

May 2025

Scriptures are quoted from NKJV, KJV, NASB and LITV.

© Victor Hall, Peter Hay and David Baker. 2025

Contents

PREFACE

Then you will know	5
Assumed salvation through baptism	5
The revelation of the name	6
The divine nature	7
The love of the Father	7
The grace of Jesus Christ	8
The fellowship of the Spirit	8
Becoming co-workers with Christ	9
The two thieves who died with Jesus	10
The fellowship of Christ's grief	11

CHAPTER 1

Exceedingly great and precious promises	13
The promise to Abraham	14
The need for marriage reformation	15
Calling, election, adoption	15
The progressive revelation of the Spirit of Christ	16
Through the prophets	16
The Spirit of Christ in a physical body	17
The establishment of a corporate body	18
The revelation of the mystery of Christ	19
Three dimensions of redemption	20
Redeemed to adoption	20
The redemption that is in Christ	20
The redemption of our body	21
Overview of the new birth	21
The commandments of Christ	21
Prevenient grace	22
The Son and the Father abide	22
The Spirit of adoption	23
The conception of a son of God	24
Baptised by water	25
Baptised with the Holy Spirit	26

CHAPTER 2

Bearing the fruit of sanctification	27
Sanctify yourselves	28
The need for sound doctrine	29
Enabled to look upon Christ	29
The God who forgives	30
Presumptuous sin	32

Korah, Dathan and Abiram	32
Nadab and Abihu	33
In the church	33
Sanctification through the Elijah ministry	34
Come out and be separate	35
Examine yourselves	36
The nature of our pilgrimage	37
The importance of completing the race	39
CHAPTER 3	
The manifestation of the sons of God	41
The name and initiative of the Father	41
The suffering Seed	43
The promise to Abraham	45
Many crowns	46
New birth begins	46
The seed of the woman	47
The travail of the bride	49
Godly women in a worthy house	50
The sign of the Son of Man	50
A progressive revelation	51
CHAPTER 4	
Growing a presbytery	53
Seven stars in Christ's right hand	54
Remember from where you have fallen	55
The call to come to Mount Zion	55
A presbytery is built from firstfruits houses	56
Worthy houses are overcomers	58
By the blood of the Lamb	58
By the word of their testimony	58
Laying down their lives to the death	58
The <i>agape</i> meal of Yahweh	58
The foundations of <i>agape</i> fellowship in the church	59
The apostles' doctrine	59
Fellowship	59
Breaking of bread	60
Prayer	60
The Covenant of salt	61
Offerings must be salted	62
Preservation and savour	62
The sanctification of children	63
Salt in the presbytery	63
Prepared for destruction	64
Wounded in the house of our friends	65

CHAPTER 5

The fellowship of prayer	67
The origin of prayer	67
Intercession and travail	69
Mankind is the fruit of Yahweh's travail	70
The <i>agape</i> fellowship of Yahweh	71
Joy forevermore in the presence of the Lord	71
The secret place of the ladder	72
The prayer meeting of four	73

CHAPTER 6

Baptism	77
Make disciples, baptising them	78
Three dimensions of baptism	79
The first dimension - baptism by the Father	80
The second dimension - baptism into the regeneration work of Christ	81
The third dimension - baptism in the Holy Spirit	82
Baptismal service outline	82
Hosting	83
Testimony	83
Statement of purpose	84
Immersion in water	84
The next person to be baptised	84
Conclusion of service	84

CHAPTER 7

The dedication of children	85
Children born in covenant houses	85
Dedication is not symbolic of circumcision	86
Dedication fulfils the Law	87
The 'Firstborn' belongs to Yahweh	88
The faith of the parents	88
The blessing of the elders	89
The dedication service	89

Preface

Then you will know

The Lord is presently restoring to us an understanding of the gospel of God. In particular, the Spirit is emphasising the exceedingly great and precious promises contained in the Scriptures. 2Pe 1:4. These promises declare our predestination to be born of God's divine nature and to be brought to glory as sons of God and sons of men in the image and likeness of God.

In order for us to receive, live, and proclaim this message, it is necessary to identify, and then forget, our former gospels. Php 3:13-14. This is because they unavoidably impact upon our reception of the proceeding word, hindering our capacity to walk in its light. Unless we forget what is 'behind', and walk in the light of present truth, we will be lost.

Warning of this implication of endeavouring to integrate the present-truth word into the framework of our former understandings, Jesus said, 'No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise, the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new *does not match the old*. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, *and the wineskins will be ruined*. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, *and both are preserved*.' Luk 5:36-38.

In this season, the word is being proclaimed with increasing magnitude, clarity, and effect upon its hearers. Those who are receiving its illumination, as they keep in step with what the Spirit is saying 'Today', are growing in their knowledge of God and of their own sanctification. Heb 3:7-15. Their obedient response to the word, which comes as the former and latter rain upon the ground of their hearts, reveals that they are building on Christ. Revealing this truth, the prophet Hosea declared, 'Then shall we know, if we *follow on to know* the Lord [in the light of present truth]: His going forth [whom we are to follow] is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.' Hos 6:3. We must follow on to know the Lord, by keeping in step with the present-truth word, *for to know Him is eternal life!* Joh 17:3. 1Jn 5:20.

Assumed salvation through baptism

As a church movement, our baptismal understandings and practices have changed in the light of the gospel of sonship, highlighting the centrality of baptism to the gospel that

we believe. The importance of baptism to one's gospel is acknowledged in most theological and denominational traditions. In fact, many of these traditional understandings have influenced our own former practices and belong to the 'old garments' and the 'old wineskins' that need to be dispensed with.

Baptismal regeneration, for example, has been a theological principle that has influenced the teaching and practices of numerous denominations. The principle of baptismal regeneration holds that a person is born again, or regenerated, *through baptism*. That is, baptism in water is viewed as the means by which a person is born again by water and regenerated by the Spirit. By this means, a respondent is admitted into the kingdom of God as a member of the church. Baptism is considered to be a sacramental sign of new birth, called 'regeneration'.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia qualifies regeneration, in the evangelical tradition, saying, 'Regeneration is here taken in its strict meaning to denote that internal spiritual change, *not of the substance, but of the qualities, of the intellect and will of natural man*, by which blindness, darkness in regard to spiritual matters, especially the gospel, is removed from the former, and spiritual bondage, impotency, death from the latter (2Co 3:5; Act 26:18; Php 2:13), and the heart of the sinner is made to savingly know and appropriate the Lord Jesus Christ and the merits of His atoning sacrifice, as its only hope for a God-pleasing life here in time and a life in glory hereafter.'

Similarly identifying new birth, or regeneration, as the *outcome* of baptism, the Westminster Confession states, 'Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptised into the visible church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, or his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life: which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His church until the end of the world.'

The importance of baptism to salvation is particularly pertinent to churches that practise infant baptism. This follows, for example, John Wesley's assertion that *in baptism* a child is cleansed of the guilt of original sin, initiated into the Covenant with God, admitted into the church, made an heir of the divine nature, and spiritually born anew.

There are many other theological statements that similarly advance the view that new birth is through baptism and does not happen before baptism. Equally notable is the fact that none of these statements view new birth as a substantive change in the spirit of a believer through the conception of the Seed of Christ, which is the divine nature, in their spirit, by the Holy Spirit. 1Pe 1:23.

The revelation of the name

Within our own stream of churches, the most recent theological influence upon our understanding of baptism, and what it means to be a Christian, has been the doctrine, or revelation, *of the name*. This hermeneutic was succinctly captured in the song, 'The fullness of the Godhead bodily dwelleth in my Lord', including the line, 'We are complete in Him'.

Salvation in relation to this theological perspective began with conversion. Conversion was necessary for the forgiveness of sins. Regeneration was understood to mean, being made alive to God from the state of having been dead in trespasses and sins. In this regard, 'born again' was this regeneration from the death of sin. A person was then placed

in the position of a son by adoption. This understanding of the adoption was reflective of John Calvin's notion of adoption as one's designation, or identification, as a son.

In keeping with the Baptist tradition, following the 'great awakening', a believer was baptised *after* their conversion and new birth from the dead, through regeneration. The name, which Christ received at His exaltation, was given to the believer when they were baptised by water into His name. This made them complete in Christ and able to use His name, *by invocation*, to overcome sin and the devil.

Significantly, the divine nature as the fundamental element of the new birth was not at all recognised or appreciated. Without this understanding, a believer was left as a unique member of Christ's body, but indistinct from Him. They were not deemed to be a unique individual with the divine nature as a *separate seed* from Christ. In this regard, they were still an adopted man; not a son of God by regeneration.

The divine nature

The gospel of sonship reveals the *love of the Father*, the *grace of Jesus Christ*, and the *fellowship of the Holy Spirit*. 2Co 13:14. Through the unique initiatives of each Person of the Godhead, we are born of God and made in the image and likeness of God.

Significantly, new creation is not through baptism or regeneration. Rather, it begins with an adoption. This is not adoption as conceptualised by Calvin, but rather, a whole process that is initiated by receiving the promise of the Spirit through faith. Gal 3:14.

In Chapter 1, we have detailed the adoption, including new birth and salvation through regeneration. However, for the purpose of highlighting the significance of receiving the divine nature through new birth prior to baptism, let us now consider the implications of the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

The love of the Father

The Father, at the request of the Son, sends the Holy Spirit into our heart to be with us and in us. Joh 14:15-17. Paul called the Holy Spirit, 'the Spirit of adoption'. When He comes into our heart, He convicts us of sin, righteousness and judgement. Joh 16:7-11. In doing so, the Spirit is asking us, 'Do you want to be a son of God?' As we say 'Yes!', the Holy Spirit gives to us the faith to believe for what is *absolutely impossible and unthinkable* - we are able to believe that we can become a son of God who is born again of His divine nature. This is the same faith that Abram received when Yahweh, who is the Word, came to him and said, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield [of faith], your exceedingly great reward.' Gen 15:1. Abram believed by this faith, and it was 'accounted to him for righteousness', meaning 'sonship'. Gen 15:4-6.

As we believe for sonship, the Holy Spirit adopts us, making us children of God and delivering to us the free gift of righteousness. Rom 5:17. By the Spirit of adoption, we are able to call God, 'our Father'. Rom 8:15. In response to our cry, 'Abba! Father!', the Spirit of Christ, which is *the divine nature*, is sent by the Father into our spirit (Greek: *pneuma*). This is the unique seed that contains our name and life as a son of God, which was multiplied from the one Seed, Christ, through His travailing journey from Gethsemane to Calvary. We have detailed this travail in Chapter 3. In this regard, we could liken our spirit to 'an egg', and the seed of our sonship to be the Seed of the Father. This seed is germinated in our spirit by the Holy Spirit, and we are conceived as a son of God in *the womb of the virgin bride of Christ, the church*. When this conception has happened, we receive a new and unique name as a son of God and Christ has become our life. Gal 2:20.

Like any conception, our spirit, or identity, has been reborn as a son of God who can uniquely express the life of God. Our identity is not lost through this conception. We are born of the divine nature and have become a totally new creation as a 'zoe-fied' identity. That is, the *zoe* life of God has caused a change in our spirit (*pneuma*). As a consequence, we are *substantively* different from the 'first Adam', referring to those who still belong to the first creation. This reality was expressed by the apostle John, who declared, 'Behold what *manner of love the Father* has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore *the world does not know us*, because it did not know Him.' 1Jn 3:1.

After we are born again as a son of God, the Father then places us into the church, by making us a member of the body of Christ. Col 1:18. This is the first dimension of baptism. The body of Christ is the context where we are to grow and mature as Christians. 1Jn 4:7-21.

The grace of Jesus Christ

Although we are born of the Spirit, and are in Christ, '*the body is [still] dead because of sin*'. Rom 8:10. Unless we are joined to the second aspect of baptism, the seed of new creation will die and we will lose our sonship.

The second aspect of baptism is by water into the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, wherein we are being saved through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. Tit 3:4-7. Christ Himself joins us to His offering journey through the ministry of His messengers who have been made co-workers with Him. 1Co 3:9. 2Co 6:1. 3Jn 1:8. In the fellowship of His offering, the process of regeneration becomes operative in our life, perfecting us in our humanity. We are progressively being made into the image and likeness of God, 'from glory to glory'. 2Co 3:18.

The work of regeneration and renewing applies to the ground of our heart, referring to the inner man (spirit and soul) so that the seed of our sonship life can grow to maturity. Evidently, the first and most basic lesson of the parable of the sower and the seed is that the ground of our heart needs to be changed through this process. Through regeneration and renewing, we are given a new heart and a new spirit as the stones of law are removed from our heart by the circumcision of Christ. Eze 36:26 Importantly, we, as a new creation identity, can set our mind, which belongs to our soul life (Greek: *psuche*), on the Spirit or on the flesh. Paul was clear, that 'those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.' Rom 8:5-6.

To be spiritually minded is to present ourselves, each day, as 'zoe-fied' identities, for fellowship with Christ in His offering and sufferings. Paul described this as 'coming boldly to the throne of grace' to obtain mercy and grace to secure us in this fellowship, so that we are being delivered from the other law, we are being regenerated and renewed in the spirit of our mind, and we are bringing forth the fruit that Christ has already borne for us through His offering, once for all. Heb 4:16. This is the implication of obtaining *the grace of Jesus Christ*. 1Co 16:23.

The fellowship of the Spirit

Our capacity to journey with Christ in the fellowship of His grace, and thereby fulfil the will of God, is only possible by the capacity, or power, of the sevenfold Spirit of God, which we receive when we are baptised by the Holy Spirit. Act 1:8. This is the third

dimension of baptism. Once immersed in the Spirit, the Spirit Himself fills us full, *making us His temple*. 1Co 6:19. This baptism is indicated by the capacity to speak in tongues. Act 2:4.

We continue to fulfil the will of the Father, as a member of Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, by the capacity of the Spirit until the day of resurrection. At this time, those who have been born as sons of God with the divine nature, and saved through regeneration and renewing as sons of men, receive *a spiritual body*. This was called, by Paul, 'the adoption, the redemption of our body'. Rom 8:23. Their physical body is made immortal and incorruptible by the word of the Son. It is then clothed with their heavenly body, which they receive from the Father. This spiritual body is as physical as it is spiritual, and as spiritual as it is physical.

Significantly, the spiritual body is a temple for the Holy Spirit. In this temple, the Holy Spirit fellowships with our spirit. This happens at the altar of our conscience. In the new heavens and earth, our spiritual body, which has been made perfect as the temple of the Holy Spirit, will be a vessel for the *full expression of the Holy Spirit*. We will do this as a son of God and a son of man.

At this point, we are no longer just a people who have received a firstfruits of the Spirit as sons of God and members of the body of Christ. Having received the Spirit in full measure, we proceed from Christ to be His bride, the heavenly Jerusalem. Each person is a temple of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the throne of the Father and the Lamb, as the expression of the river of life that flows out from the offering life of Yahweh *Elohim*.

For those who belong to the bride city, the New Jerusalem, this order of the throne is the order of life for the rest of eternity in the new heavens and earth. Significantly, the temple of Christ's body will have completed its work. Its dispensation will end, leaving the Father and the Son, together, ruling from one throne from which the life of God will proceed to us, and from us, as a river of life. The ever-increasing multitude being brought forth in the kingdom of God will be sustained by this river. Rev 22:1-5.

We receive the *zoe* life of God through new birth, granting to us our name as a son of God, as we partake of Christ's flesh and blood, and as we become the expression of the Holy Spirit as His temple. This reveals that the Father is the source of the *book of life (zoe)*, in which our name as a son of God is written. The Son is the *Tree of Life (zoe)*, of whom we are partakers, and by whom we become trees of life. The Holy Spirit is the *river of life (zoe)*, of which we are tributaries feeding this great torrent, for out of our bellies 'flow rivers of living water', which refers to the Spirit. Joh 7:38-39.

Becoming co-workers with Christ

The offering of Yahweh, revealed through the seven wounding events of Christ's offering journey, is the full provision for our redemption, and for the fulfilment of our predestination as spiritual sons of God and sons of men, in Christ. In Gethsemane, the context of Christ's first wound, the Father joined us all to Christ for judgement and redemption.

In the court of Caiaphas, we are first joined to Christ's buffeting, where His visage was marred more than any man's on account of our iniquitous self-image. Here, the self-image and expression of the zealot, driven by the other law, is either replaced through mourning, repentance and faith, or is judged. These two implications of Christ's suffering were manifest through the responses of Peter and Judas. Peter met Christ eye to eye.

He was delivered from his idolatrous zealotry as he received the true image of his name, reflected to him from the face of Christ. In contrast, Judas would not let go of his self-image and was eternally damned.

Once a person has been delivered from the drive to make a name for themselves, they are able to become *a co-worker* together with Christ. 1Co 3:9. Php 2:25. This happens through the third wound, as Christ was chastened with rods 'for our peace'. Isa 53:5.

Significantly, the apostle Paul explained that, through this wound, the corporate body of Christ was established, writing, '*For He Himself is our peace*, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself *one new man from the two*, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity'. Eph 2:14-16.

When a person embraces the fellowship of Christ's chastening, they are able to reveal Christ as a new-creation son and member of His body. Through the ministry of the gospel of God, they are able to birth others, and join them to this same fellowship. This is because they are able to follow the direction of Christ, who said to the seventy-two, 'But whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house". And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give [participating in the *agape* fellowship that belongs to the body], for the labourer [or co-worker] is worthy of his wages.' Luk 10:5-7.

The two thieves who died with Jesus

Two thieves were crucified with Jesus on the day that He died. Mat 27:38. Initially, both thieves reviled Him, joining the scorn of those who passed by Jesus as He hung on the cross, and of the chief priests, scribes and elders. Mat 27:39-44. However, prior to the sixth hour (12pm), when darkness covered the whole earth, one of the thieves, through prevenient grace, received illumination of the salvation that Jesus was accomplishing for him.

Responding to his fellow-thief's statement, 'If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us', the repentant thief said, 'Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.' Luk 23:39-41. He then said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.' Luk 23:42.

Jesus responded, saying to this thief, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.' Luk 23:43. Christ suffered for this thief. He suffered his death and relieved his sufferings as they were comforted together in the fellowship grace.

The other thief railed upon Christ. As Esau had done, he viewed himself as the victim of his circumstances, resisting the prevenient grace that was coming to him through the testimony of Jesus. As this man suffered justly on the cross, he demanded to be provided with the benefits that Christ had afforded the people during His 3½-year ministry.

Jesus did not respond to the vociferous demands of the thief. In silence, Christ suffered the grief of the loss of this man who progressively became dead to Him as they suffered together under the judgement of God. The wrath of God, which had fallen upon Christ on behalf of this man, was then progressively transferred from Christ to him *as an eternal judgement*. This happened as the thief hardened in his choice, refusing to submit himself

to the predestined sonship that God had prepared for him and was ready to reveal to him on that day – the day that Jesus died. He refused the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings which would have brought him to Paradise.

The fellowship of Christ’s grief

As co-workers of Jesus Christ, we experience His sufferings. This includes suffering with Him *in His rejection*. 2Th 1:4-10. As we suffer in this manner, we are to respond as He did. In the fellowship of Christ’s grief, we join His silence as the Father and the Holy Spirit transfer the wrath of God, with its condemnation, upon those who refuse to obey the gospel.

Those who do not obey Christ, because they do not believe His word, are under condemnation already. Jesus Himself said, ‘He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.’ Joh 3:18-19.

In this regard, we must not come between Christ and those who are rejecting Him as Lord, and who are refusing to submit themselves to the fellowship of His sufferings, in which they would otherwise obtain regeneration and salvation. Our endeavours to intervene, put us at risk of the same judgement as the person who is refusing Christ.

The New Testament apostles warned us against becoming partakers of God’s wrath through fellowship with others in their sin, particularly as their rebellion becomes increasingly resolute. For example, Paul wrote, ‘Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.’ Eph 5:6-7.

We note that Christ’s work on the cross is progressive. Inasmuch as a person’s salvation is progressively obtained as they journey, through obedience to Christ’s word, on the pathway He pioneered, the condemnation of the rebellious is progressive as they harden their hearts in disobedience to His word. Isaiah identified the progressive *waypoints of damnation* that belong to the disobedient, writing, ‘But the word of the Lord was to them, “Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little”, that they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught’. Isa 28:13.

As a person refuses salvation by rejecting the word of Christ and His invitation to join the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, the wrath of God upon them increases. Having been given the opportunity to repent, there no longer remains for them ‘a sacrifice for sins’. As Paul declared, ‘For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgement, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.’ Heb 10:26-27.

Chapter I

Exceedingly great and precious promises

The apostle Peter opened his second letter by drawing our attention to the truly magnificent hope of the gospel. He declared that 'exceedingly great and precious promises' have been given to us through which we are able to become 'partakers of the divine nature'. 2Pe 1:4. Peter was referring to the promise of Scripture, revealing that we must first receive the promise of the Holy Spirit who then enables us to be born again by the Seed of the divine nature, which is the Spirit of Christ. Gen 15:1. Gal 3:14. Rom 10:17. Rom 1:1,16-17. Php 3:14.

Through the Holy Spirit, called by the apostle Paul, 'the Spirit of adoption', we are illuminated to see, and enabled to confess, that God is our Father and that we are His sons. Rom 8:15. By this means, we are established in *the adoption*. The adoption is not just a position of acceptability before God, nor is it merely one's 'designation' as a son of God. Rather, the Holy Spirit is the capacity that enables the whole process, through which sons of men are born anew of God's life and are progressively made in the image and likeness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The process of the adoption culminates on the *day of resurrection* when those who have been born as sons of God with the divine nature, and saved through regeneration and renewing as sons of men, receive *a spiritual body*. Paul called this 'the adoption, the redemption of our body'. Rom 8:23. By the word of the Son, their physical body is made immortal and incorruptible. It is then clothed with their heavenly body from the Father. This spiritual body is as physical as it is spiritual, and as spiritual as it is physical. It is a temple for the Holy Spirit who fellowships with their spirit at the altar of their conscience. As His temple, the spiritual body will be a vessel for the full expression of the Holy Spirit as a son of God and son of man in the new heavens and earth.

Many hearers have not been illuminated to this amazing promise because they have not yet received the faith of the Son of God that comes by hearing the gospel of God. Rom 1:1,16-17. Rom 10:17. They have either not heard the message declaring

'new creation' or they have chosen to believe another gospel that accords with the desires of their own heart and mind. In doing so, they have spurned the very faith that the Old Testament saints received, by which they believed for the hope of sonship. Significantly, 'these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.' Heb 11:13. They were unable to receive these promises until Christ came in the flesh and rose from the dead.

The promise to Abraham

A person is adopted *only* under the New Covenant. It was impossible for believers in the dispensation of the Old Testament to receive the adoption until Christ had accomplished the work of redemption through His offering on the cross. Establishing this point, Paul wrote, 'But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, *that we might receive the adoption as sons*'. Gal 4:4-5.

We see that the promise of the adoption was realised when Christ was born of Mary and then, in obedience to the Father, He offered Himself on Calvary. When Christ died, His Spirit left His physical body and was clothed with His heavenly body. He then continued in fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit in His heavenly body for three more days and nights. After this time, the Spirit of Christ re-entered His physical body, which had already been made immortal and incorruptible through His offering on the cross. His physical body was *glorified* as it was clothed with His heavenly body, revealing His spiritual body. By resurrection, Jesus was manifest as the first Man who had been made in the image and likeness of God.

Importantly, after Jesus had risen from the dead, sons of men were now able to receive the adoption and then be born of the Spirit of Christ, by the Holy Spirit, as sons of the Father. We know that this was the case, because on the evening of His resurrection Jesus appeared to His disciples, saying to them, 'Peace be with you'. Joh 20:19. Having declared their redemption, He then delivered to them the Spirit of adoption, by whom they were caused to be born again as new-creation sons of God. Recounting this event in his Gospel, John wrote, 'And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit".' Joh 20:22. We will consider this event in more detail later in this chapter.

If the promise of the adoption was unable to be received before this point, we might ask, 'What did the believers receive in the Old Testament?' They received *the faith of Abraham!* Heb 11:1,39. Abraham received this faith, which was the faith of the Son of God, when 'the word [Hebrew: *dabar*] of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward".' Gen 15:1. In this encounter, He who is Yahweh, the Word, came to Abraham and promised to be his Offspring from whom the multitude of sons of God would come. These children would possess the divine nature, for Christ would be the Seed from which they would be brought forth.

He who is Yahweh, the Word, said that He would be Abram's shield, or protection, so that nothing could stop what He had promised from coming to pass. As we have just noted, this promise was that sons of men would become sons of God, possessing the image and likeness of God through Christ, who would be Abraham's Seed. Abraham asked how he would inherit this promise. He was told that he would inherit it as a man as he was

joined, by faith, to the offering of Yahweh, *before*, which would later be manifest, in time, at Calvary. Gen 15:8-21.

Abraham received this promise from Christ; and he chose and accepted it. He considered God to be faithful, and trusted in God to fulfil His promise. Rom 4:20-21. This responsive attitude of Abraham, combined with the initiative of Yahweh, who is the Word, became *a covenant of faith* between the two, which was then described in Scripture as 'the faith of God'. Rom 3:3. By this means, the faith of the Son of God became Abraham's faith. This covenant of faith is the definition of 'the faith of Abraham'.

Later, the Lord, *Yahweh*, appeared to Abram and said, 'I am *El Shaddai*; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My Covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly ... and I will establish *My Covenant* between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, *for an Everlasting Covenant*, to be God to you and your descendants after you.' Gen 17:1-2,7. Through Christ, the Word, *Yahweh Elohim* had extended *Their Covenant*, which is the Covenant of faith by which They live, to Abraham. The Lord gave circumcision to Abram as the sign in his flesh of this Covenant. Gen 17:10-11.

The need for marriage reformation

Significantly, the realisation of the promise of the Spirit required a reformation of the marriage of Abram and Sarai. Through the ministry of this word, Abram and Sarai received new names. *El Shaddai* said to Abram, 'No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.' Gen 17:4-5. He also said, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.' Gen 17:15-16.

These new names of Abraham and Sarah were the outcome of them both receiving the *same* portion of *Yahweh's name* through His initiative toward them as *El Shaddai*. The name *El Shaddai*, or 'God Almighty', means 'the Lord, the Covenant God, who possesses the *power* to realise His promises'. To this end, the portion of Yahweh's name, given to Abraham and Sarah through His expression as *El Shaddai*, endowed them with *power to be one*. Christ joined them to *the fellowship of headship*, enabling them to participate in God's covenant purpose of bringing many sons to glory. That is, from their oneness, as they walked together by faith in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, Abraham and Sarah had the power, or capacity, to participate in bringing forth Isaac, according to their unique *sanctification*. Paul noted that Isaac was a son born 'according to the Spirit'. Gal 4:29. This is the meaning and demonstration of a couple's participation in the order of headship that belongs to the offering fellowship of Yahweh.

Calling, election, adoption

Abraham became the father of Isaac, the one through whom the Seed, Christ, would be called. On Mount Moriah, Abraham joined Isaac to the offering of Christ so that, through him, Christ would come and fulfil this offering initiative of Abraham. Also, in the offering that Abraham made on Moriah, it was established that Christ, the Seed, would be called forth from Isaac. He would be called 'the Son of the Highest'. He would be the Word of the Father, made flesh as the Seed of Abraham.

Abraham established *calling* through his offering obedience on Moriah. Calling was established in Isaac as Ishmael, born according to the flesh, was rejected. This calling revealed that Isaac was the child of promise, and that he had been called by God according to His sovereignty. Gal 4:28. Rom 9:22-24.

The principle of *election* was established in Jacob through *choice*. The two brothers – Esau and Jacob – were given the opportunity to choose what God had chosen, or elected, for them. Jacob chose to embrace the process through which he could obtain the blessing of his name, while Esau rejected the word of his predestination. He hated the word of his name, refusing to become the servant of Jacob. For this reason, the Lord declared, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.’ Rom 9:13. Mal 1:2-3.

In type, the *adoption* was established in Jacob when he blessed Manasseh and Ephraim, saying, ‘And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, *they shall be mine.*’ Gen 48:5. Through the adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph was given his place among the twelve tribes of Israel. In this action, the Gentiles were also given their place among the twelve tribes of Israel. This was the implication of the blessing that Jacob gave to Joseph, when he prophesied, ‘Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; *his branches run over the wall.*’ Gen 49:22. These branches refer to a lampstand church from which the gospel of the kingdom of God will be proclaimed in all the world as a witness to all the nations. Rev 4:5. Mat 24:14.

The progressive revelation of the Spirit of Christ

The Spirit of Christ was with Abraham and with his descendants after him in a covenant of faith. The apostle Peter highlighted this point, writing, ‘Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith [the faith of Abraham] – the salvation of your souls. Of this salvation the prophets [Abraham, Moses and the Old Testament prophets] have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, *the Spirit of Christ who was in them* was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things which angels desire to look into.’ 1Pe 1:8-12.

Through the prophets

Until the coming of Christ, mankind was under the angels. Even so, Moses met Christ. He became Christ’s friend and received from Him the knowledge of Yahweh *Elohim*. God made Moses a prophet in the likeness of Christ. In this way, he was a type of Christ. Exo 33:11. Exo 3:14-15. Revealing this appointment, Moses testified, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you *a Prophet like me* from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’ Deu 18:15. Likewise, Jesus declared, ‘For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; *for he wrote about Me.*’ Joh 5:46.

Under Moses, the administration of Christ, through which the Spirit of Christ was ministered, was manifest in the tabernacle. At this time also, Moses received the Law through the disposition of angels. Act 7:53. The Law was added as the measure of God’s righteousness. The apostle Paul explained that the Law was added ‘because of transgressions, *till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made*; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator’. Gal 3:19. This mediator was Moses

who received the Spirit of Christ before he received the Law. The presence of God was with the children of Israel in the *Shekinah*. The glory of Yahweh's presence shone forth to them from between the *cherubim*, who represented the administration of the angels under which man was still situated.

The ministry of the word of God by the prophets of the Old Testament was enabled by the *seraphim* through the Holy Spirit as they connected the prophets, by sanctification, to the altar of incense. Isa 6:6-8. The prophets could then minister the word to Israel on behalf of Christ. 2Pe 1:21. 1Pe 1:10-11. This expression of the Spirit of Christ by the prophets was revealed when Isaiah was recommissioned in the year that Uzziah died. Having seen the Lord, Isaiah confessed, 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.' Isa 6:5. Isaiah further testified, "Then one of the *seraphim* flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me". Isa 6:6-8.

The Spirit of Christ in a physical body

The Spirit of Christ ministered through the tabernacle and its offering economy, and through the prophets, remained until the time of John the Baptist. Jesus described John as being the greatest born of a woman, for his work was to prepare the way before Christ, the embodiment of the Spirit of Christ. Significantly, Jesus further declared that 'he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he'. He said this because the Spirit of Christ would be germinated in a believer, by the Holy Spirit, and they would be born again as a new-creation son of God. Mat 11:11. From the time Jesus made this declaration, the kingdom of heaven was 'at hand' and men began to press into it and to 'take it by force'. Mat 11:12.

During their respective ministries, both John the Baptist and Jesus emphasised that the Jews were not heirs of the promises that Christ made to Abraham's descendants, who would be as numerous as the sands of the seashore or as the stars of heaven, simply because they possessed Abraham's DNA. For example, John the Baptist warned the Jews, and in particular the Pharisees and Sadducees, saying, 'Brood of vipers! [Children of the serpent!] Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.' Mat 3:7-9.

Likewise, Jesus forbade the Jews to interpret His words to Abraham as being applicable to them on account of their genetic heritage. He said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. *Abraham did not do this* [when I spoke to Him as Yahweh the Word]. You do the deeds of your father [Satan].' Joh 8:39-41. Jesus further emphasised that He was the source of the word to Abraham, saying, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.' Joh 8:58.

When Christ came in the flesh, the Spirit of Christ was revealed in the physical body of Christ as *the temple of Yahweh*. Jesus was *the Word made flesh*. Joh 1:14. The Word made flesh was a momentous step in the unfolding of God's covenant plan for mankind. Prior to this, in the dispensation of the Old Testament, Christ had a heavenly body, and His

Spirit could dwell in the heart of a hearer even though they were not born of the Spirit. However, when Christ was made flesh, a Son of God in the flesh had been brought forth. As God, manifest in the flesh, He was the *firstfruits* of the mystery of godliness; that is, He was the firstfruits of what *we are to become!* 1Ti 3:16.

His earthly ministry commenced when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and He was anointed with the sevenfold Spirit of God. At the beginning of His ministry, He said to the Jews, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Joh 2:19. They thought that He was talking about destroying Herod's temple in Jerusalem. However, John was clear that Jesus was talking about *the temple of His body*. Joh 2:21-22. That is, Jesus' body was *already* the temple. The will of the Father was being fulfilled only by Him. If the Jews killed Him in an endeavour to destroy the temple of His body, He would raise it up again by the resurrection life of the Father.

This statement established a point of conflict between Christ and those who presumed to be righteous through their participation in the economy of the Old Covenant temple, with its ordinances. In fact, the implication that their temple was not the temple of God at all was one of the claims that the worthless witnesses brought against Jesus in the court of Caiaphas. Interestingly, Mark noted in his Gospel that 'not even then did their testimony agree'. Mar 14:57-59.

The establishment of a corporate body

Through Christ's offering journey from Gethsemane to the cross, He was made *the corporate body of Christ*. After He was raised from the dead, the Spirit of Christ was then given His spiritual body, which had been made a corporate body. Now, the Spirit of Christ could dwell in a believer's heart, as well as be the Seed from which their spirit could be born of God. However, He was also able to contain, in Himself, the names and identities of all the newborn sons of God as a *corporate New Man*. His spiritual body had become the context in which we can grow up and mature as sons of God in Him, under His headship. Eph 4:15-16.

On the Mount of Olives, Jesus prayed that this would be the fruit of His offering journey from Gethsemane to Calvary. He asked the Father to give the fourfold grace that belonged to His own Spirit - name, word, truth and glory - to those whom the Father had given to Him. He did this so that they could be joined to Him as He became the corporate body of Christ. Moreover, through Him, they could be joined to the fellowship of Yahweh *Elohim*.

Specifically, Jesus prayed, 'I have manifested *Your name* to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept *Your word*.' Joh 17:6. He further said, 'Sanctify them by *Your truth*. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.' Joh 17:17-19. He also prayed, 'And *the glory* which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.' Joh 17:22-23.

Christ's offering journey from Gethsemane to Calvary was a travail. Explaining one of the key purposes for this travail, Jesus said, 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain'. Joh 12:24. Jesus was the one Seed in whom all the names of the sons of God were written, *before*, when He was begotten by the Father as the Son of God. Heb 1:5. However, unless He fell into the ground and died, He would abide alone as the only Son of God.

Through the pangs of death, or birth pangs, that belonged to the travail of His seven wounds, the one Seed was multiplied to become a firstfruits Sheaf, in which resided the unique seed of every person's name and life as a son of God. Highlighting this tremendous point, Paul said that when Christ had risen from the dead, He had 'become the [Sheaf of] *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep'. 1Co 15:20. We have detailed this travail, and its implications for the new birth, in Chapter 3.

On the day of His resurrection, being the first day of the week, Christ appeared to His disciples in the upper room, proclaiming, 'Peace be with you.' Joh 20:19. With this statement, their sins were forgiven them and He reconciled them to God. He then breathed the breath of *zoe* life upon them. Joh 20:22. Through this action, the Spirit of Christ, with the Spirit of the Father, came to abide in the hearts of the disciples.

Next, He said to the disciples, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'. Joh 20:22. As we will consider further in this chapter, the Holy Spirit is *the Spirit of adoption*. The Holy Spirit came into the disciples' hearts, causing them to know that they had been adopted by God the Father as His sons. Rom 8:15. The Father sent the seed of their sonship, brought forth from the travail of Christ, into their spirit. This seed, through the agency of the Spirit, was germinated in each person's spirit and they were conceived as new-creation sons of God who had been born again of the divine nature. Gal 4:6. The Spirit was also bearing witness in the disciples that they had entered the kingdom of heaven; they were now Abraham's true children as stars in heaven because they had sprung from Christ and were His seed. By this means, they had been 'translated into the kingdom of the Son'. This kingdom was called by God the Father, 'the kingdom of the Son of His love'. Col 1:13. Col 2:9-15. Eph 1. Eph 2.

Christ, at this time, also commissioned His disciples and sent them into the world to be His messengers, saying, 'As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' Joh 20:21. This commission had come from God the Father, for Jesus told Mary Magdalene, when she met Him at the garden tomb, that the apostles were His 'brethren'. He further said that as God was His Father so also were they sons of the Father, making them sons of God. Joh 20:17-23. As sons of God, they, like Him, were now sent into the world to make disciples for Christ.

Although the disciples were adopted as sons and were born of the divine nature, they were unable to discharge the commission that they had received from Christ, for they had not yet been baptised with the Holy Spirit. Act 1:8. Accordingly, the New Covenant of the Spirit had not yet commenced. Prior to His ascension to be seated at the right hand of the Father, Jesus *personally* ministered as the Head of His church for forty days and forty nights. During this time, He appeared in His spiritual body to over 500 brethren. 1Co 15:6. However, the disciples were not at this time engaged in this ministry.

The revelation of the mystery of Christ

On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples, and those who were with them, were 'filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance'. Act 2:1-4. They received 'power from on high' to be witnesses of the Spirit of Christ in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Act 1:8. Luk 24:49. Significantly, they were enabled to proclaim the mystery of Christ. As a hearer received and believed this message, they could be born again and be built into the New Jerusalem upon the twelve foundations of the apostles. Rev 21:14.

The apostles were granted the ministry of this mystery which had been kept secret, or had not been explained, to former generations – the mystery that the prophets enquired about in order to understand. The apostle Paul, in particular, testified, ‘I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: *which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.’ Col 1:24-29.

Likewise, the apostle Peter, addressing the New Testament believers as sojourners and pilgrims, wrote, ‘But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy’. 1Pe 2:9-10. Peter was declaring that the New Covenant believers, who had received the adoption as sons of God and who were being built on Christ, were the expression of the Spirit of Christ in the world. By this means, the mystery that was kept secret from ages past was being revealed as these believers superseded the administration of the Old Covenant. Since the coming of the Holy Spirit, we have ‘a more sure word of prophecy’, summed up now in the book of Revelation, to which we would do well to take heed. 2Pe 1:19.

Three dimensions of redemption

Having established that the adoption was not available to a believer until Jesus Christ came in the flesh, died on the cross, and was brought forth as the Firstborn from the dead, it is important to recognise that there are *three dimensions* of this redemptive work.

Redeemed to adoption

The *first* dimension of redemption is deliverance from living under the Law and its judgement, and the forgiveness of sins, granting to us *the adoption as sons of God*. This redemption was manifest in ‘the fullness of time’, when Christ was born of Mary as a Son of Abraham and of David, and was crucified for us. Explaining this seminal point, Paul wrote, ‘But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, *to redeem* those who were under the Law, *that we might receive the adoption as sons*.’ Gal 4:4-5.

The adoption gives to us the *right* to be a joint heir of the divine nature, with Christ. Highlighting this point, John introduced his Gospel account by stating, ‘But as many as received Him, to them He gave the *right to become children of God*, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.’ Joh 1:12-13.

The redemption that is in Christ

The apostle Paul described the *second* dimension of redemption as ‘the redemption that is in Christ’. He wrote, ‘For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being *justified* freely by His grace *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*’. Rom 3:23-24. We were justified by *the knowledge of Jesus* as He journeyed from Gethsemane to Calvary.

Establishing this point, Isaiah prophesied, 'By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.' Isa 53:11. The 'knowledge' by which we are justified is *our obedience as a son of God*. Jesus '*learned [our] obedience by the things which He suffered*'. Heb 5:8. He did this by fulfilling all of the works that belong to each person's sanctification as a son of God.

We are connected to this dimension of redemption through baptism by water and by the Holy Spirit, enabling us to be conformed to the image of the Son through the work of regeneration. As we journey with Christ on the pathway of salvation that He finished for us, we are being progressively regenerated and renewed; and we are enabled to do the works of obedience that Jesus has already finished for us. Tit 3:4-7. Heb 5:8-9.

The redemption of our body

The *third* phase of redemption is the redemption of the body that gives to us possession of a spiritual body on 'the last day', in readiness for 'the new heavens and the new earth'. *This is the fulfilment of the adoption*. Describing this culmination of redemption and adoption, Paul wrote, 'Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for *the adoption, the redemption of our body*. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.' Rom 8:23-25.

In this passage, Paul was referring to the second coming of Christ, when we are made incorruptible and immortal. We then put on our heavenly body and become completely spiritual in body, soul and spirit – just as Christ was, when He rose from the dead after three days and three nights in the tomb. At this point, we are no longer a 'firstfruits of the Spirit' people, who are members of Christ's body. Rather, we have proceeded from Him to be His bride, the heavenly Jerusalem. Each person is a temple of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the throne of the Father and the Lamb, as the expression of the river of life that flows out from the offering life of Yahweh *Elohim*.

This is the order of life for the rest of eternity in the new heavens and earth, for those who belong to the bride city, the New Jerusalem. The temple of Christ's body will have completed its work. Its dispensation will end, leaving the Father and the Son, together, ruling from one throne from which the life of God will proceed to us, and from us, as a river of life. This river will sustain the ever-increasing multitude that is within the kingdom of God. Rev 22:1-5.

Overview of the new birth

Let us now turn our focus to the means by which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit's covenant plan is accomplished in our life. This is the process through which we are born of God and, progressively, being made in the image and likeness of God. As we identify the elements of salvation, it is important to recognise that they are not just progressive but will have an ongoing expression in the life of a Christian.

The commandments of Christ

The beginning of the accomplishment of Yahweh *Elohim's* covenant purpose is the ministry of the word. This is the word that proceeds from the counsel of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The apostle John opened his Gospel with this key point, writing, '*In the beginning* was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. Joh 1:1.

Jesus sends messengers to proclaim the gospel of God by the capacity of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Rom 1:1. 1Pe 1:12. The gospel of God is the word declaring Yahweh *Elohim's* covenant purpose for each person. John described this message as 'the commandments of Christ'. Joh 14:21. Jesus said that His commandments were given to Him from the Father. Joh 12:49-50. These commandments are the word of the Father concerning the predestination of each person. To this end, they declare the redemption of a hearer and the hope of fulfilling their predestination by being born of God and brought to glory as a person who has been made in the image and likeness of God.

Importantly, the gospel of God, which contains the commandments of Christ, ministers the faith of the Son of God to a hearer so that they can believe for, and participate in, God's covenant purpose for them. Paul explained how a person receives this gift, writing, 'So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God'. Rom 10:17. Faith is ministered to the hearer in relation to each element of their salvation so that 'the righteousness of God is revealed *from faith to faith*; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith" '. Rom 1:17.

Prevenient grace

The hearer demonstrates that they have received, and are keeping, the commands of Christ as they find, through prevenient grace, repentance and deliverance from every impediment to hearing and believing His word. Having been dead in trespasses and sins, they are made alive in order to hear and receive the gospel of their salvation.

Detailing this aspect of God's covenant initiative toward us, Paul said, 'And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.' Eph 2:1-2. *As amazing as this deliverance is, the effect of God's prevenient grace in the life of a hearer is not the new birth, nor is it salvation.*

Rather, the effect of this spirit of grace and supplication, as they keep Christ's commands, will be notable changes in the life of a hearer. Through the faith that they are receiving in the word, enabling them to keep the commandments of Christ, they will find deliverance from addictions; healing of past hurts; relief from spiritual torment, and so on. This is the fruit of the *first* dimension of faith that a hearer receives. For this reason, they will love Christ and will glorify God. Because of this, Jesus said that the Father would love them and that He would also love them and make Himself known to them. Specifically, He said, 'He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.' Joh 14:21.

The Son and the Father abide

The Father demonstrates His love for the hearer who loves Christ by sending the Spirit of His Son, Jesus Christ, *into their heart*. Note, that the Spirit of the Son is sent into our heart *first*. This is when Christ, in identity, manifests Himself to us. Joh 14:21. He comes to *abide* in our *heart*, which is distinct from our spirit. Accordingly, this is *not* when our spirit is reborn.

The Spirit of Christ can dwell in a person's heart without new birth, for this was the experience of those who lived by the faith of Abraham. As we noted earlier in this chapter, the apostle Peter highlighted this reality, writing, 'Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come

to you, searching what, or what manner of time, *the Spirit of Christ who was in them* was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow'. 1Pe 1:10-11.

When the Spirit of Christ comes into our heart, the Father also comes to abide in our heart, for the Son and the Father are one. As Jesus said to Philip, 'Do you not believe that *I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?*' Joh 14:10. Highlighting this key waypoint of the Son and Father abiding in our heart, Jesus declared, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and *We will come to him and make Our home with him.*' Joh 14:23. As we noted earlier, when the Father and Son come and make their home in our heart, *this is a key foundation of God's plan for us, but it is also not the new birth.*

In this regard, it is important to recognise the distinction between Christ and the Father abiding in our heart and the conception of our spirit as a new creation. Most church theologies recognise that God can dwell in the heart of a person, but they do not believe in the next step of new birth which involves *the conception and rebirth of one's identity*, so that we are 'of God'. For example, John Calvin wrote, 'Christ calls Him His God, in so far as, by taking upon Him the form of a servant, He humbled Himself. (Philippians 2:7). This is, therefore, peculiar to His human nature, but is applied to His whole person, on account of the unity, because He is both God and Man. As to the second clause, in which He says that He ascends to His Father and our Father, *there is also a diversity between Him and us; for He is the Son of God by nature, while we are the sons of God only by adoption.*'

Calvin considered man's identification as a son of God to be an allegory, or picture, of his relationship with the Creator. In his view, man was placed in the *position* of a son through adoption; he could never become a son like Jesus. With this in mind, Calvin likened one's relationship with God to a flower's dependence on the sun for its life and expression.

Many theologians and so-called messengers have maintained similar views on sonship. They have either denied, or not recognised, that the process by which Christ was conceived as a Son of God in the flesh, is the very process by which our spirit, or identity, is born again. Moreover, they do not acknowledge that Adam was a type of Christ and that our predestination was to be made into the image and likeness of God through the process that Jesus, the Last Adam, pioneered through His offering and suffering journey. On the day of resurrection, we will be just like Jesus was on the day of His resurrection! Denying this truth, they are messengers of theologies that belong to the synagogue of Satan. Rev 2:9. Rev 3:9.

The point is, that many who identify as Christians on the basis of traditional theologies and creeds, have not yet received the faith to believe for the promise of the Spirit, which delivers to us the true adoption and new birth. Unless a hearer receives the faith of Abraham, rather than maintaining a 'believism', the Seed, which is the Spirit of Christ, will not germinate in them, meaning they are not born again and are not an heir of salvation. This is the definition of 'wayside ground'. We note that Jesus said, 'When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it [that is, they do not have the knowledge of the Holy One], then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart [which is, the effect of the teaching of the synagogue of Satan]. This is he who received seed by the wayside.' Mat 13:19.

The Spirit of adoption

The Son, when sent into our heart by the Father, prays to the Father who gives to us the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus described as '*another* Helper'. He is sent to us to be *with* us and

then *in us*. Joh 14:15-17. This is the advantage that belongs to those who received the gospel following the resurrection of Jesus. It is the promise of the Spirit, whom the heroes of faith saw from afar, but did not receive. Receiving the promise of the Spirit is the fruit of the *second* dimension of faith that comes by hearing the gospel of God. Gal 3:14.

The Holy Spirit is called 'the Spirit of adoption'. He comes into our heart, convicting us of sin, righteousness and judgement. Joh 16:7-11. Through this conviction, we are being asked, 'Do you want to be a son of God?' As we assent to this conviction, the Holy Spirit gives to us the faith to believe for what is entirely impossible and naturally inconceivable, which is that we can become a son of God who is born again of His divine nature. This is the *third* dimension of faith. Abram received this faith when Yahweh, who is the Word, came to him and said, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield [of faith], your exceedingly great reward'. Gen 15:1. Abram believed by this faith, and it was 'accounted to him for righteousness'. Gen 15:4-6. That is, his faith was the substance of the sonship to which he had been illuminated and that he now hoped for.

Likewise, as we believe for sonship, the Holy Spirit adopts us, making us children of God and delivering to us the free gift of righteousness. Rom 5:17. By the Spirit of adoption, we are able to call God, 'our Father'. This was Paul's point when he wrote, 'For you did not receive the spirit of bondage *again to fear*, but you received the *Spirit of adoption* by whom *we cry out*, "Abba, Father".' Rom 8:15.

In this age, we receive the Holy Spirit in a *firstfruits* measure. Describing the hope of the resurrection, which is the fulfilment of the adoption, Paul wrote, 'Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body'. Rom 8:23. The firstfruits of the Spirit is the Spirit of adoption.

Chapter 8 of the book of Romans reveals two dimensions of the work of the Spirit who is *with us* and *in us*. Paul wrote, 'There is therefore *now no condemnation* to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit'. Rom 8:1. They are under no condemnation because they have been redeemed and have received the Spirit of adoption. Later in this chapter, we read, 'For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God [walking according to the Spirit of adoption], *these are sons of God*.' Rom 8:13-14.

These two passages teach us that we are able to be spiritual when we receive the Holy Spirit as our Helper, and can then obediently follow His leading. The Spirit then confirms that, after we are born again, we are a joint heir of the divine nature, with Christ, on the condition that we join the process of regeneration by being co-crucified with Christ. By this, we mean that our life in the flesh, in this world, is replaced by the *zoe* life of Christ. Gal 2:20. Emphasising this reality, Paul said, 'The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.' Rom 8:16-17.

The conception of a son of God

In response to our cry, 'Abba! Father!', which is enabled by the Spirit of adoption, God sends forth the Spirit of Christ, who is the Father's Seed, *into our spirit*. This is the unique seed of our name, which was multiplied through the travail of the one Seed, Christ. While the Son, in identity, dwells in our heart, the seed of our sonship is germinated in our

spirit by the Holy Spirit, and we are conceived as a son of God. We are born of the divine nature and have become a totally new creation! We have become the offspring of God, but we do not become God through this birthing process.

Describing this conception, Paul wrote, 'And because you are sons [by adoption], God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.' Gal 4:6-7. It is helpful to note that the beginning of the adoption and the new birth happen almost simultaneously.

When this conception has happened, Christ has become our life, and we are to live this life by the faith of the Son of God. Gal 2:20. After we are born again as a son of God, the Father then places us into the church, *by* making us a member of the body of Christ. Col 1:18. This is the context where we are to lay our life down in love for one another. 1Jn 4:7. This is the *first dimension of baptism*.

Explaining this aspect of baptism, Paul wrote, 'For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit'. 1Co 12:13. 'But now God [the Father] has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.' 1Co 12:18. This is when a person has been born of water and the Spirit to enter 'the kingdom of God'. Joh 3:3,5. Paul summed up the outcome of new birth, writing, 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation'. 2Co 5:17.

Notably, Paul explained that a person who was baptised into Christ by the Father was baptised as a new creation son of God into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. This happens *before* water baptism. Explaining this point, Paul wrote, 'Or do you not know that as many of us as were *baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death* [and resurrection]? Rom 6:3. A person who has been born again and baptised by the Father acknowledges that although they once were not part of the people of God, through the Father's initiative towards them in the cross of Christ, they have become sons of God. Rom 9:25-26.

Baptised by water

Although a believer has been born of the Spirit, and is in Christ, '*the body is [still] dead because of sin*'. Rom 8:10. That is, they still have an unregenerate heart, which is motivated by another law, bringing them into bondage to the law of sin. Paul highlighted this wretched state, testifying, 'But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into *captivity to the law of sin* which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! *Who will deliver me from this body of death?*' Rom 7:23-24.

Deliverance from the body of death is through *regeneration and renewing in the fellowship of Christ's dying and living*. We are joined to this pathway, upon which our salvation is progressively obtained, when we are baptised by water. This is the second dimension of baptism. Although we were already baptised by the Father into the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, water baptism demonstrates our faith to take up our cross each day and follow Christ, as a disciple, on the pathway of salvation that He pioneered for us. We are able to be discipled by Christ through the word of His messengers. Moreover, we are changing from glory to glory as the other law is being removed from our heart and our inner man is being regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Rom 8:11. Eze 36:26. Mat 13:20-21.

In summary, Christ, as our great High Priest, joins us to His offering as a daily participation, through the ministry of His messengers who have been made co-workers with Him. 1Co 3:9. 2Co 6:1. 3Jn 1:8. In the fellowship of His offering, the process of regeneration becomes operative in our lives, perfecting us in our humanity into the image and likeness of God. Tit 3:4-7. 2Co 3:18.

Baptised with the Holy Spirit

After a person has been born and baptised by the Father into the body of Christ, and baptised in water, they are to be immersed, or baptised, in the Holy Spirit. This is the *third* dimension of baptism. Once immersed in the Spirit, the Spirit Himself fills a believer full, making them His temple. 1Co 6:19. This baptism is indicated by the capacity to speak in tongues. Act 2:4.

Having been baptised in the Holy Spirit, a believer receives the capacity to pray and prophesy, and to *testify* as a son of God. They do so as a member of the body of Christ, who is proceeding from Him as part of the community of the bride of Christ, the church. Act 1:8. In this regard, any Christian who has received the baptism of the Spirit is then able, as part of a community of believers, to be a co-worker with Christ.

Chapter 2

Bearing the fruit of sanctification

The body of Christ, the church, is a worldwide institution of sanctified people who are among the denominations, and even outside of them. These are people who have been born of the seed of the divine nature and baptised by the Father into the body of Christ. This happened when the word of God was spoken to them and they received the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of adoption, and the Father then sent the Spirit of the Son into their heart. The Holy Spirit enabled the conception of the Seed of God, which is the Spirit of Christ, in their heart, whereupon the Father placed them in the body of Christ.

With this in mind, we acknowledge that the Father knows those who are His. As the apostle Paul declared, 'Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity".' 2Ti 2:19. 'Iniquity' is going astray from the pathway of salvation that Christ has pioneered for us because we trust in our own understanding and walk according to the sight of our own eyes. Pro 3:5. Isa 5:21. Those who are known by the Father are calling on the name of the Lord and departing from iniquity. That is, they are planted in the body of Christ so that they can join the process of regeneration and become sons of men in the image and likeness of God. Rom 10:13. Tit 3:4-7.

How then do we know who belongs to the church, the body of Christ? Jesus was clear that it is by their fruit that a person is known, saying, 'You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them.' Mat 7:16-20. This is the fruit of the divine nature, and not a projection of religious good works. The removal of those who do not belong to the church is the work of the Father.

A key indicator that a person belongs to the kingdom of heaven, which is in the kingdom of God, is that they are a sheep who hears and responds to the voice of the Shepherd when He sends His messengers to proclaim His word to them. Jesus said, 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has

given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one.' Joh 10:27-30. They hear His voice and follow Him wherever He leads. Importantly, they are able to be gathered into the fellowship of Yahweh with their brethren.

Sanctify yourselves

Sanctification is the fruit that is born by those who have been brought forth as new-creation sons of God and who are walking by the Spirit on the pathway of regeneration as members of Christ's body. In this present season, the Holy Spirit is urging us all to be established in our sanctification, for the Scriptures are clear – *our sanctification is our eternal life*. Stressing this point, the apostle Paul declared, 'Pursue peace with all people, and holiness [lit: sanctification], *without which no-one will see the Lord*.' Heb 12:14. Similarly, he taught that 'having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness [sanctification], and the end, everlasting life'. Rom 6:22. We must, therefore, understand what is our sanctification, and how we are sanctified.

Messengers of Christ are responsible to proclaim the word of truth, which is necessary for sanctification. However, every hearer is responsible for sanctifying *themselves* in response to the word. The Lord gave this instruction to Joshua following Israel's defeat at the hands of Ai, which they suffered because of the sin of Achan. In response to this calamity, Joshua and the elders of Israel tore their clothes, put dust on their heads and prostrated themselves before the ark of the Lord until evening. The Lord then said to Joshua, 'Stand up, sanctify the people, and say, "*Sanctify yourselves*".' Jos 7:13.

With this action in view, Jesus prayed that the Father would sanctify us as His disciples. That is, He was asking the Father to sanctify us from the world and its uncleanness. Joh 17:15-16. He said to the Father, 'Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.' Joh 17:17. Earlier, Jesus had taught that the words of the Father, which are truth, and through which we are sanctified, are also the means by which the branches of the Vine, typifying the body of Christ, are pruned and purged by the Father. He said, 'Every branch *in Me* that does not bear fruit He [the Father] takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes [lit: purges or cleanses], that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean [or purged] because of the word *which I have spoken to you*.' Joh 15:2-3.

The word of the Father, which accomplishes our sanctification, is proclaimed by Jesus Christ through the ministry of His messengers. To this end, Jesus said, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.' Joh 13:20. However, as the Lord made clear to Joshua, it is the responsibility of a hearer to sanctify themselves in response to this word. Paul emphasised this point when he said to the Philippians, 'Therefore, my beloved, as you have always *obeyed*, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, *work out your own salvation* with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.' Php 2:12-13.

Sanctifying ourselves is working out our own salvation. We do this, by the Spirit, through obedience from the heart to the word of God. This is only possible for a person whose heart has been made new through rebirth and regeneration. Motivated by the fear of the Lord, a new-creation son of God *chooses* this word, *embraces* its implications for their life, and *walks* with Christ in the works of obedience that belong to its fulfilment. By this means, they are delivered from the world, they are transformed by the renewing of their mind, and they prove the will of God, which is their sanctification. Rom 12:1-2. 1Th 4:3.

The Holy Spirit is our Helper in this endeavour for He is the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of sanctification. Joh 15:26. 1Pe 1:2.

Inasmuch as hearers must accept responsibility for their own sanctification, those who are sent to proclaim the word that calls for this sanctification must not exceed their mandate. They are sent to preach the gospel of God. Rom 10:15. Their work is not to enforce the implications of the word in the lives of their hearers through emotive restatement or overstatement. To do so is to 'strike the rock with the rod'. This form of ministry by a messenger incurs the judgement of God, as exemplified by Moses at Meribah. Num 20:7-13.

The need for sound doctrine

Significantly, we find sanctification when we obey from the heart that form of doctrine, or way of living, into which we have been entrusted by Christ's messengers. Rom 6:17. This way of living is a culture that is particular to the fellowship of offering into which we are immersed through baptism. Paul charged Timothy to teach this culture to the Ephesian churches. Teaching this culture entailed instructions on how those in the church, individually and as families, were to live sanctified lives as Christians, being separated from the world. He defined this whole instruction as 'sound doctrine'. 1Ti 1:10. 2Ti 4:3.

In fact, Timothy was directed by Paul to command some that they teach no other doctrine in the church, for many alternative gospels and points were being taught in the church. Specifically, he said to Timothy, 'As I urged you when I went into Macedonia - remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.' 1Ti 1:3-4. Paul further asserted that all teaching and preaching in the church was to be godly, edifying, and in faith. The aim of all who taught was to achieve a Christian culture that expressed love from a pure heart; love expressed from a good conscience; and then love expressed from sincere faith. 1Ti 1:5.

Paul's explanation of the sanctifying ministry of sound doctrine reflected the instructions that Jesus gave to His disciples just prior to the commencement of His offering and suffering journey. He said to them, 'As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. *If you keep My commandments* [the word of sound doctrine through which we are cleansed and sanctified by the Father], you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.' Joh 15:9-10.

Christ said that His joy was that He was loved by His Father and that He abided in the Father's love. He was loved by the Father because He kept the commandments of the Father. Our joy is that we are loved by the Son because we abide in His love. We abide in His love because we keep His commandments.

Jesus commands us to love one another as He has loved us. As He commanded, we now love one another as He loved us. This love for one another, and the same abiding in, and with, one another, applies to every member of the body of Christ in relation to every other member. *This makes us friends together*, which is demonstrated as we lay down our lives for one another. This is summarised by Jesus as the fruit that we manifest as branches of the Vine. This love, in fact, is the fruit of the Vine. Joh 15:16-17.

Enabled to look upon Christ

At this time, the Spirit is calling us all to cease from hiding our faces from Christ so that we can be delivered from the iniquitous projections that impede our participation in the

fellowship of *agape*, and can be established in our sanctification. Isa 53:3. Thankfully, the Spirit is enabling us to look upon, and to see, the Son of Man.

Emphasising this imperative, the apostle John recounted Jesus' interaction with the man who was born blind. Hearing that the man had been cast out of the synagogue, Jesus found him and said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?' The man asked, 'Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?' Significantly, Jesus answered, 'You have both *seen Him* and it is He who is *talking with you.*' Joh 9:35-37. In other words, the man had been enabled to look upon and *see* the Son of Man and was receiving His word as a disciple of Christ. Now illuminated, and filled with faith, the man responded, saying, 'Lord I believe!', and he worshipped Jesus. Joh 9:38.

Jesus then summed up the whole matter, which the Spirit is presently highlighting to us, saying, 'For judgement I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.' Joh 9:39. One of the Pharisees who heard His word asked, 'Are we blind also?' Jesus responded, saying, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin [because you could start to receive illumination and look upon Christ and begin to mourn]; but now you say, "We see" [closing your eyes to the process of regeneration]. Therefore your sin remains.' Joh 9:40-41.

To interface with Christ in this manner is an astonishing interaction. As the prophet Isaiah noted, 'Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.' Isa 52:14. A person is astonished when they see that Christ's visage 'was marred more than any man's', and then to understand that this marring was because of *their* fallen projection that had been transferred to Him. This interaction with Christ quickens faith. As a believer 'looks on Him whom they have pierced', as Peter did, they are able to mourn for Christ 'as for a Firstborn'. Zec 12:10. This mourning leads to repentance, establishing them on the pathway of salvation. 2Co 7:10.

The God who forgives

A person who is obtaining their sanctification rejoices in the forgiveness of God, but also fears Him. They recognise that He takes vengeance on their sinful deeds. Accordingly, they accept the need to eat the fruit of their own way. They recognise that this belongs to the process for their refinement and maturation as a son of God.

King David exemplified this orientation to the pilgrimage of God's covenant people, particularly after he found forgiveness from God for his adultery and murder. The prophet Nathan had said to David, 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun.' 2Sa 12:11. As David was fleeing Jerusalem to escape the grievous intent of his son, Absalom, he was abused by Shimei who cursed him and threw stones at him. In response to Abishai's request to take Shimei's head, David said, 'Let him alone, and let him curse; *for so the Lord has ordered him.* It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will *repay me with good* [the fruit that belongs to my sanctification] for his cursing this day.' 2Sa 16:11-12.

Having this understanding, David prophetically wrote of Christ, the King of kings, saying, 'The King's strength also loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool - He is holy.' Psa 99:4-5. The footstool, where we are to worship, is the feet of Christ.

This is where the apostle John fell as a dead man when he turned to see the voice that spoke with him, and he saw one like the Son of Man in the midst of seven lampstands. Rev 1:10-13,17.

The psalmist continued, saying, 'Moses and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel was among those who called upon His name; they called upon the Lord, and He answered them. He spoke to them in the cloudy pillar [or from between the cherubim as He was seated on the mercy seat]; they kept His testimonies and the ordinance He gave them. You answered them, O Lord our God; *You were to them God-Who-Forgives [El Nasa], though You took vengeance on their deeds.*' Psa 99:6-8.

When the psalmist identified Christ as *El Nasa*, he was revealing that He comes close to, forgives, and delivers, those who mourn. He does this by lifting them up with His right hand. Job 27:11. We note, in this regard, the words of Isaiah, who testified, 'Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for Yah, the Lord, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.' Isa 12:2. Describing the expression of those who have received this salvation, we read, 'The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous; *the right hand of the Lord [that ministers this salvation] does valiantly*'. Psa 118:15.

As we have already noted, although the Lord does forgive, He also takes vengeance on our deeds. This is part of the ministry from His hand as *El Nasa*, and it looks like lamentation, mourning and woe. Ezekiel learnt this principle, testifying, 'Now when I looked, *there was a hand stretched out to me*; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it were *lamentations and mourning and woe.*' Eze 2:9-10. Significantly, as a messenger of the Lord, Ezekiel was directed to eat this scroll, as he further recounted, 'Moreover He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll.' Eze 3:1-2.

Having established that the King of kings is the God-Who-Forgives, who takes vengeance on our deeds, David then directed us, saying, 'Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the Lord our God is holy.' Psa 99:9. The holy hill is Mount Zion, the city of the living God. This is the city that belongs to the sanctified elect, meaning those who are departing from their uncleanness and iniquity.

Christ is coming in the midst of the seven churches as *El Nasa*. For example, He addressed the church in Thyatira as, 'the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass'. Rev 2:18. Having rebuked the *aggelos* for allowing Jezebel to teach and seduce His servants, Christ said to them, and to the church of Thyatira, 'All the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. *And I will give to each one of you according to your works.*' Rev 2:23. That is, He will take vengeance on our deeds, even though He forgives. Christ then said, 'Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine [of Jezebel], who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. *But hold fast what you have till I come.* And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations.' Rev 2:24-26.

We are in a season when the Lord is coming among us with 'eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze'. Rev 2:18. He is addressing our iniquitous projections, revealing the thoughts and intentions of our heart, and calling us to worship at His feet in sanctification on Mount Zion. Psa 99:4-5. Specifically, the Lord has been addressing the

issue of sanctification in our families. In this regard, He is coming upon many in judgement because they have not discerned the body in relation to this matter. 1Co 11:29. Their unsanctified engagement in the community of the church has been the fruit of their arrogance towards the word of the Lord. This is the word of His messengers, proclaimed from the Scriptures that were written by Peter and Paul.

Paul testified that the rejection of his message, by those who heard him speak, was a humiliation. 2Co 12:21. Likewise, the messengers in this age are humiliated when they preach what is written in the Scriptures, and those who hear the word remain resolute in their iniquity. Instead of obeying the word, these ones cleave to presbyters with deceit. They seek alternative and corrupt counsel, and patronise Christ's messengers who belong to the presbytery and who are given to preach the word. They do this while making complaint against them and their message, privately and, at times, openly.

However, the Lord expects His messengers to continue to proclaim the word faithfully. As He said to Jeremiah, ' "The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and *he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully*. What is the chaff to the wheat?" says the Lord. "Is not My word like a fire?" says the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" ' Jer 23:28-29. Note, that as the messengers of the Lord faithfully speak the word, rather than hit the rock with the rod in frustration, the word itself is like a hammer that breaks the rock into pieces.

We are living in fearful days as the judgements of the Lord come among us. Accordingly, this is the time to fear the Lord as we remember His word that says, 'He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.' Pro 29:1.

Presumptuous sin

King David wrote, 'Keep back Your servant also from *presumptuous sins*; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless [as one who walks according to the Spirit], and I shall be innocent of great transgression.' Psa 19:13. Presumptuous sins are high-handed, deliberate disobedience that is effected by those in the church. It refers to the attitude and actions of a person who follows after their own heart and their own mind on matters to do with the word and culture in the church. Those who walk in this manner are rejecting their own sanctification and are undermining the sanctification of those who are weak in faith.

Korah, Dathan and Abiram

Such presumption was exemplified in the Old Testament by Korah and his associates, Dathan and Abiram. We remember that Korah was a Levite who criticised Moses and Aaron, the Lord's messengers. Having gathered men to himself, Korah, with Dathan and Abiram, claimed that the holiness of the people was not contingent upon obedience to the word of Moses and Aaron. They insinuated that the people did not need to listen to these messengers; and that they were not the face of Christ to them. Korah said to Moses and Aaron, 'You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?' Num 16:3.

Moses immediately recognised this presumptuous sin and its implications for these men and their families. He fell on his face and said to them, 'You and all your company are gathered together against the Lord. And what is Aaron that you complain against

him?' Num 16:11. He then directed them to present themselves before the Lord, saying, 'Tomorrow, you and all your company be present before the Lord - you and they, as well as Aaron. Let each take his censer and put incense in it, and each of you bring his censer before the Lord, two hundred and fifty censers; both you and Aaron, each with his censer.' Num 16:16-17.

In their presumption, Korah and his followers were confident that God would accept them and their prayers when they gathered at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. However, the Lord, through Moses, said to the congregation, 'Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram'. Num 16:24. In effect, He was saying to them, through Moses, 'Come out from among them and be separate'. 2Co 6:17. The Lord executed judgement on Korah, Dathan and Abiram, their families, and all who were with them. The ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth so that they, and their possessions, were swallowed up. The earth then closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. Num 16:31-33.

Nadab and Abihu

Nadab and Abihu were the sons of Aaron. They presumed upon the work of offering incense, a work that belonged to their father, the high priest. Not only that, but they also did not follow the instructions of the Lord concerning this offering, adding common fire to their censers, rather than the fire that belonged to the altar of burnt offering. Lev 10:1.

As a consequence of their presumptuous sin in the service of the tabernacle, 'fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord'. Lev 10:2. The Lord spoke to Aaron, through Moses, saying, 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.' Lev 10:3. Aaron was not even allowed to grieve for his sons on account of their presumption. Lev 10:6-7.

Interestingly, the children of Israel were supposed to make tassels on the corners of their garments, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. When they looked upon the tassels, they were to *remember* all the commandments of the Lord and do them, and were to eschew harlotry to which their *own heart* and *own eyes* were inclined. Num 15:37-39. Furthermore, they were to be holy, or sanctified, for the Lord as those who knew His name. Accordingly, He said to them, 'I am the Lord your God [Yahweh *Elohim*], who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God.' Num 15:40-41. This should have been Nadab and Abihu's orientation to their conduct in the tabernacle.

In the church

Presumptuous sin is demonstrated in the church when a person, particularly one who maintains a leadership demeanour, rejects or reinterprets the word of the Lord proceeding from the presbytery. They do this on the basis of their own understanding of the gospel, and to soften the harm that they perceive is being done to them, and to others, through the proclamation of the word. In this regard, they are empowered by the fruit that they have consumed from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which they feed to others in the church.

A person reserves the right to minister to others in this manner through either assumed authority or on account of their association with those who have received actual authority from Christ. In both instances, these are people who 'cleave to the messengers with deceit' and who gather people to themselves and their own interpretation of the word of

the Lord. Those who gather to them, and entreat them, do so because of their own lack of sanctification on a matter, and because they are unwilling to personally meet Christ in repentance, and to know Him by walking in the light of the word that proceeds from His face through the ministry of the presbytery.

A notable example of this presumptuous sin has been the alternative instruction given to families who have had members depart from their household, and from and the household of God, in pursuit of their rebellious and often immoral endeavours. The Spirit has been calling every family in the church to be found worthy, which requires their sanctification from the world. Through sanctification, families are able to dignify a person's choice to depart, leaving them to their decision. They are able to maintain their obedience and sanctified participation in the *agape* meal as part of the bride of Christ.

However, there have been a number of supposedly leading brethren and, in particular, wives, who have not maintained their own sanctification in these matters, and have counselled others to engage their rebellious relatives as an expression of God's unconditional love. This is presumptuous sin and brings both those who minister in this way, and those who receive their counsel, under condemnation.

Jesus warned the presbytery in Thyatira about this influence in the church, describing it as the spirit of Jezebel. He said to the presbytery of this church, 'I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.' Rev 2:20-23.

Sanctification through the Elijah ministry

The Elijah ministry to the church is a sanctifying ministry. The sanctification of the people of God by this ministry enables them to be called 'the church', because the church is a 'called out' company who are made the elect. The apostle Paul spoke the word of the Father that was given to him by Christ to proclaim to the Corinthian church. This word belongs to the church in this present season. It is the content that belongs to the Elijah ministry, which was first proclaimed to Israel on Mount Carmel, and then continued to be proclaimed by all the prophets under the Old Covenant, concluding with John the Baptist when he baptised Christ.

John's baptism of Jesus inaugurated the beginning of the New Covenant. At this time, Jesus said to John, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us *to fulfill all righteousness.*' Mat 3:15. The baptism of Jesus fulfilled all righteousness because this is when the physical body of Christ was inaugurated as the new Temple of God on the earth. Joh 2:19. This happened because the Holy Spirit descended from heaven in His fulness, in the form of a dove, and filled Christ, giving to Him, from the Father, all of the power and capacity of *El Shaddai*. Joh 1:32-34. He would minister by this power, which was enabled by the seven Spirits of God given to Him by the Holy Spirit.

Significantly, this is when Jesus was *sealed by the Father with the Spirit*. This gave to Jesus the right and capacity to give us everlasting life through the ministry of His word. To this end, He said, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs,

but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, *which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.*' Joh 6:26-27.

John the Baptist had ministered in the spirit and power of Elijah. This meant that, just as Elijah had done, John had ministered by the portion of the capacity and power of the sevenfold Spirit of God that he had received. The highpoint of his ministry was to ordain Christ through baptism. Once he had fulfilled this ministry, and had passed on the ministry of fulfilling all righteousness to Jesus, John's ministry began to decrease and was consummated in martyrdom. As John himself said, 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' Joh 3:30.

Christ's ministry began to increase from the day of His baptism as He gathered His apostles to Himself. These men were gathered to Jesus as His sheep when they became His disciples. The Elijah ministry, as the ministry that is to fulfil all righteousness by *bringing in everlasting righteousness*, had been transferred from John to Jesus and His apostles. In this regard, the Seventy Weeks prophecy had been given to Christ to fulfil. Dan 9:24.

The word of the Elijah ministry that has been proclaimed to us in our day is the word of the Lord that is calling us to be sanctified in our marriages and families. The Lord, the Father, through the prophet Malachi said, 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord [when the Father takes His seat]. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.' Mal 4:5-6.

Come out and be separate

The apostle Paul declared this same word to us from the Father when he spoke of the unsanctified relationships and behaviours that existed in the Corinthian church. He said to them, and to us, 'O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open [This is the demeanour of messengers in the church]. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open.' 2Co 6:11-13.

In love, messengers who speak before God in Christ are open to their hearers. They proclaim the word without fear or favour, so that their hearers might not be inhibited in relation to their sanctification. As we considered in Chapter 1, hearers demonstrate their love for Christ and their affection for His messengers *through obedience to the word*. This is the word of the Father that can bring them to maturity as sons of God.

Paul continued, writing, 'Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness [which is sonship] with lawlessness [iniquity; self-image; projection leading to weariness]? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?' 2Co 6:14-15. Belial is not Satan or an evil spirit. The word, 'Belial', comes from the Hebrew word for 'worthlessness and unprofitableness'. It is referring to people, or social engagements, that are worthless or unprofitable. These are not the works of obedience that belong to being yoked with Christ, through which we find rest as we cease from striving to find ourselves through our own endeavours. It is, therefore, important to consider whether the activities in which we are engaged are worthwhile or profitable

for righteousness. Do they reveal Christ through *agape* fellowship? Are they multiplying our mina and talent, or are they the activities that belong to the pursuit of pleasure?

Further highlighting the distinction between sanctified and unsanctified conduct, Paul said, 'And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? *For you are the temple of the living God.* As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people".' 2Co 6:16. Paul was emphasising a remarkable understanding – we are a temple for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are worshipping in our body and desiring for us to multiply this worship with others. It defines how we relate to one another. For this reason, we must not defile the temple of God. 1Co 3:16-17.

Having posed these questions, Paul addressed the church, saying, ' "Come out from among them and be separate", says the Lord. "Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters", says the Lord Almighty.' 2Co 6:17-18. There are three clear directions in this statement – (1) *Come out* from among those who are unsanctified in the church; (2) be separate; that is, relationally *separate yourself* from those in the church who live and walk in an unsanctified manner; and (3) *do not touch* what is unclean.

God the Father made it clear, through the prophetic, apostolic ministry of Paul, that He would not receive us, or be a Father to us, if we did not do as He directed us to do. If we call on God as our Father, then He only hears us if we are living and walking in the culture of righteousness that the Elijah ministry declares. This is what it means to be 'a church'. A church is a 'called out' and sanctified community. Jesus said that He would build His church and that it would be made up only of an elect, sanctified people. As we are progressively sanctified and made righteous by, and through, obedience to the word, the fruit of our righteousness will be seen because of answered prayer. James, the brother of Jesus, instructed us that as Elijah prayed, so we also will pray. He then said that this kind of prayer is made effective through sanctified righteous living. Jas 5:16-18.

Examine yourselves

It is important to recognise that the apostle Paul was writing to the church in Corinth when he directed those with an ear to hear, to 'come out from among *them* and be separate'. 2Co 6:17. The '*them*', to which Paul was referring, were those in the Corinthian congregation who were unsanctified. They were not obedient from the heart to the form of doctrine to which they were being delivered. Rather, they were continuing to live according to their own understanding and the sight of their own eyes.

Speaking to these people, Paul said, 'Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? *We speak before God in Christ.* But we do all things, beloved, for your edification. For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits [self-promotion], tumults [instability, complexity, agitation]; lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practised.' 2Co 12:19-21.

Paul was detailing the fruit that is brought forth by those who are *unsanctified*. They are unclean on account of their disobedience and mixture. 1Th 4:7. Significantly, he said that they had *not come to repentance*. Without repentance, we are unable to receive or exercise faith to live by the Spirit, who is the Spirit of adoption. Heb 6:1. Gal 3:14. Rom 8:15.

In this state, our Christian life is 'a form of godliness' without the power of new-creation life. Again, Paul said, 'From such people turn away!' 2Ti 3:5.

Notably, *these people can make a lot of noise*. However, their communication is not the confession, 'Abba! Father! – God, You are my Father'. In fact, they demand attention from the messengers of Christ, and from others in the body, to ratify their own gospels; to excuse their mixture and uncleanness; and to verify their idolatrous projections. Their motive is the fear of death associated with condemnation and shame.

Those people who are unwilling to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling often want someone to define the works through which they can be assured of their acceptability. Paul summarised this orientation to the word as choosing the imposed imperative of 'circumcision'. Others who continue to live according to the dictates of their own heart, preference the counsel of false messengers who say, 'You shall have peace' and, 'No evil shall come upon you'. Jer 23: 17. Paul called this 'uncircumcision'. However, neither of these motivations bear good fruit. As Paul emphasised, 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, *but a new creation*.' Gal 6:15.

Assurance by association is the alternative to faith. We do not obtain faith through engagement with the messenger. We receive faith by hearing the word and receiving it with meekness. Rom 10:17. Jas 1:21. We then desire fellowship with those who preach the word *because we have already received faith*. 1Jn 1:1-3. As Paul said, 'And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and *therefore* I spoke", we also believe and therefore speak.' 2Co 4:13. The conversation of faith is a *confession of sanctification*. This includes confession of the uncleanness from which we are departing, and confession of the obedience to which we are being delivered. Our communication in this fellowship is *with gladness and simplicity of heart* as those who are 'taught the word *share in all good things* with him who teaches'. Gal 6:6.

The messengers of Christ, and indeed the members of the body of Christ, *have no obligation to the flesh*. Rom 8:12. It is not their responsibility to assure a person of salvation, particularly when a hearer is choosing uncleanness over sanctification. In fact, Paul said that the onus was on each person to *examine themselves and prove that Christ was in them*, writing, 'Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified.' 2Co 13:5.

To examine ourselves, as we are directed by Paul, let us consider the following questions. Do we trust Christ's messengers? Are we receiving faith by hearing and responding with repentance to the word? Is our communication expressing sonship by the Spirit of adoption, or is it the emotion of sin driven by the loss of our religious reputation? Is the Spirit of Christ our 'exceedingly great reward', or do we embrace the uncleanness that belongs to the spirit of the world? Gen 15:1. Are we beset by sin and its emotions, or are we finding deliverance and healing through regeneration and renewing on the pathway of salvation? Are we contentious, jealous, full of opinion and complaint, confused, anxious, contrary, and demanding, or are we participating in the *agape* meal with gladness and simplicity of heart?

The nature of our pilgrimage

If we are on the pathway of salvation, we are pilgrims who are responding to the call to come out from among the unsanctified. Moreover, we are separating ourselves from those

whose culture does not belong to the heavenly city. Pilgrims recognise that their works and sanctification are not yet complete; however, they are being progressively realised as they journey with Christ to Mount Zion.

Concerning the pathway of pilgrimage, the prophet Isaiah declared, 'A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness [meaning, sanctification]. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; it shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' Isa 35:8-10.

From where are pilgrims journeying? They are journeying forward in their escape from Sodom and Gomorrah in their generation. Sodom and Gomorrah are symbols of the world – that is, the ten nations of the land of Canaan. This is, symbolically, the promised land in which we now reside.

Abraham was a prophet who refused to be identified with Sodom. He said to the King of Sodom, 'I have raised my hand to the Lord [Yahweh], God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours.' Gen 14:22-23.

Abraham's next two considerations of Sodom were through intercessory prayer. We recall that Abraham supped with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit over an *agape* meal. Gen 18:1-8. At the conclusion of this meal, Yahweh said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.' Gen 18:17-19. The Lord then revealed that He was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah and all of their inhabitants.

Abraham prayerfully interceded for Lot, asking the Lord to spare the city if He found ten righteous people within it. However, this intercession was not only for Lot. He was also interceding for his children and household after him, whom he would instruct to depart from this fallen, mixed and wicked culture. That is, he was praying for the remnant church from this point, all the way to the time of the end. He was praying for those who would depart from the mixture within the kingdom of God, typified by the land of Canaan.

We note that Abraham and Sarah did not build any cities, nor would they reside in any of the cities within the promised land, for these cities represented 'mixture' in the kingdom. They dwelt in tents because they were on a journey to live in a city that God was building for them, and for us, their children. The remnant church are those who are on this same pilgrimage.

Isaiah was a prophet who said that he dwelt with a very small remnant of true believers in the midst of the nation of the Jews, whom he likened to Sodom and Gomorrah. Speaking the word of the Lord to the Jews, he said, 'Unless the Lord of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like

Gomorrah [that is, we would have been destroyed]. Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the Law of our God, you people of Gomorrah.' Isa 1:9-10.

Yet, Isaiah prophesied that, in our day, this very small remnant would become Zion. They would be drawn from the four corners of the earth and would be those who traversed the highway of holiness, gathering to the banner set for the nations. Isa 11:11-16. The prophet Daniel described this remnant as a stone, cut without hands, from Zion.

Dan 2:45. Beginning as a very small remnant, symbolised by the number 144 000, it would then fill the whole earth and become a great and high mountain.

The importance of completing the race

Once we have commenced our journey, it is important that we complete it! This is fundamental to our salvation. For this reason, Paul said, 'Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.' 1Co 9:24-27.

Clearly, Paul recognised that his salvation was not assured because of his ministry grace or service. This is true for all believers, including those who belong to the presbytery. In this regard, Paul withstood and admonished Peter and Barnabas before the whole congregation in Antioch. They were at risk of becoming castaways, meaning 'damned', because they succumbed to the pressure of the Judaisers, withdrawing themselves from the Gentiles. Peter's preservation of his reputation among the Jews placed him, again, in the court of Caiaphas. He needed to receive the gospel proclaimed by Paul and find repentance, lest he enter into hell with the messengers of Satan whom he had entertained.

Chapter 3

The manifestation of the sons of God

The name and initiative of the Father

God the Father is the source of every identity. Moreover, He is the Father of all the families of the earth in which these identities are brought forth. James, the brother of Jesus, identified the Father as the source of identities, writing, 'Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the *Father of lights*, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.' Jas 1:16-18. The 'lights' identified by James in this passage, refer to spirits, or identities. We know this because King Solomon explained that 'the spirit of a man is the lamp [or light-bearer] of the Lord'. Pro 20:27.

The apostle Paul explained that *creation springs from God the Father*, writing, 'There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him'. 1Co 8:6. Creation is the context that has been prepared for families in which identities are multiplied through procreation. These identities were predestined to be born of God by incorruptible seed, through the word of God. 1Pe 1:23. The name and initiative of the Father is revealed through this process.

More specifically, the glory of God the Father is seen in godly families, as identities are multiplied from the womb in the bringing forth of children. In these *covenant houses*, the children are children of Abraham as sons and daughters of men. Following their conception, they are born again in the womb as sons and daughters of God. That is, they are born again of the Seed of the Father, who is Christ, in whose name their name as a son of God resides. Php 2:9-11.

Note that a natural birth is a procreative work, established in creation by God the Father. Through procreation, an eternal spirit, or identity, is generated in a physical body. The manifestation of this identity is 'out of nothing', in the sense that the person - as a body, soul and spirit - did not exist until the conception had occurred in the womb of a mother. It is this eternal identity that is then *reborn* in a physical body as a son of God.

The process of being born again parallels the conception of Christ as the Son of Man in the womb of Mary. However, it is important to recognise the differences between Christ's birth and our new birth. Christ is Yahweh Son who emptied Himself, *before*, to be begotten by the Father as the Son of God. He then emptied Himself further to the womb of the virgin Mary and was conceived as the Son of God in the flesh by the agency of the Holy Spirit. By this means, He was brought forth as a Son of Man and a Son of God in the lineage of Abraham and David. Importantly, Christ's identity pre-existed this birth.

As sons of men, who are children of Abraham through faith, our identity is created through a natural conception in the womb of a woman. This is a marked distinction from Christ, who is I AM in identity, having no beginning nor end of days. Joh 8:58. Heb 7:3. A natural identity, conceived in a mother's womb, is born again of the Seed of the divine nature that comes from the Father through Christ, by the Holy Spirit. This happens in the womb of a woman who, through the faith of one parent, belongs to the corporate virgin bride of Christ. 1Co 7:14. In this sense, an existing natural identity is born of the Father, by the Spirit, through the travail of the virgin bride, which is the church.

Jesus was God the Son who was begotten as the Son of God and was manifest in the flesh as the Son of Man. We are sons of men who are born again as sons of God. Paul explained this point of connection, writing, 'For both He who sanctifies [Christ] and those who are being sanctified [sons of men] *are all of one* [born of the Father through the agency of the Spirit], for which reason *He is not ashamed to call them brethren*'. Heb 2:11. We now sojourn with Jesus on the pathway of salvation that He pioneered through His offering and suffering journey from Gethsemane to Calvary. Heb 5:7-9. At the conclusion of this journey, when He was raised from the dead, He was manifest as the first Man made in the image and likeness of God. As we faithfully walk each day by the Spirit on this pathway, we are progressively being changed from glory to glory into the image of the Son. 2Co 3:18. At the resurrection on the last day, we will be made just like Him! 1Jn 3:2.

Presently, the bringing forth of identities who are born again as sons of God happens in godly families. These families are the expression of the bride of Christ, the church, who *remains a virgin* although married to Christ. The consummation of the union of Christ and the church is not possible until those who comprise the bride of Christ receive their spiritual bodies in the resurrection. Even then, the marriage is not consummated until the conclusion of the Millennium. At that time, the old creation will pass away, and the new heavens and earth will be established. The union of Christ and His bride establishes a new economy by which sons of God are brought forth in maturity.

Until the day of resurrection, through circumcision and regeneration, we are progressively maturing as sons of men who have been born of the Seed of the divine nature as sons of God. This process is the implication of our *daily* participation in the work of the cross. Luk 9:23. Our faithful and patient participation in this process brings us to the fullness of the adoption, identified by the apostle Paul as 'the redemption of our body'. Rom 8:23. This is the day of resurrection when we receive our spiritual body, which is an immortal, incorruptible, physical body that is clothed with a heavenly body. Prophesying concerning this day, King David wrote, 'As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness'. Psa 17:15.

Manifesting the divine nature as part of our humanity is the present focus of our daily fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ. The name that we receive through new birth is the essence of the Seed by which our identity is born again. It defines our unique expression of the one *zoe* life of God. Because of our birth as a new-creation son of God,

we have a participation in the fellowship and purpose of Yahweh. This *desire* belongs to us, for it is the essence and life of the Seed. Communicating the participation of sons of God in the fellowship of Yahweh, King David declared, 'One thing *I have desired* of the Lord [Yahweh], that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.' Psa 27:4.

Importantly, as sons of God, we are not merely an extension of the expression of Yahweh, like the Angel of the Lord. Rather, we have been born to be participants in the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as those who are born of Their life and are being made in Their image and according to Their likeness. Gen 1:26. Highlighting this implication of the gospel, the apostle John said, 'Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.' 1Jn 2:8.

The suffering Seed

To explain how Christ, the one Seed of the Father, became the Seed of new creation for each person, Jesus declared, 'The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.' Joh 12:23-24. The question is, how did the one Seed become a multitude?

The apostle Peter answered this question in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Speaking of Jesus Christ, he said, 'Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God [the Father] raised up, having loosed the *pains of death*, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.' Act 2:23-24.

The Greek word for 'pain' that Peter used to describe the 'pains of death' specifically refers to the travail associated with *birth pangs*. In this regard, Peter was highlighting that each wounding event in the course of Christ's offering journey, culminating in His death on the cross and subsequent burial and resurrection, *were birth pangs*. Jesus was not held by death, but through His death something was being brought forth by God the Father.

In and of itself, each wound that Jesus suffered was sufficient to kill Him, revealing that these birth pangs were events in which Jesus laid His life down by *emptying Himself to an endpoint*. Jesus highlighted this implication of His travail, declaring, 'Therefore My Father loves Me, because *I lay down My life that I may take it again*. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power [from the Holy Spirit] to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.' Joh 10:17-18. Christ was being put to death in each wound. By this, we mean that the birth pangs of death were Christ's seven suffering events, which were impossible for Him to survive without *exanastasis*. Through *exanastasis*, Christ's body was being progressively *immortalised* through the resurrection life of the Father in His blood. Heb 13:20.

Emptying is the expression of the Son's travail, which is enabled by Eternal Spirit from the Holy Spirit. This travail began, *before*, in the fellowship of Yahweh *Elohim*, when Yahweh the Son emptied Himself to the bosom of the Father in order to reveal the Father by becoming His Son. Having been brought forth as the Son of God by the word of the Father, He was enabled by the Spirit to further empty Himself to the womb of the virgin Mary as the Seed of the Father and be begotten as the Son of God in the flesh through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Luk 1:35. Through this birth, He was the Firstfruits Son of God

in the flesh. This was His *first* manifestation as a Firstfruit. As the Son of God in the flesh, He was described as ‘a tender plant’, by the prophet Isaiah, who declared, ‘He shall grow up before Him [the Father] as *a tender plant*, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.’ Isa 53:2. The next expression of the Son’s travail was manifest at His baptism, where He was sealed by the Holy Spirit for the work of revealing the Father during His 3½-year earthly ministry. Joh 14:9-11.

At the conclusion of this earthly ministry, Jesus testified of His next action of emptying. This is when He said to His disciples that *the hour for His glorification as the Son of Man had come*. Joh 12:23-24. He was going to be glorified as a Firstfruit, *a second time*. Through this emptying travail, He was going to be brought forth from the dead in a spiritual body as the first Man made in the image and likeness of God. Furthermore, He was going to become the Head of a corporate body, as the Chief Seed in a firstfruits Sheaf containing a great multitude of seed. As we noted earlier, Jesus described this work of emptying as a seed falling into the ground and dying for the purpose of bringing forth ‘much grain’. Joh 12:23-24. Significantly, having established this point, Jesus then said, ‘Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? “Father, save Me from this hour”? But for this purpose I came to this hour. *Father, glorify Your name.*’ Joh 12:27-28.

The Father’s name is glorified when the one Seed, Christ, becomes a multitude of seeds *in one Sheaf*. These ‘seeds’ are the name of every son who would be born again of the life of God and would then be brought to glory as sons of men in the image and likeness of God. They are born again once they receive this seed into their spirit, which was brought forth through the travail of Christ, the one Seed of the Father. The seed of their name and life as a son of God is germinated by the Holy Spirit, causing their identity to be reborn as a son of God. They are then, progressively, made men in the image and likeness of God as they journey with Christ on the traveling pathway that He pioneered for them.

Jesus was the one Seed in whom all the names of the sons of God, predestined to be made in the image and likeness of God, were written, *before*. They were written in Him when He was begotten by the Father as the Son of God. However, unless He, as the Son of Man, fell into the ground and died, He would abide alone as the only Son of God. By asking the Father to glorify His name, Jesus was asking the Father to multiply the names of all the sons of God from the one Seed. This multiplication happened through the pangs of death, or birth pangs, that belonged to the travail of His seven wounds.

Prior to entering the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed on the Mount of Olives, ‘And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.’ Joh 17:5. This glory was His intrinsic capacity as Yahweh Son to be the substance and expression of all sonship. He was not asking this for Himself, but so the Father could be glorified through His offering. In the course of His journey, the Son would fulfil the specific works of every name from the Father so that in doing these works, these names would be multiplied from Him. As Isaiah declared, ‘Lord, You will establish peace for us, since *You have also performed for us all our works.*’ Isa 26:12. We see that as the Seed, Jesus was Yahweh Son in identity, the Son of God, and the Son of Man.

Christ’s travail as the Seed falling into the ground and dying, involved emptying Himself to an endpoint to reveal another. This specific dimension of the Son’s travail commenced in the garden of Gethsemane. He prayed to the Father, saying, ‘Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, *but Your [will], be done.*’ Luk 22:42.

Jesus Christ was emptying Himself, or falling into the ground and dying as He, by the capacity of Eternal Spirit, drank the cup of sin and was made mortal like us. The immortal seed of sonship was in the flesh of a mortal Man, who was the Son of Abraham and the Son of David according to the flesh. Jesus did this in obedience to the Father so that the Seed would be multiplied, and we could then be brought forth of the Father's own will as a firstfruits of His creation! Php 2:8. Jas 1:18. Having been strengthened with Eternal Spirit, and being in agony, 'He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood *falling down to the ground.*' Luk 22:44.

The Son continued to travail in prayer through the course of His seven wounding events by the power of the seven Spirits of God from the Holy Spirit. By this means, the Father brought forth the name of every person's sonship as multiplied seed from Christ, who was falling into the ground and dying in each travailing, wounding event. Following His resurrection, this seed - the specific seed of our name as a son of God - could be planted in our spirit and reveal our name as a son of God in Him. 2Co 5:21.

On the day of Christ's resurrection, the Father, by the Holy Spirit, caused the Spirit of the Son to re-enter His physical body, which had been made immortal and incorruptible through His offering journey from Gethsemane to Calvary. His physical body was further clothed with His heavenly body, revealing the spiritual body. By this means, Jesus Christ was revealed as the Firstborn from the dead. Col 1:18. Rev 1:5. He was the first Man to be made in the image and likeness of God. Gen 1:26. Rom 5:14. As we noted earlier, this was the *second* manifestation of the Son as a Firstfruits.

Significantly, the apostle Paul said that when Christ had risen from the dead, He had 'become the [Sheaf of] *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep'. 1Co 15:20. He was the first immortal 'plant' of a Man in the image and likeness of God. Furthermore, the one Seed had multiplied to many seeds in Him, the one Sheaf. This was the *third* aspect of firstfruits that the Son manifest. In this regard, He is the sum of every seed in the Sheaf for He accomplished all the works that belong to our sonship. Inasmuch as He is the Sheaf of firstfruits, He was also the Chief, or foremost, Seed in the Sheaf.

The promise to Abraham

We note, that as the immortal Sheaf of wheat, He has brought forth immortal seeds of sonship that are able to be planted in the mortal children of Abraham. These are sons and daughters of men, who hear the gospel of God and believe for the sonship that it promises. 2Pe 1:2-4. As this immortal seed, which is the divine nature, is germinated in our spirit, we are born as sons of God and made mortal members of His corporate body, of which He is the immortal Head. We are branches connected to the root of the Vine, who is Christ, and bring forth fruit as we reveal Him by doing the works that He accomplished for us in the course of His travail. This is the implication of journeying with Christ on the pathway of salvation that He pioneered for us. Upon this pathway, we are changing from glory to glory so that, on the day of resurrection, we will be revealed with Christ as men in the image and likeness of God.

We see that, through the gospel, we are first made sons of Abraham. We are then begotten as sons of God as the immortal seed of our sonship, brought forth from the travail of Christ, is germinated in our natural spirit. We are then progressively being made men in the image and likeness of God through a daily fellowship in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Luk 9:23-24. On the day of resurrection, we will be manifest as sons of men when we receive our spiritual bodies.

Abraham was illuminated to this tremendous promise, of which we are now recipients, when Christ said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.' Gen 15:1. By the faith that he received by hearing this message, he was enabled to see and believe for *the manifestation of the sons of God* – a multitude of sons who would be born of the divine nature in their mortality, who would then be made spiritual men in the resurrection. These were the stars of heaven. Gen 15:5-6. This caused Abraham great joy, as Jesus said, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.' Joh 8:56. This message has not been understood or preached among the churches. It is the gospel of God that must be declared to the whole world.

Many crowns

The important point to recognise is that prior to the commencement of His travailing, emptying journey, from *before*, Yahweh Son was the full and only expression of all sonship. In each travailing wound, He who filled all things, and in whom was written all the names of the sons from the Father, was emptying Himself. He was doing this to make room so that we could be revealed from His substance as new seed, living by His life but with a unique name as a son of God.

Significantly, the Son did not end in identity at this point. Rather, as we have considered, through His resurrection from the dead, He was brought forth as the first Man in the image and likeness of God. That is, He was the Firstfruits of us all, who would be brought forth from the dead through the pathway of regeneration and renewing that He pioneered. 1Co 15:20-22. Furthermore, He was brought forth as the whole Sheaf of firstfruits. These firstfruit expressions were *added* to Yahweh Son in identity. For this reason, the apostle John described the Son as wearing '*many crowns*'. Rev 19:12.

New birth begins

On the evening of His resurrection, the glorified Son of Man appeared to His disciples. He first said to them, 'Peace be with you'. Joh 20:19. With this statement, the redemptive implications of His finished offering were proclaimed to them. Through prevenient grace, which accompanied this declaration, the disciples bore witness to Christ's pierced hands and side. Joh 20:20. They looked on Him whom they had pierced, and their mourning was turned to gladness and joy as 'they saw the Lord'. Zec 12:10. Isa 51:11. Joh 20:20.

Jesus then said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you'. Joh 20:21. With this statement, the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of the Father, in terms of Their own Spirit and identity, made Their abode in the hearts of the disciples. Jesus then breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'. Joh 20:22. As Jesus breathed on the disciples, they received, from the Father, the Spirit of Son into their spirit. This was now the specific seed of their name and life as a son of God that had been brought forth through the travail of Christ. The Holy Spirit, whom they had received, caused the germination of this seed in their spirit and they were born again as new-creation sons of God in identity.

The Father then placed each disciple in the church by making them mortal members of Christ's immortal body. This corporate body was established on the cross through Christ's offering and suffering journey. Eph 2:14-18. We know that after Jesus' Spirit departed from His immortalised and incorruptible body, a soldier's spear was thrust into His side, out from which flowed blood, water, and the Spirit of grace and supplication. Joh 19:34-37. Zec 12:10. These elements were the 'rib' from which the bride of Christ, the church, was formed.

Although born of God, members of the body of Christ and part of the bride of Christ, the disciples could not minister the word through which others could be born again of the Father. At this stage, the corporate woman was indistinguishable from Christ. She was not manifest as a bride coming down from heaven until the Day of Pentecost. On this day, those who were born again and baptised by the Father into Christ were baptised by the Holy Spirit into the sevenfold Spirit of God. Act 1:8. They received the capacity to travail with Christ and to proclaim the word, as His witnesses, through which others could be born of God. *Their* hearers were brought forth from the church as children of the Father, who were born of the incorruptible divine seed of their name, by the Holy Spirit. Luke recorded that, on that day alone, 3 000 souls were added to them. Act 2:41.

The seed of the woman

Bringing forth sons of God the Father is now the work of the church, for the bride of Christ is the *vessel of multiplication*. As we have already mentioned, she is a virgin bride who is presently proceeding from the spiritual body of Christ, as Eve proceeded from Adam. She is the woman of whom the Father said to Satan, 'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.' Gen 3:15.

Certainly, in the first instance, 'the Seed' is referring to Christ, the Son of David, who was born of the virgin Mary. On the cross, He triumphed over Satan and the powers of darkness. However, it is further fulfilled by the manifestation and ministry of the bride of Christ. She is a virgin bride who is travailing, through fellowship in the seven wounds of Christ, to bring forth sons of God. These sons are her seed, and this refers to both godly children who are born in covenant houses, and people in the world who are born again through the ministry of a network of 'worthy houses'.

These networks, or communities, of worthy houses, were described by the apostle John as 'elect ladies'. 2Jn 1:1. The bride of Christ, which is the church, the New Jerusalem, is typified in the Scriptures by *Sarah*. Gal 4:26. We note, in this regard, that, having been established on Christ (the Rock from which we were hewn), we are further directed by the Spirit to 'look to Abraham your father, and to *Sarah who bore you*; for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him'. 1Co 10:4. Isa 51:2.

The virgin church is comprised of families who have received the promised blessing of Abraham. This blessing is the divine nature in mortal bodies. The members of these families are, by nature, sons of Abraham who have been born again as sons of God, typified in Jesus' parable as 'new plants'. However, they are not yet immortal sons of men in the image and likeness of God. As we have considered in this book, the Spirit of the Son, the Spirit of the Father and the Holy Spirit, in identity, come to dwell in their *hearts* by faith. These sons of Abraham are reborn when they receive into their *spirit*, the seed of their name and life as a son of God, which was multiplied through the travail of Christ, the one Seed of the Father. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, who enables the germination of this Seed in their spirit, they are conceived as a son of God. That is, through the life in the seed, their identity is recreated, and they are manifest, in identity, as a son of God in mortality.

This wondrous transaction makes us *the offspring of God*, who have His nature through birth, but it *does not make us God*. We remain, forever, sons of men and sons of God. As the apostle John observed, writing in the book of Revelation, 'Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned

for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, *the tabernacle of God is with men*, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God." ... He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and *I will be his God and he shall be My son.*' Rev 21:2-3,7.

However, in this age, sons of God in mortality are crushing Satan's head. Celebrating this capacity, Paul wrote, 'For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore, I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. *And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet* shortly.' Rom 16:19-20.

As we noted above, the sons of God, brought forth from the bride of Christ, refer both to natural children born in covenant houses, as well as to people in the world who are delivered out of the kingdom of darkness to be born as sons of light. Significantly, these sons of God are *not* born of the seed that belongs to the head of the wheat plant of another son of God. That is, they do not receive the divine nature from the son of God who conceived them through procreation, or from the one who proclaimed the gospel to them. They are born of God by receiving the seed of their sonship from the Father, which was multiplied to them from the travail of the Son. This seed is germinated in their spirit by the Holy Spirit. A child is a recipient of this blessing on account of the faith of their parents, whose house is part of the bride of Christ. A hearer is a recipient of this blessing as they receive the gospel preached by the Holy Spirit through the testimony of another son of God who is also established as part of the bride of Christ.

Emphasising this understanding, Jesus Himself said, 'Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.' Mat 23:9. Paul highlighted the folly of viewing another as the source of their sonship, saying to the Corinthian church, 'For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.' 1Co 3:4-6.

It is also important to understand that sons of God in mortality are *not* born from the fatherhood of Christ as the Husband of the bride, the church. Rather, as we have already emphasised, they are born of God the Father, by the Holy Spirit. Christ is, firstly, the Seed of their sonship before He is their Husband. The sons of Christ are brought forth in the coming age, identified in the Scriptures as the new heavens and earth. They are the fruit of the consummation of the union of Christ and His perfected bride, the members of whom have received their spiritual bodies on the day of resurrection.

Even in the new heavens and new earth, the children brought forth from the consummation of Christ and His perfected bride, are *not* the fruit of the seed from individual immortal 'plants' in the image and likeness of God. The immortalised plant, symbolising a spiritual man in the image and likeness of God, is a temple of the Holy Spirit. They have been fully established as a unique participant in the covenant fellowship of Yahweh. The fruit that they bear belongs to their participation as part of the New Jerusalem. This everlasting administration is the wife of the Lamb who has become the community of the Man, Christ.

As the community of the word, the perfected bride is not the source of new sons of God. The Father is the source of these identities and names. The substance of each new son's name is proceeding from the finished travail of Christ on Calvary as an everlasting stream. However, this stream, which is the river of the water of life, is being fed by the

Spirit as it flows out of the bellies of spiritual men, who are proceeding from, and revealing, Christ. Joh 7:38-39. 1Co 11:12.

This fellowship, bringing forth an ever-increasing multitude of sons in maturity, is depicted in the book of Revelation. Witnessing this amazing work of the bride, the New Jerusalem, the apostle John wrote, 'And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.' Rev 22:1-3. We see that the source of the river is the throne of the Father and of the Lamb. The bride, who is revealing the Lamb and the Father, is declaring the word of the water of life, by the Spirit, through which spiritual sons are being brought forth for eternity. Furthermore, as 'trees of life', they are nourishing this everlasting increase of sons.

The travail of the bride

As the bride of Christ, we are proceeding forth from the body of Christ, the Son of Man. *This happens through our participation in the seven wounding events of His offering journey*, which culminated in the completion of His redemptive work and His death on the cross. In this regard, we are drawn from the body, as the bride of Christ, in *each* wounding event. Referring to this implication of our fellowship in the offering and suffering journey of Christ as members of His body, the apostle Paul wrote, 'Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law *through the body of Christ*, that you may be *married to another* - to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God'. Rom 7:4. We note in this passage that we are crucified with Christ and established as members of His new-creation body for the purpose of coming forth from Him as His bride. Significantly, as part of the bride, we are to bring forth fruit, or seed, as the virgin church.

We noted earlier that Jesus' first wound in the course of His offering journey was in the garden of Gethsemane. This was the place of Yahweh *Elohim's travail in prayer*. This is an amazing understanding, which we have considered further in Chapter 5. As sons of God who are members of Christ's body, we have been invited to join the fellowship of the true God who travails to bring new creation to birth. Their death is to empty to an endpoint so that others can be brought forth through the gospel.

The apostle Paul was joined to this travail of prayer so that his hearers would be born of God and established on the pathway of regeneration and renewing, upon which they could be made in the image and likeness of God. They were not born of Paul, but were born of God, by the Holy Spirit, as they received the seed of their name as a son of God through Paul's ministry of the gospel. Accordingly, he wrote, 'For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God'. Eph 3:14-19.

Reflecting on his participation in the fellowship of this travail, Paul said, 'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for

the revealing of the sons of God [in mortality].’ Rom 8:18-19. It is important to note that this happens before the revealing of the sons of men on the day of resurrection, when we receive our spiritual body. He further testified that his prayer and aim was to know Christ and join the fellowship of His offering journey, and attain to *exanastasis* life as the means by which he would survive the traumas that beset him from day to day. Php 3:10-11. Identifying himself with Christ’s pangs of death, he said that he was ‘in deaths oft’, despairing even of life. 2Co 11:23. 2Co 1:8. However, out of all these afflictions the Lord delivered him, through *exanastasis*, from day to day. 2Ti 3:11.

Godly women in a worthy house

To further understand the work of the bride, the church, let us now consider a woman in a family, for she is the community of the bride in the household. Instructing such women, the apostle Peter wrote, ‘Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your *chaste conduct accompanied by fear*’. 1Pe 3:1-2.

The chaste conduct of a woman who is established in the fear of the Lord in the order of headship under Christ, is holy and clean in relation to her priesthood in the temple of Christ, and also as a wife and mother in her house. Through her obedience to the word, she is being built on Christ, her foundation Stone, as she is submitted to her husband in the fear of the Lord. 1Pe 2:7-8. Evidently, the woman’s head is covered so that she and her family are not subject to the oppression of unclean spirits that belong to the kingdom of Satan. 1Co 11:10. Having no access, Satan is unable to devour her children, who are holy on account of her faith. 1Co 7:14.

In principle, drawing from the imagery of the bride of Christ depicted in the book of Revelation, a godly woman’s feet are on the moon, which symbolises Christ, and, as a son of God, she is shining forth as the sun, which is the glory of the Father. Rev 12:1.

The sign of the Son of Man

The apostle John described the bride of Christ in the time of the end, manifest in a firstfruit expression as the 144 000, as ‘*a great sign in heaven*’. She is ‘clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars’. Rev 12:1. The wife of Christ, the Lamb of God, travails to bring forth a great multitude, making her the mother of nations and kings. This is her seed. As we have been considering, her travail is the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings. We note, for example, her connection to the intercession and travailing prayer of Christ in Gethsemane. The twenty-four elders lead this prayer meeting, having golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. Rev 5:8. It is following the expression of this travail in prayer that Christ opens the first seal and the white horse and rider proceed forth into the world.

Concerning this event, initiated after the Father takes His seat, Jesus said, ‘And this *gospel of the kingdom* will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.’ Mat 24:14. The ‘gospel of the kingdom’ is the gospel that is applicable to the whole world. This message details what is required of the nations as families who are to become obedient to the Father, and to His administration, by choosing His offer of sonship. The ministry of this gospel will be initiated by Christ and His church through the opening of the first seal.

The manifestation of the sons of God, who are coming forth from the bride, *is the sign of the Son of Man*. These are sons of God in mortality, who have been born of immortal seed, which is the divine nature, and who live by resurrection life. It is the numberless multitude of sons of God who are brought to birth through the ministry of the 144 000, once the Father has taken His seat and the first seal is opened. At this time, the white horse and rider proceed forth to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to every family in all the nations of the earth. Rev 6:1-2. The families of the earth are called to account in relation to the Father, who is the God of all the families.

This great company of sons are keeping the true Feast of Tabernacles as a kingdom of Melchizedek priests. That is, their manifestation will be as king-priests reigning on the earth. As sons of God in mortality, who are ruling and reigning with Christ, they will be effective in their ministry to the world in the seven-year period of the Father's conquering rule. Prophetically witnessing this sign, the apostle John recorded, 'After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ' Rev 7:9-10.

A progressive revelation

The manifestation of the sons of God is the *culminating* revelation of the sign of the Son of Man. This sign was first apparent in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, *and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah*. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.' Mat 12:39-40.

It is notable that Jesus identified this sign as being given to an *adulterous* generation. He was referring to every generation of people who failed to join the travailing death of Christ that they may be married to Him and participate in bringing forth fruit for God - that is, sons of God. Only in this fellowship, which believers join through baptism by water, are they being washed of the filth of the flesh and purged of their blood-guiltiness. Isa 4:4. They are being sanctified and washed by the water of the word so that they may be part of a glorious church that is holy and without blemish. Eph 5:25-27.

The next expression of the sign of the Son of Man is the delivering power of the Father's *exanastasis* life in the time of the end. Prophesying of this provision, which belongs to the corporate body of the Son of Man, King David declared, '*Give Your strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant* [sons of men who are born as sons of God through the travail of the bride of Christ]. *Show me a sign for good*, that those who hate me [revealed by great tribulation] may see it and be ashamed, because You, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.' Psa 86:16-17. This 'help' and 'comfort' is the *exanastasis* life that belongs to sons of God. These are mortal sons of God who live by resurrection life that is out-flowing from Christ. Php 3:11.

This delivering strength is operating from the time when the Father takes His seat until the opening of the sixth seal, when all the peoples of the earth will say to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?' Rev 6:16-17. Psa 99:1-5. Speaking of the ministry of the church following this event, Jesus said, '*Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the*

tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.' Mat 24:30.

The sign of the Son of Man appearing in heaven, initiating a great mourning that leads to the repentance, faith and new birth of a numberless multitude, is connected to, but distinct from, the 'great sign' that is the bride. The relationship between these two signs was indicated by the prophet Isaiah, who said, 'Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.' Isa 7:14. The sign is a son who is born of a virgin. This, of course, was Christ. Isa 9:6. However, in the time of the end, it is a great multitude of sons who are born of God the Father, by the Holy Spirit, and are brought forth from the virgin bride of Christ.

Further identifying the sign of the Son of Man as the great multitude of sons brought forth from the bride of Christ through her fellowship in Christ's travail, Isaiah declared, 'For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace [indicating new birth]; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.' Isa 55:12-13.

Chapter 4

Growing a presbytery

For almost fifty years, we, as a community of believers, have been on a journey of restoration to be established as a lampstand church. The word of present truth has been foundational to our pilgrimage, being a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Psa 119:105. This is the word of the Father that comes to us from Christ, by the Spirit, through the ministry of messengers who belong to a presbytery.

A presbytery is a fellowship of overseers, elders and deacons, among whom Christ has given specific ascension-gift grace for the equipping of the saints for the work of their ministry, both in the presbytery and in the church. The most fundamental trait of a person whom the Father has set apart to oversee the church, as part of a presbytery, is that of '*firstfruits*'. This means that the culture of the kingdom, which is revealed through the gospel, is evident in their life and in their family, and as they meet others house to house. Emphasising this point, the apostle Paul asked, 'If a man does not know how to rule [oversee] his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?' 1Ti 3:5.

In the course of our journey as a fellowship of lampstand churches in Australia, Papua New Guinea and Asia, the Lord has faithfully and mercifully blessed us with a proceeding word. However, we also acknowledge that the clarity and effectiveness of the word has been impacted by alternative cultures and competing agendas within the presbytery. The apostle Paul likened these cultures and agendas to different forms of *leaven*. 1Co 5:6-8. At various times, leavens have pervaded the fellowship of the presbytery because of personality idiosyncrasies and the corruption of particular individuals, as well as through the accommodation and imposition of alternative gospels and church traditions.

With this in mind, it is notable that the revelation and expression of the word has most acutely flourished within our fellowship of churches following seasons of refining, as the Lord has sovereignly initiated the washing and purging of both the presbytery and the church. This was particularly apparent in 2016 when the Spirit began to illuminate to us the steps of salvation. The word further multiplied in volume and clarity during the Covid season, when the Lord impressed upon us the need to forsake our sacramental practices in order to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread as participants in the Passover.

The word that is proclaimed from the fellowship of the presbytery is the gospel of the kingdom that Jesus Himself preached. Mark noted this ministry in his Gospel, writing,

'Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, *preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God*'. Mar 1:14. Jesus detailed the content of the gospel of the kingdom when He prayed to the Father on the Mount of Olives, saying, 'And I have *declared to them Your name*, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.' Joh 17:26.

Evidently, the kingdom of God is the name of the Lord. His name - Yahweh *Elohim* - reveals the nature of His life and fellowship, which is love. This is the expression of life that belongs to those who receive illumination as they respond with repentance and faith to the gospel of the kingdom and enter the kingdom by being born of water and Spirit as a new-creation son of God.

Jesus sent the twelve and the seventy-two disciples to preach the kingdom of God, which they were to do through testimony, saying, 'Peace be to this house'. Luk 9:2. Mat 10:7. Luk 10:5. A person and a household demonstrate that they are worthy of the kingdom by the way in which they receive the messengers of Christ and their message. A person who receives the kingdom of God, which is the name of Yahweh, will call on the name of the Lord. That is, they will desire to be joined to the fellowship of the presbytery, because they recognise that this fellowship is with the Father and the Son. 1Jn 1:1-3.

The presbytery, which is among the flock, is enlarged by the faith and obedience of those who hear and receive their message and are, thereby, established as firstfruits believers and families. This means that they are being secured in the fellowship and order of headship as part of a lampstand church, which is the bride of Christ. The reality of this connection to the bride of Christ is from house to house. Significantly, this is the basis of a local church that is '*an elect lady*'. 2Jn 1:1. That is, an 'elect lady' is a congregation of two or three worthy households gathered in the name of Jesus. Mat 18:20.

Seven stars in Christ's right hand

Evidently, the culture and the expression of a presbytery is fundamental to the viability of a lampstand church. Reflecting this reality, the seven letters that Jesus dictated to the apostle John and sent to the seven lampstand churches of Asia were first addressed to the presbytery, or *aggelos*, of each church.

Christ's first letter was addressed to the presbytery of the church in Ephesus. This one church comprised many smaller congregations. The messengers who were part of the Ephesian presbytery were supposed to walk with Christ, visiting, preaching, and caring for all of the people who were in the congregations that belonged to this church. As well as caring for the Ephesian church, this fellowship of messengers was one of 'seven stars in the right hand of Christ'. Rev 1:20. They were also supposed to walk with Christ from one nation to another, to minister to lampstand churches in different countries. This ministry was to be the *first work* that was associated with their *first love*. Rev 2:4-5.

The seven stars in Christ's right hand are 'the seven Spirits of God'. Each star is the full expression of seven 'lamps' on a lampstand church. Each individual lamp is a ministry group that is set in a 'flower', or congregation, on the 'branch' of a lampstand church. A lamp, as a fellowship, should possess the grace to proclaim the full mystery of God. This is the word that is proceeding from the fellowship of Yahweh, through which a hearer can progressively realise their predestination as a son in the image and likeness of God. A lamp-ministry group maintains the grace to proclaim the word in a local setting *only because* they remain connected and engaged as part of a star that is in the right hand of Christ.

Each lamp is a fellowship of leading brethren, and each 'star' is a fellowship of lamp-brethren for a lampstand church. A star moves between lampstands as they remain in the hand of Christ and walk with Him. The movement of those whom the Holy Spirit has set apart to shepherd a lampstand church, as they walk regionally, nationally and internationally, reveals the 'wheels within wheels' of Christ's administration on Earth. The operation of these wheels is the means by which the *aggelos* are 'ascending and descending upon the Son of Man', from heaven to Earth. Joh 1:51. It is the ladder that Jacob witnessed and recognised as belonging to the house of God and to the gate of heaven. Gen 28:12,17. 'First love' within a star presbytery, as men walk across and between lampstand churches, manifests the operation of the wheels, for the Spirit 'is in the wheels'. Eze 1:20. The orbit of each presbyter within this administration will be according to their sanctification.

Remember from where you have fallen

Jesus admonished the presbytery of the Ephesian church for leaving their first love. Rev 2:4. He said to them, '*Remember* therefore *from where* you have fallen; *repent* and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent.' Rev 2:5.

The presbytery in Ephesus had fallen from the fellowship of first love in the heights of Mount Zion as they prioritised the pastoring of their local congregations and ceased from travelling together among the churches in and beyond their region. The *heavenly Jerusalem* was no longer their 'chief joy'. Psa 137:6. Significantly, their capacity to minister the light of life under the anointing of the Spirit was hindered. The psalmist noted this implication of forgetting Zion, writing, 'If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth - if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.' Psa 137:5-6.

The Lord was calling the Ephesian presbytery to 'remember' and to return *to Zion*, and to bear the fruits of repentance by fulfilling the works that belong to first love in Zion. 'Zion' is a spiritual mountain. The top of this great mountain is the highest point of the whole 'heavens and earth'. It was established when Yahweh Son emptied Himself by the capacity of Eternal Spirit and was begotten, by the Spirit, as the Son of God when the Father declared, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.' Php 2:5-8. Heb 1:5. At this point, the covenant fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was extended beyond Themselves into 'the heavens and earth' as an Everlasting Covenant. Gen 9:13,16. Psa 19:1-6. Heaven was established as the throne of the Father, and Earth was established as His footstool. Isa 66:1. Within this creation, the Son fixed His throne on the heights of Zion. In the time of the end, the Father will take His seat on Zion beside the Son's throne, and the Son's throne will move into the Father's throne. The Father will sit on Zion, for the tabernacle of God will be with men. Rev 21:3.

'The heights of Zion' is the Son's throne. This is where Christ now rules over the kings of the earth. As the psalmist declared, 'But [He] chose the tribe of Judah [the tribe from which came the King of kings], *Mount Zion* which He loved. And He built His sanctuary *like the heights*, like the Earth which He has established forever.' Psa 78:68-69. We see that these are the heights from which the Ephesian presbytery had fallen.

The call to come to Mount Zion

Presbytery-messengers are sent by Christ into the world to bring the church, which is the bride of Christ, to Mount Zion. The New Jerusalem is to be built around the throne of God and of the Lamb as a spiritual house. Of course, to fulfil this work, those who belong to

presbyteries must be recovered to the fellowship of first love that belongs to Mount Zion in the heavenly places.

The apostle John and his fellow presbyters were testifying of this work when John wrote, 'That which was from the beginning [when the heavens were established as the Father's throne, and the Son's throne was established on Mount Zion], which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life ... that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ [in the heights of Zion].' 1Jn 1:1,3.

Once restored to first love in Mount Zion, Christ's messengers proceed from the fellowship of the presbytery to call every hearer to come with them to Mount Zion. As the word proceeds from the fellowship of Yahweh, they say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' Isa 2:3.

Messengers call their hearers to come to Mount Zion to be born there. In this regard, those who receive this message are *pilgrims*, even before they are brought to birth as sons of God and sons of men in the image and likeness of God. Speaking of this birth, the sons of Korah wrote, 'And of Zion it will be said, "This one and that one were born in her; and the Most High Himself shall establish her".' Psa 87:5. This birthing process from Mount Zion is fully manifest in the resurrection, when every believer is brought forth from Zion into the new heavens and earth.

A presbytery is built from firstfruits houses

The Lord Jesus is guiding us *by* His hand through the ministry of the seven stars, or *aggelos* presbyteries, *in* His hand. In each generation of the church, Christ has given ascension-gift graces to certain messengers. The four ascension-gift graces that are given by Christ to the seven stars and the seven lampstands are the New Testament expression of 'the Elijah ministry'. We note, in this regard, that 'the gift' of Christ in the Old Testament and in the New Testament *is the Elijah ministry*.

As we approach the time of the end, the Elijah ministry has a particular focus on *the restoration of lampstand churches*. The fruit of this restoration is the separation made between the five wise virgins and the five foolish virgins within the seven lampstand churches. The seven restored lampstands, comprising those who have a double portion of oil, will be the expression of one lampstand manifesting the seven Spirits of God that are sent out into the world. Rev 4:5.

The cry, 'Behold the Bridegroom comes!' is the restoration message of the Elijah ministry *before* the Father takes His seat. This ministry is to *prepare* the churches, typified as ten lampstands in the temple that Solomon built, so that those who are in these churches may receive the double portion of oil and are thus found ready when the Father takes His seat. After the Father takes His seat, the ministry of Elijah is given to the wise virgins; that is, to proclaim the word to the whole world as 'the rider on the white horse'. This is the ministry of the Spirit and the bride who say, 'Come!' Rev 22:17.

The light of the seven Spirits of God will be the ministry of the word proceeding from the throne of the Father. Rev 4:2. We know this because the throne is set upon 'the sea of glass', which is 'the body of heaven for clearness'. The 'lamps of fire' are burning before the throne as they are set on this 'sapphire pavement'. Rev 4:5-6. Exo 24:10.

In the mode of Timothy and Titus, the work of those who belong to Christ's apostolic administration is to build and guide presbyteries on the foundation that has already been laid by the apostles. Referring to this work, Paul said, 'According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.' 1Co 3:10.

As we noted in the introduction of this chapter, the presbytery of a lampstand church must be built from *firstfruits houses*. An elder is firstly known by the culture of their own household, not by their public ministry as a preacher or by their administrative capacity as a deacon. Reflecting on our history as a church movement, we have to acknowledge the reality that being found as a worthy house was not our focus when we merged as congregations and sought to establish a presbytery. Overlooking this fundamental qualification for overseership in the presbytery served only to allow corruption to flourish in the presbytery and among our congregations.

When a presbytery is built from firstfruits houses, it belongs to the house of David. We are reminded that the Lord promised to build David a *new house* through his Seed, Christ, and the administration that comes from Him. 2Sa 7:11, 18-19. The house of David *now* belongs to the true Israel of God, the church. It comprises the elders who have been restored to the heights of Zion as part of a presbytery in the right hand of Christ. The work of elders in a presbytery is to shepherd the Lord's people as 'a flock'. A true elder lives 'among the flock' as part of the house-to-house fellowship because they have been found as a worthy house and have grown up as a firstfruits believer. In this regard, the way in which they live in their own house, and meet from house to house, is an example to the flock. 1Pe 5:1-3.

When the Father takes His seat, the overcoming presbyters who belong to the house of David will be seated with Christ on the throne of David. Rev 3:21. 'The throne of David' is the twenty-four thrones that will be placed around the throne of the Father on the top of Mount Zion. Rev 4:4. They have 'the key of David' in their hands, enabling them to open wide the gates of the New Jerusalem, through which a great multitude will come. Rev 3:7-8. In the time of the end, when Jesus Christ stands to rule and reign in the middle of His enemies, His authority over the nations will be expressed through one worldwide presbytery that is around the Father's throne.

When Christ stands to open the seals, the ministry arm of the presbytery will be the white horse and its rider. Rev 6:1-2. *The rider of the white horse is the multitude of firstfruits houses who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.* These firstfruits *families* are symbolically listed as 12 000 representatives from each of the twelve tribes that belong to the true Israel of God. Rev 7:1-8. Referring to this event, the Lord declared, through the prophet Jeremiah, ' "At the same time", says the Lord, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people".' Jer 31:1. Their work is to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom as a testimony in all nations. Mat 24:14.

Significantly, the twelve groups of firstfruits houses will be the twelve messengers who stand at 'the twelve gates of the wall'. The gates are the entry to the heavenly Jerusalem on the top of Mount Zion. Rev 21:12. The work of these firstfruits households is to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom and to open wide the gates of salvation to all who hear and respond to their message. As the psalmist said, 'Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, and I will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter.' Psa 118:19-20. They are also *the voice of the bride of Christ*, whose work is to call all the nations to come into the bride city, which is the fellowship of the church, to be saved from the judgement of God upon the world.

The firstfruits households who become the voice of the bride of Christ to the world are the wise virgins who have purchased a double portion of oil. In relation to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, it is important to recognise that the virgins come *from their houses* to meet the Bridegroom at the midnight hour. The sanctification and the testimony of the wise virgins is designated as the oil that is both in their vessels and in their lamps. Mat 25:1-13. The double portion of oil is necessary for their ministry to the world, as firstfruits houses, during the opening of the seals.

The sanctification and testimony of this firstfruits multitude is proclaimed as their *song*. When the apostle John saw this firstfruits company standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion, he said, 'They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no-one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the Earth.' Rev 14:3. The song is also the voice of 'the sound of many waters', which is the substance of the sevenfold Spirit of God that is flowing from their hearts as an expression of the river of life. Rev 14:2. Joh 7:38.

Worthy houses are overcomers

A key understanding that we are endeavouring to communicate in this chapter is that the presbyters are first found as worthy households who have grown up to become firstfruits believers. Their authority and capacity to care for the flock as part of the fellowship of the presbytery is because of this new creation reality; it is not because of some other qualification, appointment, anointing, or gift.

A household who is found 'worthy' will overflow with life through sanctified ministry and care toward other houses. This is because they have overcome the spirit of the world, which is under the rulership of Satan, in their own lives, in their household, and in the church. They have overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb; by the word of their testimony; and by not loving their lives to the death. Rev 12:11. What does this look like, practically?

By the blood of the Lamb

Overcoming by the blood of the Lamb refers to the specific application of each of the seven wounding events of Christ's offering journey to a person's life, both individually and as a household. A worthy house has an ongoing testimony of learning the lessons that belong to these seven wounds in Gethsemane; in the court of Caiaphas; before Pilate and Herod; and on the cross. They are, therefore, *living in the atonement*.

By the word of their testimony

Overcoming by the word of their testimony refers to a person who is finding, and is being established in, the true expression of their name. They are becoming obedient as they are delivered from the limitations and inhibitions that they have placed upon themselves, as well as the projections and overstatements that belong to their fallen self-image.

Laying down their lives to the death

Overcoming by laying our lives down to the death refers to the nature of a person's offering in relation to service and ministry as individual members of the body of Christ, and as families who are part of the bride of Christ.

The *agape* meal of Yahweh

Participation in these three aspects of the Christian pilgrimage is the means by which Satan and his influence in the seven lampstand churches is *overcome*. For example, in His first letter to the seven churches, Jesus admonished the Ephesian presbytery for leaving

their first love and for falling from fellowship within the heights of Mount Zion. Zion was no longer their chief joy. Significantly, Jesus declared, 'To him who *overcomes* I will give to *eat from the tree of life*, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.' Rev 2:7. That is, they are given a participation in the *agape* meal of Yahweh.

It is significant that the *agape* meal was the focus of Christ's first letter. The intercession and travail of Yahweh that brought forth mankind to be a firstfruits of His 'creatures', whose predestination was to become a part of God's family, also produced *agape* fellowship as the context for our participation in the life of Their community. It is this fellowship that we join as we overcome the uncleanness and mixture that is energised by the spirit of the world in the church. We will consider this intercession and travail further in Chapter 5.

The foundations of *agape* fellowship in the church

Those who are overcoming by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, and by laying their lives down to the death are evidently joined, by the Spirit, to the very travail that brought forth God's covenant purpose for us, and that established the *agape* meal as the provision and context for the fulfilment of this Covenant. The evidence of overcoming is a worthy, or sanctified, participation in the *agape* meal.

A worthy household who is emerging as 'firstfruits' is able to facilitate and promote this meal as a cultural expression in the community of the church. The life that is shared in this fellowship multiplies, and is expressed from the church as light to the world.

The elements that belong to the love feast of the Father's house are readily apparent in the Scriptures. Identifying these foundations, Luke wrote, 'And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers'. Act 2:42. Let us now briefly summarise these elements:

The apostles' doctrine

The apostles' doctrine refers to the word of present truth, preached from the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit through messengers who belong to the fellowship of a presbytery. A firstfruits believer is joined to this fellowship through their 'worthy' response to the word, which is demonstrated by repentance and faith obedience, leading to reformation in their own life, marriage, and family.

Receiving illumination and conviction from the Spirit as they hear and respond to the word of God, they are then motivated by the Spirit to reveal and multiply this word through their unique expression as a son of God and a member of the body of Christ. This may be through a specific ministry initiative; by speaking 'edification and exhortation and comfort'; or by testimony within house-to-house settings. 1Co 14:3.

Fellowship

Our fellowship as a community of believers is established by the proceeding word of God proclaimed from a presbytery. Highlighting this point, the apostle John said, 'That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that *your joy may be full*.' 1Jn 1:3-4.

Practically, fellowship as a foundation of the *agape* meal is demonstrated as we worship and make offering in the community of the church, and from house to house. Accordingly, we are instructed by the apostle Paul, who said, 'For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, *but through*

love serve one another.' Gal 5:13. This service is fundamental to worshipping the Father 'in Spirit and in truth'. Joh 4:23-24.

With this understanding in view, the *agape* mealtime presents an opportunity for us to serve one another as we publicly gather together each week. It is also an opportunity to consider how we can practically pour ourselves out upon the sacrifice and service of others, from house to house. Php 2:17-18.

Firstfruits believers are established in this fellowship and have addicted, or devoted, themselves to the care of the saints. The household of Stephanas exemplified this commitment to the apostles' fellowship, as noted by Paul, who wrote, 'I urge you, brethren – you know the household of Stephanas, *that it is the firstfruits of Achaia*, and that they have *devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints* – that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labours with us'. 1Co 16:15-16.

Breaking of bread

The breaking of bread is a feature of our love for one another, expressed through hospitality. Emphasising the connection between *agape* love and hospitality, the apostle Peter said, 'Above all things have *fervent love for one another*, for "love will cover a multitude of sins". *Be hospitable to one another* without grumbling.' 1Pe 4:8-9.

Our meals together are sanctified as a participation in the love feast of the Father by the word of God and prayer. 1Ti 4:5. They are an opportunity to testify and share with one another from the word of present truth, refreshing one another and encouraging each other to love and good works. Heb 10:24.

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

Firstfruits believers extend themselves in hospitality and care toward others and promote, through participation and support, the initiatives of other houses. Again, Paul noted that Stephanas had refreshed his spirit and the spirits of those who belonged to the community of believers in Corinth. Paul said to the church, 'For they [Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus] refreshed my spirit and yours. *Therefore, acknowledge such men.*' 1Co 16:18.

Prayer

As we will consider further in Chapter 5, prayer is the conversation within the fellowship of Yahweh *Elohim* concerning Their covenant purpose to make man in Their image and according to Their likeness. The Holy Spirit is the source and capacity of prayer. That is, He enables *intercession* and *travail*. Rom 8:26-27. The Holy Spirit enables us to join this intercession and travail. Establishing this point, Paul wrote, 'Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes *intercession* for us with *groanings* [meaning, travail] which cannot be uttered.' Rom 8:26.

If we are not enabled by the Holy Spirit to intercede and travail, *we are not praying at all*. Our communication is merely mind-chatter, motivated by the fear of death, as we anxiously groan and petition God in relation to the matters that are confounding our expectations of our life, ourselves, and of others.

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

The Covenant of salt

Offering is the distinguishing culture of a worthy household who are being recovered to the fellowship and order of headship so that they can grow to firstfruits. It is the conduct of faith, working by love, as each person lays down their life to reveal the sanctification of their *friend* and neighbour, and also, one's spouse. Describing this offering culture, Jesus said, 'Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.' Joh 15:13-14. We see that *friendship* is foundational to the fellowship of offering, which should be the culture of the presbytery.

Friendship based in each person's submission to the lordship of Christ is essential to every relationship that belongs to the offering culture of the kingdom of God. The quality of friendship in the fellowship of Yahweh, which is the kingdom of God, was exemplified by the relationship between the Lord and Abraham, the father of faith. The Lord Himself identified Abraham as His friend. Isa 41:8. Jas 2:23.

In the Scriptures, this dimension of perpetual and eternal friendship in the fellowship of offering is symbolised by *salt*. Reflecting on its significance in the age of the Old Covenant, several commentators have noted that eating salt together signified an unbreakable friendship. Because salt was used as a preservative, it was an appropriate symbol for eternity - a covenant of salt could not be changed.

The bond of friendship between those who are established in the fellowship of Yahweh is described in the Scriptures as *a covenant of salt*. It is notable that Abijah, the great-grandson of King David, used this term to describe the mandate of kingship that was given by the Lord to David and his sons. He said to King Jeroboam, who had come to make war against him, 'Should you not know that the Lord God [Yahweh *Elohim*] of Israel gave the dominion over Israel to David *forever*, to him and his sons, *by a covenant of salt*?' 2Ch 13:5.

David was a man *after the Lord's own heart*. 1Sa 13:14. This means that David's conduct and orientation to life and fellowship was the same as Yahweh's! Calling the Covenant that the Lord made with David and his Son, Jesus Christ, 'a covenant of salt' highlighted that being a man after the Lord's heart was the basis of his friendship with the Lord and with those who belong to the Lord.

To be a worthy household, which is a *household of peace* from which the life of God can be multiplied to others, it is necessary to understand this principle of 'salt'. We must ensure that salt is not lacking in our lives and in our relationships as individuals, as married couples, as families, as local churches, and in the presbytery. Jesus clearly stated

that we will all be tested in relation to the integrity of our friendship with God and with our brethren. Specifically, He said, 'For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavour, how will you season it? *Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.*' Mar 9:49-50.

Offerings must be salted

As we have been considering, friendship is fundamental to fellowship in the offering of Yahweh. The offerings outlined in the Law Covenant symbolised the culture of life and love in the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For example, Yahweh described the daily burnt sacrifices of the morning and evening lamb as, 'My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire as a *sweet aroma* to Me'. Num 28:2. Significantly, the apostle Paul explained that offering, symbolised by the sacrifices required by the Law Covenant, was to be the life and culture of every believer in the New Covenant, writing, 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a *living sacrifice*, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service [of worship or fellowship]'. Rom 12:1.

The Lord stipulated that salt was to accompany every offering made by fire. He gave this direction as He outlined the details of the grain offering. The grain offering symbolised our participation in the fellowship of the body of Christ. As the apostle Paul explained, 'For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.' 1Co 10:17. The Lord said to the children of Israel, 'And every offering of your grain offering [symbolising the *agape* meal of the church], you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the Covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. *With all your offerings you shall offer salt.*' Lev 2:13. Clearly, we must not allow the covenant of friendship to be missing in any interaction that belongs to the fellowship of offering in the body of Christ. This is true concerning our relationship with the Lord God, as well as in our personal interactions, marriages, families and churches.

Preservation and savour

In addition to symbolising the necessity for perpetual friendship in the fellowship of offering, salt also served several other associated purposes. Salt is a preserving agent that prevented the corruption, or spoiling, of the sacrifices that the Israelites were required to make. Interestingly, the salt that was added to the offerings was mined from the salt pits of the Dead Sea, and particularly the cliffs of Jebel Usdum, otherwise known as 'Mount Sodom'.

The salt from this region was the fruit of God's judgement upon the spirit of the world in the promised land, expressed by Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord rained down fire and brimstone upon the promised land to rid it of Sodom and Gomorrah's corrupting influence. The salt that remained, following this judgement, symbolised an eternal preservative against corruption in the Lord's own land. We know that in the time of the end, the Lord will heal the regions that have become lifeless under the judgement of God, as those in the world receive the water of the word that is ministered from houses of peace. As Ezekiel prophesied, 'This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed.' Eze 47:8.

James was promoting the preserving qualities of salt in true Christian friendship when he wrote, 'Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.' Jas 4:4-5. A person who has salt in themselves does not pursue friendship with the world. Even more fundamentally, their friendships in the context of the body of

Christ are preserved from the trading dynamics that belong to the spirit of the world. This way of relating is sourced from Satan himself. Unless a person is delivered from this fallen way of living, and then continues to have salt in themselves, trading will be the basis of engagement in their marriage and family, and in the church, and it will lead to further corruption. Eze 28:18.

The second purpose for adding salt to grain and burnt offerings is as a *seasoning*. Salt gives the sacrifice a sweet aroma and savour to the Lord. Lev 1:9. Lev 2:12-13. This *flavour* will be evident in the quality and content of the conversations between friends in the fellowship of Yahweh. Highlighting this reality, Solomon said, 'He who loves purity of heart and has *grace on his lips*, the king will be his *friend*.' Pro 22:11. Furthermore, he taught that 'ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the *sweetness* of a man's friend gives delight by hearty [or living and breathing] counsel'. Pro 27:9. With this sweet savour in mind, the apostle Paul exhorted us all, saying, 'Let your speech *always be with grace, seasoned with salt*, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.' Col 4:6. Our speech as friends must be sanctified by the Spirit and should not be the expression of our own fleshly perceptions and expectations of each other.

The sanctification of children

The covenant of sanctified friendship between a husband and a wife should extend to their children. We note, in this regard, that when a child was born into a covenant house in Israel, they were washed and then *rubbed with salt*. This practice signified the sanctification of the children to the culture of the Covenant. The application of salt to our children is only possible if the Covenant of salt is active in our marriage. By this means, our children, from the youngest age can learn to trust the Lord and His messengers, and to extend Christian friendship to others in and beyond the house.

Highlighting this principle, the Lord likened natural Jerusalem's unsanctified association with the world, typified by Amorites and Hittites of Canaan, to a child who was not washed with water or rubbed with salt. Specifically, Ezekial recorded, 'Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, and say, thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. As for your nativity, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you; *you were not rubbed with salt* nor wrapped in swaddling cloths." ' Eze 16:1-4.

Salt in the presbytery

Under the Old Covenant, the ministry responsibilities of the priests belonged to the Lord's shepherding initiative toward the people of God. Significantly, the Lord gave the heave offerings of the children of Israel to the priests, describing this provision as a covenant of salt. He said to them, 'All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to the Lord, I have given to you and your sons and daughters with you as an ordinance forever; *it is a covenant of salt* forever before the Lord with you and your descendants with you.' Num 18:19. The priests had a participation in the fellowship of the heave offering as long as they kept faith with the Covenant of salt.

This principle now applies to the fellowship of the presbytery. It is imperative that those whom the Holy Spirit has set apart for the work of caring for the church as under-shepherds and overseers have salt in themselves and uphold the culture of friendship that belongs to the Covenant of salt in the presbytery. This cultural

commitment will be evident in the way that a man speaks in the fellowship of the presbytery, and through their conduct in and beyond the presbytery.

A man's willingness to speak in an open-faced and truthful manner in the presbytery demonstrates that they *trust* their brethren. Their commitment to empty themselves to reveal another through offering demonstrates their deliverance from the corruption of collegiality that would, otherwise, be their default mode of relating in the presbytery, and in the church. In the offering fellowship of the presbytery, those who are established by a covenant of salt will worship the Lord, and one another, in Spirit and truth. This means that they speak according to their sanctification, and that the content of their conversation in this context is consistent with how they speak and conduct themselves in their marriage and household. A discrepancy in these two expressions is a corruption that wars against the *agape* meal and brings the presbyter, and his house, under judgement.

The principle of trust as a fundamental quality of friendship in the presbytery was revealed through the scorn directed toward Jesus by the chief priests, scribes and elders as He suffered on the cross. These three groups represented a fallen shepherding administration. Matthew recorded in his Gospel, 'Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. *He trusted in God*; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God'.'" ' Mat 27:41-43. Psa 22:7-8.

Although they were, themselves, disqualified, these men acknowledged that Jesus trusted the Father. However, they did not understand the implications of this trust. Jesus Christ was the Son of David. His relationship with the Father was a covenant of salt evidenced by trust as each Person laid down Their life, by the capacity of Eternal Spirit, to reveal the other. In the context of this fiery offering, Jesus trusted in the Father. It was a feature of His relationship with the Father from birth. Accordingly, in response to the accusations of the wicked shepherds, He prayed to the Father, 'But You are He who took Me out of the womb; *You made Me trust* while on My mother's breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God.' Psa 22:9-10. Evidently, Jesus had been rubbed with salt as well as wrapped in swaddling cloths on the occasion of His nativity, learning to trust the Father from birth. Luk 2:7.

Likewise, the Father trusted the Son when He made Him an offering for sin and forsook Him. The faith of the Father was revealed when He gave His only begotten Son as an offering for sin, so that whoever believed in Him would have eternal life. Joh 3:16. He trusted that, through obedience, the Son would pioneer a pathway of salvation upon which all those who obey Him could be recovered to their predestination as sons of God, and sons of men in the image and likeness of God.

Prepared for destruction

Jesus warned that it was possible for a person to forsake the Covenant of salt that belongs to sanctified fellowship in the body of Christ. He said, 'You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.' Mat 5:13. Clearly, this is a person whom Jesus likened to wayside ground. They have the appearance of godliness, but no power for obedience. They have been prepared for destruction.

The apostle Paul distinguished between those who were prepared for destruction by the Lord and those who were vessels of mercy. Using the examples of Jacob and Esau, he said, 'What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with

much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?' Rom 9:22-24.

Paul's statement raises an important question. How is a person prepared, or predestined, for destruction? The answer, of course, is by their response to the polarising and hardening effect of the word. We know that the proclamation of the word of present truth is a season of Christ's visitation. 2Pe 1:12. Luk 12:42. The polarising effect of this word compels every hearer to a response. Furthermore, the word appoints them to the choice they make. Once the time of visitation has ended, they are unable to reverse the condition that they are in as a consequence of their choice.

Significantly, the hardening of their heart, and the setting of their condition, continues the more that the word is proclaimed. As the Lord explained to Isaiah, 'But the word of the Lord was to them, "Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little," that they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught.' Isa 28:13. It is awful to consider that this 'hardening' will happen to them for the whole of eternity. The word will continue to come to them with ever increasing intensity as the fire of God's judgement. Their corruption will also continually increase in their resistance against the word, for eternity. This increase in resistance and corruption will be contained in judgement, by the fire of the word, in a context where they are forever forgotten by God. Isa 66:22-24.

Wounded in the house of our friends

The mandate to prophesy in the church is denoted by a particular garment. We note, for example, that John the Baptist, who ministered in the spirit and power of Elijah, was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. Mat 3:4. He was adorned in the same manner as Elijah. 2Ki 1:8.

The nature and content of a person's prophetic ministry should reflect the garment that belongs to the Elijah ministry. If a person ministers in the church, figuratively dressing themselves in the mandate of the Elijah ministry, but has false visions, they must be thrust through by the fatherhood and motherhood in the church that brought them forth.

Requiring this response, the Lord, through the prophet Zechariah, said, ' "It shall be in that day [when a fountain for sin and uncleanness has been opened]", says the Lord of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land. It shall come to pass that if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who begot him will say to him, 'You shall not live, because you have spoken lies in the name of the Lord.' And his father and mother who begot him shall thrust him through when he prophesies." ' Zec 13:2-3.

True fatherhood and motherhood in the church will jealously guard the ministry of Elijah. 1Co 4:14-17. Those who have been begotten through the gospel, but proclaim an alternative message, are thrust through by the polarising effect of the word. This action is the ministry of Elijah, turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers. Mal 4:6.

Fatherhood and motherhood address those who are begotten through the gospel in this manner for the purpose of delivering them from the presumption and projections of the *novice*, so that they can be properly established in the Elijah ministry. As the psalmist

himself prophesied, saying, 'Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, *for the rebellious also*, that the LORD God might dwell among them.' Psa 68:18.

The evidence of repentance and faith through this polarising effect of the word upon a hearer will be their proper connection to the fellowship of the presbytery and reformation in their marriages and families. In this regard, we note Paul's instruction to Timothy, writing, 'A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); *not a novice*, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil [through trading]'. 1Ti 3:2-6.

A person who embraces the polarising effect of the word will testify of their deliverance from the false message that belongs to their projections. They will cease from proclaiming, 'Peace, peace' and 'No evil shall come upon you' as you walk according to the dictates of your own heart; when in fact, these are perilous times as the Lord comes among the daughters of Zion in a spirit of judgement and burning. Jer 6:14. Jer 23:17. Isa 4:4.

Concerning this reformation, Zechariah further prophesied, saying, 'And it shall be in that day that every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies; they will not wear a robe of coarse hair [as a projection] to deceive. But he will say, "I am no prophet. I am a farmer; for a man taught me to keep cattle from my youth." And one will say to him, "What are these wounds between your arms?" Then he will answer, "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my *friends*".' Zec 13:4-6.

The 'house of our friends' is the church, where we receive the ministry of the word. This word, ministered by the Spirit, pierces our heart, enabling us to meet Christ *eye to eye*. Then, as we walk in the light of the word that proceeds from Christ's face, we have fellowship together and embrace our participation in the seven wounding events of Christ's suffering journey. We grow in our knowledge of Christ as we find deliverance from our carnal, religious projections and we are able to fulfil the works of obedience that belong to our sanctification in Christ. Importantly, we are obtaining life and peace which we are able to minister to others as those of 'like passions', demonstrating that we have truly joined the Elijah ministry. Jas 5:17.

Chapter 5

The fellowship of prayer

Prayer is foundational to the life and pilgrimage of a new-creation son of God. Emphasising this point, the apostle Paul wrote, 'Rejoice always, *pray without ceasing*, in everything give thanks; *for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*'. 1Th 5:16-18.

To understand how to live in this way, we need to heed the instructions of Jesus, and the writings of His apostolic messengers in the New Testament. As we do this, we soon recognise that prayer is a conversation, or form of conduct, that belongs to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, *which we join*. Prayer does not begin with us. Joining this conversation is how we pray in the name of Jesus. Christ Himself instructed us to pray in this way, saying, 'And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.' Joh 14:13-14.

The name of the Lord is the context of Yahweh's offering through which Their covenant purpose for us was accomplished. We are established in the name by the Holy Spirit as we receive the initiative of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit toward us. First, we are born of the divine nature as sons of God and then placed by the Father in the church as members of the body of Christ. We are then joined, through immersion by water, to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, where we are being progressively saved through regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. We receive the power of the sevenfold Spirit of God when we are baptised by the Holy Spirit. This enables us to be witnesses of Christ as we participate in the process through which we are being made into the image and likeness of God.

Our capacity to pray requires an illumination of our sanctified participation in this fellowship of the name. Rather than presuming that we know how to pray, it is incumbent upon us to seek for instruction from the Lord on how we should pray as those who are being joined, by the Spirit, to the fellowship of Their covenant discussion. Luk 11:1.

The origin of prayer

Prayer began in the fellowship of Yahweh *Elohim* before the creation of the heavens and the earth. This was the first prayer meeting and was the context in which the Father, Son

and Holy Spirit discussed, and began to initiate, Their covenant purpose to make man in Their image and according to Their likeness. Gen 1:26.

God, Yahweh *Elohim*, is love. 1Jn 4:8. He is manifest through fellowship. In this fellowship of prayer, Yahweh Father and Yahweh Son first helped the Holy Spirit to become the Helper by giving to Him the sevenfold Spirit of God, which is the sum and full capacity of God who is Spirit. The Holy Spirit, within the fellowship of Yahweh *Elohim*, was now able to be the Helper of the Father and the Son. As the Helper, the Holy Spirit was the power for the travail of Yahweh Son, enabling Him to empty Himself to the bosom of the Father, in order to reveal the Father by becoming His Son. The Holy Spirit was then the power for the travail of the Father, enabling Him to bring forth Yahweh Son as the Son of God, when He said, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'. Heb 1:5.

The Holy Spirit enabled Yahweh Son, who had been brought forth as the Son of God, to empty Himself further to the womb of the virgin Mary, and be begotten as the Son of Man. The angel, Gabriel, came to Mary and announced to her that she had been favoured by God to bring forth His Son, who would be called the Son of the Highest. She asked how this would happen? She was told that the Holy Spirit would come upon her as the One who would facilitate her conception when the power of the Father overshadowed her, enabling the pre-existing identity of the Son to be conceived in her womb *as the Seed of God*. Luk 1:30-35. Mary was joined to the prayer travail of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit which initiated this conception.

The fellowship of prayer that belongs to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was further manifest at Jesus' baptism. When Jesus presented Himself for baptism, John the Baptist said to Him, 'I need to be baptised by You, and are You coming to me?' Mat 3:14. However, Jesus replied, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us *to fulfill all righteousness*.' Mat 3:15. When Jesus was brought up out of the water, the heavens were opened to Him. The Holy Spirit descended upon Him as a dove, and the Father declared from heaven, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'. Mat 3:17. Jesus, at this time, was sealed by the Father with the Holy Spirit for His earthly ministry.

Significantly, the garden of Gethsemane was the manifestation, *in time*, of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit's fellowship of prayer, *before*. This prayer meeting revealed, in a very acute way, the *intercession* and *travail* that belonged to each Person's participation in the offering through which Their covenant purpose was finished, or accomplished. The Holy Spirit was the source and capacity of this prayer. For example, in response to Christ's prayer, 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done', Jesus was strengthened with Eternal Spirit, by the Holy Spirit, through the agency of an angel from heaven. Having been strengthened in this manner, Jesus began to pray *more earnestly*. Luk 22:42-44.

This is when the blood of the Everlasting Covenant began to be shed as Jesus sweated great clots of blood. Luk 22:44. Heb 13:20. Jesus continued in this same fellowship of prayer as He journeyed, through seven wounding events, from Gethsemane to Calvary. His travail was aided by the travailing work of the Holy Spirit which strengthened Him to bring forth redemption and salvation for us.

Christ's final emptying was from the cross to the bosom of the Father. The Holy Spirit enabled the Spirit of the Son to leave His immortal physical body on the cross and to take with Him all of the saints of history, who had previously died in faith, to the arms of the Father to be received into the kingdom of heaven. This is when they received their

heavenly bodies, which the Son had prepared for each of them, and also for us, in the course of His offering journey from Gethsemane until His work was completed and then finished on the cross. Joh 14:1-4.

The physical body of Jesus rested in the tomb for three days and three nights, having already been made immortal and incorruptible through His offering on the cross. By the command of the Father, the Spirit of Christ was enabled by the Holy Spirit to enter His physical body, which was also then clothed with His heavenly body, whereupon Christ was manifest in His spiritual body. The Son was brought forth, by resurrection, as the *first* Man made in the image and likeness of God. He had also 'become the [Sheaf of] *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep'. 1Co 15:20. The one Seed had multiplied to many seeds in Him, the one Sheaf. This was the firstfruit of the intercession and travail of prayer that belonged to the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Importantly, the promise of the Spirit could now be ministered to those who received and believed the word of Christ, proclaimed by the Holy Spirit through messengers.

Intercession and travail

The key point to understand is that the prayer of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit involved *intercession* and *travail*. These two elements of prayer were not merely the *content* of Their conversation but, rather, were foundational to the offering *work* through which Their covenant purpose was brought to pass. As we noted earlier, the Father and the Son gave to the Holy Spirit the sevenfold Spirit of God so that He would be the source of intercession and travail in the Godhead. Through these two dimensions of prayer, enabled by the Holy Spirit, Their covenant purpose would be accomplished.

Intercession is a dialogue in prayer. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit's *intercession*, which is Their initiative, is the expression, or communication, of each Person's name. It is the substance of who They are and what They each bring to Their fellowship. As Individuals who are, together, the sum of all diversity, They articulate Their intense love. This is the expression of Their desire to make man in Their image and according to Their likeness. Gen 1:26. According to Their name, each Person makes offering to bring Their purpose to pass. The word by which we are born and brought to glory as sons of God proceeds from this conversation. It is the expression of *Elohim's* will, and They accomplish what They say, for Their word is immutable. Heb 6:18.

Accordingly, the intercession of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has become the substance and expression of Their one Covenant, *before*. It is called 'Their Covenant' and it communicates the initiative to make us in Their image and according to Their likeness. This one Covenant, from *before*, progressively unfolds through Their offering love as 'My Covenant' of the Father, as the 'Everlasting Covenant' of the Son, and the 'New Covenant' of the Holy Spirit.

The intercessory dialogue of the Holy Spirit, in relation to the Father and the Son, is His initiative to sanctify Their unique initiatives, and work, so that each Person remains within the fellowship of understanding as the full expression of the love of God. This expression is manifest by, and through, *wisdom*. This is the wisdom of God that is necessary to achieve Their desire, which They expressed, declaring, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'. Gen 1:26. Wisdom, herself, testifies, 'The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I have been

established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth.' Pro 8:22-23. Importantly, the work of the Spirit, to sanctify the initiative and work of others, can also be defined as 'the fellowship of the Holy Spirit'. 2Co 13:12-14.

The *travail* of Yahweh *Elohim* is the expression of Their 'giving-love', which is enabled from Their fellowship, by each other. That is, travail is Their offering that gives power to bring forth what *comes from* Them and then *proceeds forth* from Them.

The travail of prayer is the capacity of the Holy Spirit to bring forth, using the power of the sevenfold Spirit of God, the purpose of God that belongs to Their Covenant. This involved, for example, bringing forth the first creation. Moses noted this work of the Spirit, explaining, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. *And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*' Gen 1:1-2. That is, the Spirit was hovering, or *travailing*, over the yet unformed creation to ensure that its realisation was sanctified; that is, that it was ordered and secure in all things. 2Sa 23:5.

Mankind is the fruit of Yahweh's travail

Bringing forth mankind was the fruit of Yahweh *Elohim's* utmost travail. It cost the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit *everything* to bring us forth – a creature who could choose to be born of Their life and participate in the fellowship of Their love and community. This is the definition of a son of God. In this regard, the creation of man reveals the glory of God. Every son and daughter who is brought forth is an expression of the fatherhood of God the Father. Jas 1:17. It is a revelation of His glory in 'giving-love'.

Highlighting how precious we are to God, James, the brother of Jesus, explained that God the Father brought us forth of His own will that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His '*creatures*'. Jas 1:18. He created and begat us for the purpose that we would join the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Their fellowship. Reiterating this tremendous point, we see that Their prayerful intercession and travail brought us forth as a certain kind of creature, whose predestination was to become a part of God's family and to enjoy Him forever. Psa 16:11. It follows that our participation in Their conversation of prayer would reflect the purpose for our creation.

As a creature, or created one, we have been given the privilege and right of *choice*. This is peculiar to our creation; it does not belong to any other living entity, including the angels. We can choose to become a child of God and join the fellowship of Yahweh, or we can choose to reject this calling and, instead, endeavour to be the origin of our own destiny and expression. By choosing the latter, a person '*aborts*' the process through which they would otherwise obtain their glorious predestination as a son of God, and a man in the image and likeness of God.

The apostle John exhorted us to behold, or understand, the kind of love that God has for us, and the manner of its expression toward us. 1Jn 3:1-3. This is the love of God by which we were brought forth, and by which we continue in fellowship with Him. In other words, we must be illuminated to understand and participate in the expression of His intercession and travail, through prayer. Rom 8:26-27. By this means, we are joined to the fellowship of His Covenant and receive the capacity of *El Shaddai* to participate in its fulfilment.

This first involves us in Their freedom and choice. It is Their love, begetting love in us. This love is personified as sons to a Father in His family. It is also manifest as sons of

God who are brothers and sisters together. Finally, it is revealed as a whole company in its extended multiplicity, manifest as a city and a kingdom – one nation together, eternally giving and multiplying.

The *agape* fellowship of Yahweh

The travail of Yahweh *Elohim* also produced *agape* fellowship as the context for our participation in the life of Their community. This travail was typified by the Lord's initiative to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt and to bring them to Himself.

In this regard, we recall that the children of Israel were called to go on a three-day, three-night journey to meet with Yahweh at Horeb for fellowship, worship and service. They were being invited to a prayer meeting! The Lord directed His messenger, Moses, saying, 'I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain [Horeb].' Exo 3:12. Moreover, Moses was commanded to say to the king of Egypt, 'The Lord God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may *sacrifice to the Lord our God.*' Exo 3:18.

Yahweh's *agape* fellowship with the children of Israel in the wilderness was expressed in the whole burnt offering. However, before the people could come before God to participate in this offering, it was necessary for them to bring a sin offering. The whole burnt offering was between the worshipper and Yahweh, and they ate and drank together in the tabernacle.

This fellowship meal was also apparent when Yahweh called Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, to 'come up to the Lord' to worship. Exo 24:1. Moses recorded that, 'They saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. *So they saw God, and they ate and drank.*' Exo 24:10-11.

Joy forevermore in the presence of the Lord

The reason why the Lord wants to bring us to an *agape* meal is that in His presence is fulness of joy. Furthermore, at His right hand is a cup of blessing, a fellowship which grants to us pleasures, or joy, forevermore. Psa 16:11. Psa 75:8-10. Those who participate in this meal are the redeemed of the Lord. As the prophet Isaiah declared, 'So the ransomed [meaning, 'redeemed'] of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with *everlasting joy on their heads*. They shall obtain joy and gladness; sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' Isa 51:11.

As the Son and Father enjoy Their fellowship in the order of headship, we also enjoy our fellowship within the house of the Son in the order of headship. This joy is ours as we walk in the choice of obedience. Walking in the choice of obedience is the true expression of who we were predestined to be as a son of God. Having made this choice, Zion has become *our chief joy*, for in Zion, we fellowship with Yahweh *Elohim* within His city. Psa 137:5-6.

Importantly, this fellowship at the right hand of Christ, from which proceeds the light of the knowledge of our sonship as it shines from His face, *is the place of our participation in prayer*. It is our connection to the house of God and the gate of heaven as we walk in the light of the word proclaimed by Christ's messengers. Describing the prayer of a

person connected to this fellowship through the word of a messenger, Elihu said to Job, '*He shall pray to God, and He will delight in him, he shall see His face with joy, for He restores to man His righteousness [meaning, sonship].*' Job 33:26. Significantly, the right hand of Christ, which is the place of our connection to the house of God, is the secret place of prayer!

The secret place of the ladder

To preserve him from the murderous intent of Esau, Isaac sent Jacob to the house of Laban, in the land of Padan Aram, Syria. Gen 28:1-2. In the course of his journey, Jacob came to a certain place where he decided to stay for the night. He took a stone and put it at his head and lay down to sleep. Gen 28:10-11.

As Jacob slept, he dreamed of a ladder that was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven. The angels of God were ascending and descending on the ladder. Yahweh stood above the ladder, and beside it, and said to Jacob, 'I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' Gen 28:12-14.

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he acknowledged that Yahweh was in that place. And, being afraid, he said, 'How awesome [fear-provoking] is this place! This is none other than the *house of God*, and this is *the gate of heaven!*' Gen 28:17. Jacob called the ladder 'the house of God' and 'the gate [or door] of heaven'. This ladder, which is Christ Himself, is the connection point between the context of our natural creation and the heavenly context of Yahweh's own fellowship. Later, Jesus explained that the angels, ascending and descending on this ladder, are now messengers who belong to presbyteries in His right hand. As we receive and walk in their message, we are part of the house of God, which is the church that Christ is building. Our citizenship is in heaven!

The house of God, which is the church and the place of the ladder, is the temple of Christ's body. With this in view, we recognise that this context of fellowship is, in fact, the 'secret place' of prayer. Establishing this seminal point, King David wrote, 'One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord [or be illuminated to know Him by the fear of the Lord], and to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; *in the secret place of His tabernacle* [meaning, His dwelling place] He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock.' Psa 27:4-5.

The secret place of the Lord's tabernacle is where we are being built on Christ, the Rock. As part of the bride of Christ, which is the New Jerusalem established on Mount Zion, we say to Him, 'O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff [lit: stairs, or we could say, 'ladder'], let me see Your face, let me hear Your voice; for Your voice is sweet, and Your face is lovely.' Son 2:14. We see that a person who is established in the secret place, is one who is receiving, and walking in the light of, the word that proceeds from the face of Christ.

When Jesus directed us to go into our room, shut the door and pray to our Father who is in the secret place, He was highlighting that prayer is first in the secret place of the ladder. Mat 6:6. It is a corporate expression that belongs to those who are being built on

Christ as part of His body, the church, by hearing, receiving and walking in the light of the word that proceeds from His face through the ministry of His *aggelos* messengers.

Prophesying of the many who would come to participate in this fellowship of prayer in the time of the end, Isaiah declared, 'Even them I will bring to My holy mountain [Zion], and make them *joyful in My house of prayer*. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar [that is, they will have a participation in the *agape* meal of the Father]; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.' Isa 56:7.

In our prayer meetings, which belong to the secret place of the ladder, we are to join the intercessory and travailing prayer meeting of the Holy Spirit and Yahweh Son as They continue to pray for us. They are praying that we may continue to be joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering journey which He has already accomplished for us. This involves us, with the Holy Spirit, giving aid to those who are in need. If this corporate fellowship of prayer is not our first orientation and participation, we are unable to pray, individually, by the Spirit, for He is the Spirit of fellowship. Php 2:1.

The prayer meeting of four

As those who are established in the fellowship of Christ, we are able to personally pray in the Spirit *as sons of God*. This is why Jesus directed us to pray, saying, '*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name*'. Mat 6:9.

Jesus continued, saying, 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.' Mat 6:10-13. This prayer, outlined by Jesus, is not a sacramental statement for recitation. Rather, it defines a whole form of conduct, as we walk by the Spirit, that belongs to prayer at all times! We have outlined the daily implications of this prayer in our companion book.

Referring to this expression of prayer, Jesus further instructed His disciples, saying, 'And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.' Mat 6:7. These vain repetitions are both the expression of mind-chatter motivated by the fear of death, and may also belong to the incantations of heathen spiritualists who endeavour to achieve their own ends through the agency of unclean spirits. Praying in this manner is not fellowship in the conversation that belongs to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

In the secret place, by the Spirit, we meet the Father, through the Son, face to face. It is here that our spirit is illuminated by the Holy Spirit as we receive the light of the knowledge of our sonship, which is reflected to us from the face of Christ through the ministry of His word. By the faith that we receive as we hear this word, we present ourselves for participation in the fellowship of prayer. Highlighting the relationship between faith and this conversation, Paul wrote, 'And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak'. 2Co 4:13. We demonstrate this faith as we humble ourselves and pray, personally, in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the source and capacity of prayer. That is, He enables intercession and travail. As we have already noted, He did this for the Father and Son, *before*, as well as in the garden of Gethsemane. The Holy Spirit, likewise, enables us to join this intercession and travail that belongs to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As we noted earlier,

Paul wrote, 'Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes *intercession* for us with *groanings* [meaning, travail] which cannot be uttered.' Rom 8:26. If we are not enabled by the Holy Spirit to intercede and travail, *we are not praying at all*. Our communication is an expression of a troubled and unfruitful mind, motivated by the fear of death, as we anxiously groan and petition God in relation to the matters that are confounding our expectations of our life, of ourselves, and of others.

Unpacking Paul's seminal statement on prayer, we recognise that Christ searches our hearts. Rev 2:23. He knows what is the mind of the Spirit. The Spirit dwells in us and judges us in relation to our responses to Him, to Christ, and to others. The Spirit communicates this information to Christ as a witness to Him in relation to how He will speak to the Father about our needs, attitudes, and works.

The Father then acts to purge and prune us, or to remove us from the church, which is typified in the Scriptures as 'a vine', for He is the Vinedresser. Joh 15:1. Jesus is the Vine, and the members of Christ are named as branches. In this regard, Jesus said, 'I am the Vine, you [individually] are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.' Joh 15:5.

Paul taught that each one of us, as a Christian, is a temple for the Holy Spirit, writing, 'Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.' 1Co 6:19-20. Earlier, in this first epistle to the Corinthians, he said, 'If anyone defiles the temple

of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.' 1Co 3:17. This means that that if we defile our body, God the Father will bring judgement upon us in this life, and then, finally, He will destroy us in hell.

Inasmuch as we must not defile our body, which is a temple for the Holy Spirit, Paul also said, 'Nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer', because our bodies have been made members of Christ and we, each one, are one Spirit with Him.' 1Co 10:9-10. 1Co 6:15. 1Co 12:12-13.

We must not continue in sin, for we have been bought by God, with a price. It cost the Father everything to recover us, through the work of redemption, in order to give us to Christ as members of His body, and to give to us the Holy Spirit. This cost was manifest when the Father gave up His Son for us as a sin offering in the garden of Gethsemane.

Once He redeemed us completely, the Father gave to us the Holy Spirit. He designated that our bodies were to become an eternal temple in which the Holy Spirit would reside - both in our mortal body, and then, finally, in our spiritual body. Our bodies do not belong to us; not in this age, nor in the age to come. We have been purchased, and because of this, our bodies belong to God. We are to glorify God in our bodies in this age, and will do so for all of eternity as a place of worship. We are also to worship and glorify God in our own spirit. 1Co 6:15-20.

A further implication of fellowship in the prayer meeting of four, is that the Holy Spirit is the Helper of our *most holy faith*. Our most holy faith is the faith of God that we received from the Son through the ministry of His word. With this most holy faith, we are able to believe to see, and fulfil, the works that Christ has already worked for us.

Significantly, the Holy Spirit is also the Helper of our *faith initiatives*. In this regard, there are initiatives that we must take during the day that belong to the faith that we have received from Christ. The Spirit helps us to know and fulfil these initiatives as He leads us, each day, in the works that belong to our sanctification as a son of God in Christ. Joh 16:13. Through these works, we are bringing forth fruit for God.

Prayer is the substance and facilitation of hope. That is, by the Spirit, we are praying to participate in the fulfilment of what we hope for, which is our participation in the will of God being done. This is because when we pray, *we hope in God*. As the psalmist said, 'That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God [the works that Christ has finished for us], but keep His commandments.' Psa 78:7. While we are praying in faith, it is already the substance of what we hope for because our prayer is according to the will of God. Heb 11:1.

Chapter 6

Baptism

In the Preface of this book, we noted that for almost 2 000 years, since the influence of the early church fathers, water baptism has largely been applied in the church as a sacrament. Most denominations consider water baptism to be the action that marks their entry into the church and through which an adherent's salvation is realised, either now or following their death.

For example, the doctrine of 'baptismal regeneration', which informs the practices of many denominations, views the act of baptism as the means by which a person is born again by water and the Spirit through regeneration. Joh 3:5. In this tradition, regeneration refers to the eventual recovery of a person, through Christ's vicarious death on the cross, to the sinless condition of Adam and Eve prior to the Fall. Even in our own tradition of 'the doctrine of the name', a person was considered to be *complete* in Christ as a child of God by adoption once they were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Col 2:10.

All of these doctrines pertaining to baptism do not recognise or understand that the spirit, or identity, of a believer can be born anew *of the divine nature*. This is the outcome of receiving the promise of the Spirit through faith. Gal 3:14. Importantly, new birth is not through regeneration, nor is sonship a designation by adoption. Accordingly, we are not destined to return to the condition of Adam and Eve prior to the Fall, for Adam was not the full manifestation of a man made in the image and likeness of God. Paul was quite clear that Adam was a '*type* of Him [Christ] who was to come'. Rom 5:14. Even though Christ was the full manifestation of God in the flesh, He was also the first Man made in the image and likeness of God. We are to be made like Him. 2Co 3:18.

Mankind, including Adam and Eve, was predestined to be made in the image and likeness of God through the process established by Christ on His offering journey as the Son of Man. Those who are born of God, and who journey each day with Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, will be made just like Him. On the day of resurrection, when Christ physically returns a second time, our glorification as sons of God and sons of men in the image and likeness of God *will be complete*. We will receive our spiritual body

and will be like Him when He was manifest as the first Man made in the image and likeness of God on the day of His resurrection!

The gospel of God teaches us that a person is born of God *before* baptism. In fact, it is the new creation who dies with Christ through baptism by water. Along with the other denominations of the church age, many in our stream of churches have been confused on this point. This has undermined the faith of believers for their expression as members of the body of Christ, and for their daily journey with Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. However, we give thanks to the Lord for His mercy, and for the illumination that we are receiving concerning the gospel of sonship and its implications for baptism. In this chapter, we will outline the three dimensions of the one baptism through which God's covenant purpose for us is accomplished in our lives. We will also detail our amended baptism service, which reflects this renewed understanding.

Make disciples, baptising them

When Jesus recommissioned the disciples, following His resurrection, He said to them, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations*, [by] baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Mat 28:18-20.

However, the Scriptures recorded that Christ's messengers in the New Testament baptised their hearers 'in the name of Jesus Christ'. For example, Luke recorded, 'Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." ' Act 2:38-39.

How are we to understand what appears, at first glance, to be a contradiction? In the first instance, it is necessary to recognise that the Scriptures pertaining to baptism are not defining, or articulating, *baptismal formulas*. They are not the words that need to be said over a person when they are plunged into water.

This is an important point. Within our stream of churches, the baptismal formula - 'into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ' - has been emphasised as critical to a person's salvation, as if the power for this objective is imparted to a believer through the declaration of these particular words over them when they are immersed in water. The emphasis and insistence on the formula, by some, has made baptism sacramental, rendering their practice not too dissimilar from an incantation. An incantation is a 'verbal charm or spell that is spoken or sung as part of a magical ritual'. This has been a leaven among us that must be purged from our understanding and practice of baptism.

The instructions concerning baptism, outlined by Jesus and His apostles, detailed the *implications* of a person's reception of the gospel of God. In this regard, baptism is immersion into a process through which the covenant purpose of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is accomplished in the life of a believer. Their covenant purpose was to make man in Their image and according to Their likeness. Gen 1:26.

Following His resurrection, Jesus Christ was manifest as the first Man who had been made in the image and likeness of God. He was Yahweh Son who had been begotten by the Father as the Son of God; who had come in the flesh; and who had been made a mortal

Son of Man in Gethsemane. Through His offering and suffering journey from Gethsemane to Calvary, He accomplished our redemption and pioneered the pathway of our salvation.

Because of this offering, when He rose from the dead, Jesus received the name above every name, as Paul so clearly explained, writing, 'God also has highly exalted Him and given Him *the name* which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'. Php 2:9-11.

Jesus called this entire process *His baptism*, saying to His disciples, 'You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with'. Mat 20:23. This is the *one baptism* through which the covenant purpose of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is accomplished.

The name that Christ received became the context and authority for a person to be discipled in relation to the initiative of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. A believer calls on the name of the Lord to be discipled in relation to this covenant purpose. Rom 10:13. A person who calls on the name of the Lord is becoming obedient from the heart to the form of doctrine - which is the one baptism with three dimensions - to which they are delivered by the Lord's messengers. Noting this point, Paul said, 'But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.' Rom 6:17-19.

In summary, baptism 'in the name of Jesus Christ' and baptism 'in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit', are not formulas, or words, that must be invoked upon a believer, making them part of the church or recipients of salvation. Rather, baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is one's immersion into the process established by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, through which we are progressively being made in the image and likeness of God.

This one baptism, which Jesus established and was consummated when He rose from the dead and received the name above every name, requires a person to be born of the divine nature and to be set by the Father in the body of Christ so that they are able to live as a son of God in Christ. They must also be baptised by water into the fellowship of Christ's death, burial and resurrection in order to walk in a new and living way upon which regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit are at work within them. Finally, they must be baptised in the Holy Spirit and become a temple for the Holy Spirit, who enables them to be witnesses of Christ in the world. As we walk each day with Christ, in these three aspects of the one baptism, we are progressively changing, from one degree of glory to another, into His image. 2Co 3:18.

Three dimensions of baptism

Paul explained that, although there is only one baptism, there are *three distinct aspects, or dimensions, of baptism*. Eph 4:5. He signalled the first two elements of baptism in his letter to the Romans, writing, 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many

of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.' Rom 6:1-4. The *third* dimension of the one baptism that is outlined in the New Covenant, is baptism in the Holy Spirit.

The first dimension – baptism by the Father

The apostle Paul's question, 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?', focuses our attention on the *first* aspect of baptism, which is associated with *new birth and membership of the body of Christ*. Paul highlighted this aspect of baptism, writing, 'Those who are in the flesh [not having been born of the Spirit] cannot please God [because they remain an enemy of God]. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. *Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ [through new birth], he is not His.*' Rom 8:8-9.

In this statement, Paul summarised the key steps that belong to receiving the adoption, leading to new birth. Those in the flesh are dead in trespasses and sins as part of the kingdom of darkness. They are made alive through the prevenient grace of God. Eph 2:1-2. The Son and the Father and the Holy Spirit come and dwell in their *heart* because they keep the commandments of Christ. They receive the Spirit of Christ into their *spirit*, when, by the Spirit of adoption, they cry 'Abba, Father!', indicating that they believe to become a son of God.

The Seed of the divine nature is the Spirit of Christ that was multiplied from the one Seed, Christ, through the travail of His seven wounds. It is the specific seed of a person's name, which is germinated in their spirit by the Holy Spirit, causing them to be born again as a son of God. This is what it means to have the Spirit of Christ. Paul was clear that if a person has received Christ, they are His, meaning that they are *in Christ*. We see that, having been born of God by the Spirit, a believer is immersed, or *baptised*, by the Father, *into Christ*. They are set in the body of Christ by the Father, as He pleases. Outlining this first dimension of baptism, Paul wrote, 'For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit... But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.' 1Co 12:13,18.

Importantly, the implication of having been baptised into Christ by the Father, is that we are baptised, *as a new-creation son of God, into the death, burial and resurrection of Christ*. This is *before* baptism by water. As we read earlier, Paul established this point when he wrote, 'Or do you not know that as many of us as were *baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death [and resurrection]?*' Rom 6:3. This refers to a person who acknowledges that they were formerly not God's people, but through the Father's initiative toward them in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, they have become a son of God. Rom 9:25-26.

Although a believer has been born of the Spirit, and is in Christ, '*the body is [still] dead because of sin*'. Rom 8:10. Unless a person is joined to the second aspect of baptism, they will find themselves in a wretched condition, being beset by sin on account of the other law in their *unregenerate* heart. Noting this condition, Paul wrote, 'But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into *captivity to the law of sin* which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! *Who will deliver me from*

this body of death? Rom 7:23-24. The answer, of course, is *through regeneration and renewing in the fellowship of Christ's dying and living.*

The second dimension – baptism into the regeneration work of Christ

Having outlined the first dimension of baptism by the Father, Paul then drew attention to the *second* aspect of baptism, writing, 'Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should *walk* in newness of life'. Rom 6:4. The second dimension of baptism, which is by water, joins us to a *pathway* of salvation. That is, we are baptised into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus to *walk in a new and living way* upon which regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit is at work in us. Heb 10:20. Tit 3:4-7. This is the pathway of *discipleship* in the community of a local church, under the instruction and care of a presbytery. For this reason, baptism by water happens under the hands of firstfruits messengers who are co-workers of Christ. 1Co 3:9. They are sent by Christ to make disciples of those who receive and believe their message. Mat 28:19-20. Rom 6:17-18.

As we considered in Chapter 1, those who are baptised by water into the *fellowship* of Christ's offering and sufferings are joined to the second dimension of redemption – 'the redemption that is in Christ Jesus'. Rom 3:24. They are the redeemed of the Lord who are now journeying on a Highway of Holiness. As the prophet Isaiah declared, 'A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the *Highway of Holiness*. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; it shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' Isa 35:8-10.

Paul described this second dimension of baptism as 'the circumcision of Christ', writing, 'In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead'. Col 2:11-12. While it is necessary for salvation, baptism by water, which joins us to the circumcision of Christ, is more than just the process of dealing with sin. This circumcision is also the *guarantee of the resurrection!* It connects us to the regenerating work of Christ so that, as we are co-crucified with Christ, and cease to live according to the principle of the flesh, we are, by faith, able to live by Christ's life in us. This is the life that we will live, forever.

Referring to the implications of our daily participation in this aspect of baptism, Paul said, 'But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also *give life to your mortal bodies* through His Spirit who dwells in you [delivering to us a new heart and a new spirit, and enabling us to fulfil the works of obedience that Christ has already finished for us].' Rom 8:11.

In this passage, Paul was emphasising the words of the Lord through the prophet Ezekiel, who said, 'I will give you *a new heart and put a new spirit within you*; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.' Eze 36:26. The 'heart of stone' refers to an unregenerate heart that is motivated by the other law. Rom 7:23. Jesus was referring to this 'ground' of our inner man, and the need for regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, when He said, 'But he who received the seed on *stony places*, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself,

but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles [is offended, being disobedient to the word].'
Mat 13:20-21.

As we embrace the daily implications of our baptism by water into the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, we are finding deliverance from the other law and are participating in the works that Christ has already fulfilled for us. This is happening as our inner man [Greek: *anthropos*] – our spirit and soul – is being regenerated and renewed day by day. As we live and walk in this way each day, we proceed forward toward perfection. Heb 6:1.

Walking in this way is the *pathway of pilgrimage* that belongs to those who follow Christ. It is also described as *walking in the light*. 1Jn 1:7. We are to walk in this way unto the fulness of the perfect light. Describing this pathway, King Solomon wrote, 'But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day [or light]'. Pro 4:18. The 'perfect light' is the full manifestation of a son of light. 1Th 5:5. This is the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham, when He said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them. ... So shall your descendants be.'
Gen 15:5.

To this end, we recognise that we are progressively changed, 'from glory to glory', until we receive the end of the adoption, which is the redemption of our physical bodies on the day of resurrection. 2Co 3:18. Rom 8:23. Significantly, the differing 'glories' of the stars of heaven are the fruit of the extent to which sons of God are engaged in the process of glorification in this age. This same principle is communicated through the lesson of the minas. Luk 19:12-27. Jesus explained that every servant of Christ received one mina each; however, the multiplication of the minas differed among the servants. This distinction in the multiplication of the minas will correspond with the differing glories of the sons of Abraham in the resurrection.

The third dimension – baptism in the Holy Spirit

After a person has been born and baptised by the Father into the body of Christ, and baptised in water, they are to be immersed, or baptised, in the Holy Spirit. This is the *third* dimension of baptism. Once immersed in the Spirit, the Spirit Himself fills a believer full, making them His temple. 1Co 6:19. This baptism is indicated by the capacity to speak in tongues. Act 2:4.

Having been baptised in the Holy Spirit, a believer receives the capacity to pray and prophesy, and to *testify* as a son of God. They do so as a member of the body of Christ, who is proceeding from Him as part of the community of the bride of Christ, the church. Jesus explained this outcome of baptism in the Holy Spirit, saying to His disciples, 'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'
Act 1:8. In this regard, any Christian who has received the baptism of the Spirit is then able, as part of a community of believers, to be a co-worker with Christ and to make disciples.

Baptismal service outline

With this understanding in view, let us consider a typical service for those who are choosing to be baptised with water into the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Hosting

The baptism service will be hosted by a firstfruits disciple of the church. Two other firstfruits disciples will be in the water, baptising those who have requested this immersion.

At the commencement of the service, the host will gather and welcome folk. They will then give a short orientation to water baptism, acknowledging the faith response of those who have requested baptism. The host will then outline the baptism order of service, highlighting the statements that will be made by each participant in the course of the service.

Testimony

The first person to be baptised will give a short testimony, declaring their faith for water baptism. This testimony should reflect the true understanding of baptism. It will, therefore, be the fruit of their fellowship with a disciple who is a firstfruits believer in the church and, in the case of children, with their parents.

Standing with the elder, the person being baptised will deliver their testimony to the congregation. At the end of their testimony, those who are fifteen years of age, or older, will read the 'Statement of faith for baptism':

'Having been born again and placed by the Father in this community of believers as a member of the body of Christ, I am choosing to be baptised by water into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, my Lord. This is the pathway of life that Christ pioneered for me through His offering and suffering journey, upon which I am being saved through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. I am choosing to walk this way, as a disciple of Christ, in the fellowship of His body.

Acknowledging the instructions of Jesus, the condition of walking in my baptism as a disciple is that I must love Him far more than I love my father and mother, my wife and children, brothers and sisters, extended family, and my own life, also. [*Adjust statement depending on composition of family.*] This means that discipleship as a member of the body of Christ will be my principal focus and motivation as I bear my cross each day, and follow Christ, my Lord.

If it is a child who is being baptised, they will be accompanied by their parents as they share their testimony before the congregation. Following their testimony, one of their parents will read the 'Statement of commendation for baptism':

'Jesus Christ is the Head of our house, and we are submitted to His lordship. Accordingly, we commend our son/daughter ____*[name]*_____ to their baptism by water into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the pathway of life that Christ pioneered for them through His offering and suffering journey, upon which they are obtaining their salvation through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. They are choosing to walk this way as a disciple of Christ.

Acknowledging the instructions of Christ, the condition of walking in their baptism as a disciple is that ____*[name]*_____ must love Him far more than they love their own father and mother, brothers and sisters, extended family, and their own life, also. [*Adjust statement depending on composition of family.*] This means

that discipleship as a member of the body of Christ is to be their principal focus and motivation as they bear their cross each day and follow Christ their Lord.'

Statement of purpose

Once the believer has shared their testimony, and the 'Statement of faith' or the 'Statement of commendation' has been made, the host will read the 'Statement of purpose for baptism':

'[Name], your confession of faith is that you have been born again as a son of God from the Seed of the divine nature, which is Christ, and have been placed by the Father into the body of Christ, being baptised into His death and resurrection. As disciples of Christ and members of His body, we then baptise you by water into the fellowship of Christ's suffering death, His burial and His resurrection to walk in a new and living way as a fellow disciple. We do this so that just as Christ was raised from the dead to live by the glory of the Father, so you also, with us, will walk and live as Christ does in sanctification, as a member of His body, which is the church, by the power of His resurrection life.'

Immersion in water

After making this statement, the host will then invite the believer to enter the baptismal tank. Once they have entered the water, one of the two baptisers will state to them:

'[Name], we baptise you into the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings; that is, into His death, burial and resurrection'.

The believer will then be immersed in the water. Immediately after their baptism, there will be an opportunity to sing a song of thanksgiving as the one being baptised, the elders, and the congregation, rejoice together.

If a person has not been baptised in the Holy Spirit, the baptisers will lay hands on the one who has just been baptised, praying for them, and saying, 'Be baptised into the Holy Spirit.'

The next person to be baptised

After the believer exits the water, the next person to be baptised will be invited to join the host to share their testimony, make their statement of faith or commendation, whereupon the host will read the 'Statement of purpose' and then invite them into the tank to be immersed in water.

Conclusion of service

At the conclusion of all the baptisms, the host will pray, commending those who have been baptised to the grace of the Lord for their ongoing fellowship in Christ's offering and sufferings. They will then dismiss the congregation.

Chapter 7

The dedication of children

The dedication of children is an important undertaking by Christian parents who have been established in the gospel of God. Rom 1:1,16-17. It recognises that a child who has been conceived in a covenant household has been born again of the divine nature and established as a member of the body of Christ, in the womb of their mother. 1Co 7:14. Having this understanding, dedication is an action of faith exercised by parents who are yielding their child to God the Father, in acknowledgement that the child belongs to Him as part of the church of the firstborn. Heb 12:23. Furthermore, they are committing themselves to train up their child in the *pathway* of regeneration and renewing, through the discipline and instruction of the Lord, in the hope that when the child matures as a son of God, they will choose this pathway for themselves. Pro 22:6. Eph 6:4. This choice will be marked by the child's request to be baptised by water. Rom 6:3-4.

Dedication, informed by the gospel of sonship, stands in stark contrast to the practices associated with other gospel traditions. For example, church movements that hold to the doctrine of 'baptismal regeneration' emphasise the need for infants to be sprinkled with water. They assert that the child is admitted to the church, and registered as a recipient of salvation, through the regenerative action of baptism. Other church movements believe for the conversion of a child in response to a message proclaimed in the church, whereupon the young convert will desire baptism as an outward sign of their inward conviction.

Children born in covenant houses

Both of these doctrinal perspectives situate the salvation of children in the church, rather than in a household, and deny the blessing of the divine nature. This is counter to the teaching of the Scriptures. For example, when the apostle Peter preached the gospel in Solomon's Portico, he reminded his hearers of God's promise to Abraham, saying, 'And in your Seed *all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*' Act 3:25. This blessing was described by the apostle Paul as 'the promise of the Spirit', which belongs to all of the families who are in Christ, the Seed of Abraham. Gal 3:14,16. A person who has received the promise of the Spirit has been born of the Spirit as a son of God. Joh 3:5-6.

Acknowledging God's promise that a family in Christ would receive this blessing, Paul taught, 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now *they are holy* [or, sanctified].' 1Co 7:14. In Chapter 2, we explained that a person's sanctification is the *fruit* of receiving the adoption and being born of the Spirit as a new-creation son of God. Rom 6:17-18,22. This happens when the Father sends the Spirit of Christ, which is the divine nature, into their spirit. The seed of their sonship, which was multiplied from the one Seed, Christ, through the travail of His offering journey, is germinated in their spirit by the Holy Spirit and they are conceived as a son of God. The Father then places this new born son of God in the church of the firstborn by making them a member of the body of Christ.

The implication of Paul's teaching is that a child who is born into the household of at least one believing parent is a recipient of the promise of the Spirit, for they are sanctified. This marvellous and precious truth has many implications, one of which is the importance of dedication. Within the Christian community, including our stream of churches, there has been much confusion regarding dedication. However, as we have already considered, it is a fundamental response of parents who have received the New Covenant of the Spirit.

The dedication of Jesus is the scriptural basis for the dedication of children by believing parents. Jesus is the Word of God, made flesh. Joh 1:14. This means that He is the substance and exemplar of God's covenant purpose for mankind. The account of His dedication in the Gospel of Luke provides the rationale for the dedication of babies under the New Covenant, and also defines the key elements of this activity of faith by believing parents.

Dedication is not symbolic of circumcision

In his Gospel, Luke introduced the dedication of Jesus by distinguishing this practice from circumcision. He wrote, 'And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb'. Luk 2:21.

Clearly, Christ was circumcised and named on the eighth day. However, His dedication happened after the forty days of Mary's purification were complete. Describing this event, Luke further wrote, 'Now when the days of her purification according to the Law of Moses were completed [forty days], they brought Him to Jerusalem to present [lit: yield] Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb *shall be called holy* to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons".' Luk 2:22-24.

Drawing from this account, we recognise that the dedication of children is *not* a New Covenant replacement for physical circumcision. Gal 5:6. Neither is dedication an alternative to baptism, described by the apostle Paul as 'the circumcision of Christ'. Col 2:11-12. As we noted earlier, this has not been understood in many of the traditional church denominations, who have insisted on the need for babies to be baptised, or sprinkled with water, for the sake of their salvation. Any ritual, be it infant baptism or dedication, that is performed for the purpose of 'covering' a child until they are able to obtain salvation through their own response to the gospel, is a rejection of the blessing of Abraham that is available to every family in Christ. Gal 3:14.

As it was for Jesus, dedication is a believing parent's obedience to the command of the Father to yield their child to Him, for it is born of God and part of the church of the firstborn. Through their discipline and instruction, they then join the child to the circumcision of Christ, which belongs to the *pathway* of salvation upon which the child can progressively be saved by regeneration and renewing. Eph 6:4. Believing parents are able to join their children to this fellowship in Christ's offering and sufferings because they are submitted to His lordship, in the fellowship of His headship, and are walking on this pathway themselves.

In the same way that dedication is not a replacement for natural circumcision, dedication is also not a naming ceremony. A baby who is born in a covenant house receives their name as a son of God through new birth, immediately following their conception. This name was determined by the Father, and written in Christ, the Father's Seed, before the creation of the heavens and the earth. It is *because* the infant has received their name as a son of God in the womb, that the parents dedicate them to the Lord. With this understanding, parents will refrain from using dedication as an opportunity to explain the reasons why they gave their child a particular name.

Dedication fulfils the Law

As we noted from the example of Jesus, the dedication of a baby by a believing parent, or parents, is a response of faith obedience to the command of the Lord God, who said, 'Consecrate [sanctify, set apart] to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine.' Exo 13:2. Before we consider this command in more detail, let us address why, and how, a believing parent keeps this Law.

The New Testament writers taught that through Christ's offering on the cross, He ended the Old Covenant by removing the Law of God as mankind's reference point for righteousness. That is, we are not to pursue righteousness through our own efforts to keep the Law. However, this does not mean that God no longer requires the Law to be fulfilled. Mat 5:17-20. In fact, the standard of righteousness under the New Covenant far exceeds the expectations of the Old Covenant! Mat 5:20-22, 27-28. The key point is that we cannot fulfil the Law through the flesh. This leads only to sin and death.

When Christ ended the Old Covenant, He did not destroy the Law. Mat 5:17. Rather, the Law was nailed to the cross, in Himself. Col 2:14. Paul taught that we establish and fulfil the Law in Christ when we live by faith, and walk according to the Spirit. Rom 3:31. We receive faith by hearing the word of Christ that is ministered by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of Christ's messengers. Rom 10:14-17. 1Pe 1:12. By faith, we then present ourselves for participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering. 2Co 4:13-14. Gal 2:20.

The Holy Spirit enables our participation in the fellowship of this offering. Rom 8:26. 1Co 6:17. 1Co 12:13. He writes God's Law in our heart when He pours the love of God into our heart. Heb 10:16. Rom 5:5. Our faith works by this love, and this is demonstrated as we are obedient to the word of Christ. Gal 5:6. This is fundamental to our participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as a member of His body. In this fellowship, we are being delivered from our fleshly motivations and perceptions, and are fulfilling the Law through faith obedience to the word of God. We see, then, that keeping the commands of the Lord, including the command to dedicate our children, is the desire and nature of a person who is in Christ.

The 'Firstborn' belongs to Yahweh

We note that the command, 'Consecrate to Me all the firstborn ... it is Mine,' was given by the Lord *before* the Law was given to the children of Israel as a covenant on Mount Sinai. Exo 13:2. Exo 20. The Lord made this declaration after He had proclaimed the law of the Feast of Passover, following the deliverance of the children of Israel from their captivity in Egypt. Exo 12. The nation of Egypt is symbolic of 'the world' with its culture and religion.

Christ is the Firstborn. Col 1:15,18. As we have been considering, the children of believing parents are recipients of the divine nature in the womb, and are part of the Firstborn, Christ, because of the faith of one or both of the parents. 1Co 7:14. This is the faith that they obtain by keeping the Feast of Passover.

A parent keeps the Feast of Passover by eating and drinking the elements of the Father's *agape* feast as one who is poor in spirit. Mat 5:3. This means that they receive and live by the word of Christ, which is ministered by His messengers, and they participate in the fellowship of Yahweh's offering from which this provision proceeds. This word is Spirit, and it is life to them. Joh 6:63. It is the word of God's Everlasting Covenant. Eating the bread and wine of this *agape* meal, which belongs to the Father's house, is a participation in the fellowship of the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offering. 1Co 10:16.

Christ's word, which is Spirit and life, gives to a believer a fellowship in His offering, from which His life and power are ministered. Through participation in Christ, as our Passover Lamb, we are delivered from the culture of the world, which is typified in the Scriptures as the nation of Egypt. We also receive the blessing of the Spirit, who is the substance of the New Covenant. With this grace, we are enabled to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Eph 6:4. In Christ, the nurture and admonition of the Lord is the initiative of God the Father toward the child, through the parents. Through this initiative, the child is being delivered from the shame of pursuing an image and projection of themselves. They are growing in their name as a son of God, and in the capacity of faith to make offering.

The faith of the parents

The dedication of a baby is the evidence of the parents' faith that comes by hearing the word of the cross. Rom 10:17. It is the motivation of those who live in the fellowship of Christ's offering. Dedication should happen as early as practicable. As a guide, and prompted by the example of Jesus, the child should be dedicated a month or two following their birth.

Just as Jesus was dedicated at the temple, which is the context of the altar, children of covenant houses can only be dedicated at the communion gathering. This is where their parents partake of the altar, which means that their household, including the children born to them, are part of the Firstborn and belong to the Lord. Heb 13:10. 1Co 10:18. We are not able to dedicate our children in our own houses or through our own devotional initiative. To do so would be the same as presuming that we can participate in the *agape* meal of the Father apart from gathering together in the name of Christ, whose body is our bread and whose blood is our drink. The Scriptures teach us that a household who does this is, in fact, guilty of the blood of Christ. Lev 17:3-4. 1Co 11:27-29.

Parents who are dedicating their baby come to the altar, which is the *agape* meal of the Father, to declare the faith that they have received in the word of the

Everlasting Covenant. The parents are yielding, or presenting, their baby to the Lord because they recognise that their child is born of God and is part of the company of the Firstborn, who is Christ. Their child belongs to God the Father and has a priestly work that was named for them by the Father, even before they were conceived. In this way, the parents are dedicating their baby to the fellowship of Yahweh, in which the child's name is realised and the blessing of eternal life is obtained. Through this action of faith, the Law is being established and fulfilled in Christ by the believing parents.

The blessing of the elders

The Gospel of Luke recorded that when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to be dedicated, Simeon took the Child into his arms. He blessed God, and blessed Mary and Joseph. He then prophesied concerning the name and works of Jesus, and the pathway that Mary would walk as His mother. Luk 2:28-35.

Simeon was the messenger of the Lord to Mary and Joseph. His involvement in the dedication of Jesus was established and directed by the Holy Spirit. Luk 2:26-27. We understand, therefore, that parents' fellowship with a messenger, who is part of Christ's lamp administration, is an essential element of dedication. This fellowship is in one Spirit, by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the dedication itself is part of the ministry of the Spirit at the communion gathering.

Prior to dedication, Christian parents will seek fellowship with a presbyter. They will do this because they are connected to the fellowship of the presbytery as those who receive, and walk in the light of, the word that is proclaimed by Christ's messengers. 1Jn 1:1-3. In this interaction, the firstfruits presbyter will discuss with the parents the purpose and practicalities of dedication, and can receive the parents' testimony of faith for the dedication of their baby.

The dedication service

On the day of the baby's dedication, the elder, with whom the parents have found fellowship towards dedication, will bring a short statement concerning the gospel of God and its implications for dedication.

The parents of the child will then share a testimony, communicating their response of faith to the command of the Lord to separate all the firstborn to Him. Following this testimony, the father of the child (or mother, if the father is not present) will read the dedication statement:

Today we dedicate _____ to the Lord, in the presence of the general assembly and church of the firstborn. We are yielding _____ to the Lord in obedience to the command that He has given to His covenant people, 'Consecrate to Me all the firstborn... it is Mine'.

We are children of Abraham, and are recipients of the blessing that was promised to Abraham and His Seed, Christ. For this reason, we rejoice that our son/daughter is born of God and is a part of the body of Christ, the Firstborn.

We acknowledge that our adequacy for the care of _____ is found in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, to which we remain joined through our participation in this communion table. We are committed to raising _____ in the training and admonition of the Lord by the grace of life that we receive in this fellowship.

THE PATHWAY OF OUR PILGRIMAGE

Following the example of Simeon, the elder will then take the child in their arms and bless the Lord and the child through prayer. The whole congregation, who are themselves participants in the same *agape* table, are able to stand with the couple, and the elder, and to participate with them in this blessing through prayer.