

# PURSUING GOD

*SEEKING INTIMACY WITH THE FATHER*

*by D. Kevin Jones*

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D. Kevin Jones

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To the Methodist People,  
whom I have served and loved  
for over 25 years.

## INTRODUCTION

I arrived in the Black Country in the September of 2016, having spent the previous week in hospital. Agonising Gallstones were the problem. With moving house, my operation was postponed till the April of 2017. Sadly, this was too long, the pain was intense and I arrived in hospital in a very bad state.

The surgeon had performed over 500 key-hole operations without incident. Two hours into the operation I needed major surgery, the gallbladder and liver were fused. I woke in high dependency and came home after 6 days, in severe pain.

On the third night, totally unable to sleep, or pray, I simply lay in pain, in the small hours singing hymns. As I lifted my voice in song, the presence of the Lord filled the room and His peace filled my wife and me, as we received His beautiful presence. The pain remained but the fear was gone.

Later I asked the Lord if I was dying? Into my mind He imprinted a picture of a 400-metre athletics track, the runner was on the top bend, the answer came, 'you're not even on the home straight yet.' Greatly encouraged, I made prayer a priority and each time, the presence of the Lord is rich and real. I am 58 and asked the Lord, why I couldn't have found this rich presence when I was younger? His reply was swift, 'I had to overcome my major fear, (death) before I could overcome my smaller fears.' I realise fear had held me back for years, fear of people and fear of being openly Spirit-filled.

As I continued to seek God, He spoke to me about 4 keys to walking with Jesus, and said, that we can only walk closely with Him, if we walk in Desire, Humility Repentance and Holiness.

Some weeks later as I recovered, I went to a Ministers' Breakfast in the Black Country. Tim, the leader, spoke to the 200-plus people

saying God had revealed to him that you cannot follow Him unless you are willing to walk in Desire, Humility, Repentance and Holiness.

I spoke on these themes for the next year across our Methodist Circuit, and these studies are the fruit of that reflection.

I believe they are a key to a deeper walk with Jesus.

## PURSUING GOD - THE PRACTICE

In this journey we are looking at the practical steps to take, and the attitude of heart needed to drink deeply of God's presence. Practice must always be based on theology and the closing chapters will look at the theological foundations we need, to move into a deep and trusting relationship with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*John 4:23-24 'The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in **spirit** and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth' (NKJ).*

I believe desire - intimacy - humility - repentance and holiness are prerequisites for walking closely with Jesus.



# 1. PURSUING GOD: DESIRE

*'Let us fix our eyes on Jesus'*. Hebrews 12:2

I cannot remember a time when I did not want to know more of God. Since my conversion to Christ at 19, I have had a desire to understand and experience God 'in Christ' through His word and by His Holy Spirit. I remember being interviewed by Dr David Petts, when I applied for Bible College, and explaining that I wanted to learn to run with God, that I was a sprinter, and saw the Christian race in those terms. He wisely replied that I should think of the race as a marathon and not a sprint. Almost 40 years later, the race continues, the desire to know God remains more deeply, and I have begun to see some of the steps necessary to knowing God intimately. Yet recently, by God's grace, I have come to understand more of what it means to enter into the 'Holy Place' and find a deeper presence of the Holy Spirit. There are many options and distractions in the Christian faith, but our chief aim is to know God.

My goal is God Himself, not joy, nor peace,  
Nor even blessing, but Himself, my God;  
'Tis His to lead me there—not mine, but His—  
At any cost, dear Lord, by any road.

(Frances Brook.)

The Pursuit: For each of us our circumstances and experiences will differ. But from the moment we are converted, we are called to know God.

There are two aspects to our search, and we dare not neglect either - the first is understanding, the second experience. Understanding is from the head experience for the heart. Understanding can study theology, to learn about God and His ways, but experience relies on the self-disclosure of God, through the Holy Spirit. Just as we need to deepen our understanding of God we also need to progress into a deeper experience of God, the one should feed the other. If we neglect one, we will either become dry and disappointed followers of

theology, or believers without a foundation captivated by the latest experience.

The Scripture is our foundation and it depicts **three different levels** of Christian experience.

**1: Salvation by faith,** (The new birth). This is the entry level, *‘Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God without being born again”’* (John 3:3). Until we experience the saving work of Christ, we are not part of His kingdom.

**2: The Baptism in the Holy Spirit.** This was promised by John and initiated by Jesus. *‘This was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit”’* (Mark 1:7-8)

In the first we enter into new life in Christ, in the second the power of the Kingdom of God comes to rest upon and live within us. The first is a work of conversion, the second a work of empowering. *‘On one occasion, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days, you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses”’* (Acts 1:4,5,8).

**3: Intimacy with God.** When we learn to enter into God’s intimate presence, as His children, our appreciation of His Father heart grows within us and performs a magnificent transformation. When we spend intimate time with God we begin to live out of the Holy Place. His presence becomes immeasurably precious and we are guided by the peace and presence of the Holy Spirit (Colossians 3:15). God’s aim and design for each of us is that He will walk in close intimate fellowship with each of us, as He did with Adam in the garden.

If we want to draw close to God some other things will have to go. We cannot do everything well, there is not time in life to do everything that comes across our path, so we need to make a conscious decision to seek God deeply and from the heart. It needs

to be a priority in our life, for Jesus promises “*seek and you shall find*” (Luke 11:9), and Jeremiah reveals God’s intention when he says, “*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,*” declares the LORD’ (Jeremiah 29:13-14). The promise of a face-to-face encounter with God is there for all His children; we must learn to pursue His presence.

**The Principles:** There are essentially only **three things that can hold us back.**

**The first is sin,** in any of its persistent and ugly forms. Sin is compromise and we cannot ever compromise with God. The Psalmist asks, ‘*Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart*’ (Psalm 24:3-4). Holiness is an essential factor in knowing God and though He covers or ‘atones for’ our sins and treats us as righteous, for Christ’s sake, we must learn to walk in the new nature and overcome the besetting sins of the flesh. If we do not, we will never enter deeply into God’s presence, for our sins will continue to be a barrier between us and a Holy God. We need both cleansing, and a consistency, to begin to walk closely with a Holy God. This does not mean we are earning God’s presence or blessing but we are judging ourselves so that we will not be judged (1Corinthians 11:31). The battle against besetting sins can be long, but it is a battle that God will always help us in. However, to live in the Holy Place we need a level of consistency in holiness, otherwise our guilt and constant temptations will keep us from drawing close to God. I would add a word of caution here, if we find ourselves arguing that we do not need to attain a level of holiness to walk with God, then we are on very dangerous ground. God calls us to be Holy because He is Holy (1Peter 1:15-16).

**The second thing that will stop our progress is a lack of understanding.** Paul asked the Ephesian believers ‘*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*’ Their answer was they had not even ‘*heard that there was a Holy Spirit*’ (Acts 19:2). It is very hard to believe for or receive something we know nothing about. In every area of the Christian life, faith is essential to taking the next step, and if we do not have at least a basic measure of understanding, we will not grow, and cannot receive the blessings of God.

This means that it is important to seek to understand what God is offering to us. When we are saved, we enter upon a journey of understanding, which will not stop until we reach eternity. There is a wealth of understanding in the history of the Church, in the lives of those who have found God in their day and time, and in applying our minds to comprehend something of the Glory of God, the wisdom of the Cross, the depths of His Word, and the Ministry of the Holy Spirit. We will not all be theologians, but seeing what God has done in the past will deepen our desire to know God and to see Him move again in our days. We need to know enough of His grace and presence to ask for more. A lack of understanding will always hold us back.

About 15 years ago, I entered what I consider to have been a relatively stale period in my Christian experience. I had a bachelor's degree in theology and was studying for a Masters. I had a good understanding of the Bible and was 'Baptised in the Holy Spirit.' Yet my experience of God was not as deep and rich or satisfying as I desired. At that point, I could either settle for my experience and say 'it is not for me,' or I could go in humility to someone who has a deeper experience than I have and learn from them.

My wife and I had heard of what God had been doing in Toronto over many years, and finally about 9 years after the first reports of blessing in 1994, were able to go and see. When we walked into the building we walked into the glorious presence of God. As a Pentecostal in conviction and experience, with a Divine calling to serve the Methodist Church, I had often experienced God's presence in worship. We had known God move in our meetings in healings and prophecy, in tongues and interpretation, and even seen the presence of His Glory overshadowing our meetings, but this was on an altogether different scale. God's presence was wonderful, welcoming and at times visible. This was not the end of the journey for us, just a glimpse of how close God can be to the human soul. It provided the next step in our journey of discipleship, and proved a turning point in desire and in holiness of life, old habits began to die away, and a deep desire to find God was born in my soul.

**The third** thing that can hold us back is not lack of understanding but being **unwilling**. King Agrippa, knew all he needed to know to come

to faith in Christ, but he was unwilling to humble himself and believe. *'Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian"'* (Acts 26:28). At any stage of our Christian growth, **sin, a lack of understanding or unwillingness**, will stop us in our tracks. My response has been to read, to seek and to pray, and slowly the doors into God's Holy presence have opened. I suspect they were always open, but I have always been a slow and cautious learner. Perhaps even now I am only in the doorway and a whole land of experiencing His presence lies before me?

The explanation that God impressed on my heart recently, was a comparison with purchasing and assembling a jigsaw. The first consideration with a jigsaw is 'do I like it?' Then 'do I want it?' I then look at the price and ask 'am I willing to pay the price?' I remember seeing a stunning jigsaw picture of Noah's Ark, not the children's image, but something of inspirational beauty. Even then I had to see it on three occasions before I was willing to invest the money needed to buy the thing. Once the jigsaw is home, we must put the pieces out and try to find the ones that go together, and usually it takes days to build, with many people helping. Jigsaws are often a family event in our home, and the different aspects of the picture develop slowly, over time. Finally, the picture is assembled and we rejoice in its beauty, not least because we invested in it. (Time, money, frustration, hope and cooperation are all invested in a jigsaw.)

Before we can assemble the jigsaw of our Christian discipleship, we first need to decide on its beauty and value and determine if we are willing to pay the cost. [The cost includes seeking God, prayer, study, desire, holiness and time.] When we begin to assemble it, at first there only seems to be jumble and confusion, so we need to identify the major themes and construct them first.

Some of the main themes of the faith are The Cross, repentance, the Trinity, the Father-heart of God, His love and our response, salvation, assurance, the Deity of Christ, the inspiration and authority of Scripture and the Deity, ministry and power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot rush past these; we need to stop at each one and gaze deeply into their meaning and mystery. Not until these are imprinted deeply on our soul, will we be able to progress. Even when we think we have

all the pieces of a subject in place, there will be times when we return to add a new piece, and deepen our understanding, or just marvel at the developing picture. We will never get tired of gazing on these motifs. They are the essentials of our great salvation, they are mileposts along the way, and as a wise man once wrote, 'there are no shortcuts on a straight road'. If we want to know God intimately all these things need to be in place.

I personally feel that I have been carrying jigsaw pieces round for the last 40 years, and it is only now that the picture is beginning to come together. It is important to say that not every jigsaw is the same, because we are individually precious to God. However, they will contain the same motifs, and in the finished picture we will always be sitting humbly at the feet of Christ. We should also mention that we all progress in our maturity at different speeds, the important thing is the desire and determination to grow in God.

Even though the pictures differ, the desire to build a life in Christ and the method used, must be the same. When the disciples saw the intimacy and importance of Jesus' prayers, they caught the vision for prayer, and pleaded, "*Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples*" (Luke 11:1). He first taught them the elements of 'The Lord's Prayer' and then went on to show them that they need the Holy Spirit to empower their prayer lives. "*So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who seeks finds, and to everyone who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!*" (Luke 11:9-13).

If the Apostles needed the Holy Spirit to build their Christian lives, how much more do we? We are clearly encouraged to ask, seek and knock, so that we may know the work of the Spirit in our lives.

There seems to be a **progression** here. **To ask**, is to bring our need of more of the Holy Spirit before God. It is acknowledging our total dependence on Him in spiritual things and acknowledging we believe He is willing to give good gifts (the Holy Spirit) to those who ask. **To seek**, is to go deeper, it is to set our minds and hearts to understand and desire a deeper work of the Spirit. Seeking is not a transitory thing, it takes time and effort, but the promise is, *'seek and you shall find.'* **To knock**, expresses urgency and proximity, the door is so close that we can reach out and touch it, but we need to desire to enter in urgently and persistently. It seems to me that each of these steps is needed in moving deeper into the realms of the Holy Spirit.

**The Price:** The price of all our blessings is already paid by Christ; however, this does not mean that we do not need to pay a price ourselves. We can never pay for our salvation, but if we assume there is no cost in devotion to our discipleship, we are mistaken. The very word disciple means one who is disciplined and taught by their master.

The first price we must pay is **focus**. We are not called to be a 'jack of all trades,' but a master of one. St Paul wrote, *'one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus'* (Philippians 3:13-14). We were made to know God as well as to be fully known by God. Compared to knowing God, everything else is insignificant, because everything else will stop at death.

We are not speaking about knowing about God academically, but knowing Him personally through prayer. We need to be willing to give up other things in order to gain a close and rich relationship with God.

Learning to pray from the heart is an art. Saul of Tarsus, had prayed as a Pharisee all his life, yet the first-time prayer comes from his heart is in Damascus. We are told, *'there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias"'. And he said, "Here I am, Lord". So, the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying"'*

(Acts 9:10-11). Saul had said prayers many times, but he had never prayed. For prayer to reach the ears of God, it must come from the heart.

There are two components of true prayer. Firstly, it must be made in and through Jesus. He is the only mediator between us and God. Then it must be made with heart and mind united. Simply saying the correct words, without genuine faith, or heart felt devotion, will not do. Perhaps it would be better to think of our prayer times, not as a time for saying prayers, but as a time in which we deepen our relationship with God. A time of friendship and intimacy, a relational time, rather than a prayer time.

## 2. PURSUING GOD: INTIMACY

### ***PRAYER AS THE BASIS OF A RELATIONSHIP***

*‘When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.’*

Matthew 6:6

**How then are we to pray?** The first lesson Jesus teaches us, is that prayer takes concentration, time and **privacy**. You must *“go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly”* (Matthew 6:6). If we do not give the time needed, we will not build the relationship God desires to have with us. This is true of human and divine relationships.

I have been trying to build a deep, lasting relationship with God, with less time than is needed for years, and I guarantee it is not possible. A deep relationship takes time. Even when we have learned to pray, and we begin to sense the peaceful presence of God, it is no use rushing away when His peace comes. I remember well coming out of a lovely time of prayer and immediately entering into an argument about nothing, with my wife. I realised, it is one thing for us to enter into God’s peace, it is quite another thing for His peace to enter into us, and dwell there richly.

So, prayer is a choice but it is also a skill to be learned. If we will make ‘pursuing God’ a priority, it will ultimately change our lives. First comes the understanding of our need, then we ask ourselves if we are willing to pay the price? Once we are willing to give the time needed to enter deeply into God’s presence, - and it cannot be rushed, - we need to learn the art of prayer.

#### **The Practice: How are we to pray?**

Jesus revealed that God looks at our heart, so our attitude in prayer is very important. We need to understand that we are coming to ‘Our

Father' (Matthew 6:9). God is already in a family relationship with us through Jesus, and we come as His children not as servants or beggars.

There are several ingredients that I have found useful on different occasions in drawing closer to God. This is a little like choosing from a menu in a restaurant, no one eats all the food on the menu. In the same way, we will not use all the components of prayer at the same time. The important thing is to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance, as to where He wants to take your prayers on any given day. You may spend the whole time reading and responding to what you read, it may be a time of praise and worship rising from your situation, or deep repentance as you see your sins in a new light.

The ingredients are fairly well known, but rather than doing them out of need or duty or because we know we should, we are bringing our gifts of worship and prayer before 'Daddy God.' It is a mind change that is needed, where we see our prayer time as an opportunity to share intimately from our heart with our heavenly Father.

Having had a system of prayer for several years, that only brought a limited measure of blessing, I have found that majoring on the aspects of prayer the Holy Spirit is highlighting on each specific day, has brought me deeper in to fellowship with God. However, the most important thing is to **stop trying to pray, and start talking to God**. Prayer needs to engage our minds and our hearts; it must be an honest encounter with the God who loves us as a Father. The words we use are less important than pouring out our hearts honestly and openly before God. *'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person availeth much'* (James 5:16 AV).

In brief, these menu choices are: Conversation with God, Singing, Repentance, Rest, Singing the Psalms, Reading God's Word, Reading Inspirational and Devotional Books, Speaking in Tongues, Journaling, Thanksgiving and Soaking prayer. These all have a place, some are more important than others, and you will come back to them again and again, but I cannot stress enough that the aim is to be guided by the Holy Spirit and not feel guilty about the things we have not done in prayer.

One of my old Bible teachers thought that it was not the fact that you spent an hour in prayer that counted, but the 5 minutes that you sensed God was present. Those were the moments that sustained you through the day. I believe prayer is first and foremost a meeting with God; and we need to ask for, and **pursue, His presence.** We are there to develop our relationship with God and not just besiege Him with our problems, and requests. Once we find His presence, we need to linger there, till His presence, peace and purpose thoroughly enter into us, soaking us through and through, changing our attitude and outlook into the image of Christ. We need to rest in the Love of our Father, until that love comes to rest in and upon us.

**1. Conversation: Praying out of your heart:** Talk it through with God.

Prayer is your opportunity to bring an honest account of your heart before God. To share your desires and dreams, and to ask His intervention in the mundane, so that it becomes infused with the Divine. Talk to God about your family, their needs, your hopes and plans, your need to know Him more deeply. Ask Him to overrule and guide your days and your future plans. Remember we are praying **'Thy will be done on earth,'** not **'my will'** be done on earth.

Often as we talk through our day, week, or future, God will make things clear. Remember we have no need to fear God's will, as it is always *'Good, pleasing and perfect'* (Romans 12:2). So, we need to pour out our heart, our needs and our desires, asking for God's intervention, presence and wisdom in our lives. It is only as we submit our plans to the Lord that they begin to prosper. Remember; *'Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain'* (Psalm 127:1). Once God is our co-partner in life, we begin to find life and joy in the things we do, from work, to holidays, to children, to hobbies. God wants us to live inspired and guilt free. So, submit all your plans to Him, don't seek to convince Him about your wisdom, but make your chief desire seeking His wisdom and ways. However, I find that my repertoire of things to say in English, soon dries up. Prayer is more than talking, it is fellowshiping, or communing with God.

2. **Song:** Sometimes, immediately as I sit to pray, God will place in my heart the words of a hymn or worship song, old or new. This is a Gift the Holy Spirit is giving me, to give back to the Father. I sing that song, until it is fully offered to God, or until a new song enters my heart to replace it. Sometimes the whole prayer time will simply be taken up with singing His praise. We need to do this to bring our human soul in line with the desires of the Spirit of God. Once we begin to sing from the heart, we are conforming our thoughts and emotions, to the truth of God expressed through that song.

In a service we often sing a hymn and then stop, and the result is that the words of the hymn have little time to engage our souls. As we extend our times of praise, worship in song becomes a vehicle of both adoration and revelation. If we do not give sufficient time to singing, our soul will never catch up with the Spirit of God.

Our Souls (mind - emotions - reason - will) are slow to respond to the promptings of God. We need the priming of worship in song, to bring our wayward thoughts and feelings into unison with Him. How many times have you found yourself reading your Bible, singing or praying, while your mind is actually drifting somewhere else? Engaging the heart and mind through fervent song can re-energise our prayers and our souls. We can literally praise our way into God's presence. Our minds need to stop rationalising and wandering, our reason needs to stop analysing, our emotions need to engage with God, and our will needs to obey. Singing can be the means of conforming our soul to the image of Christ as we yield to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Song can be a great joy to the soul and, I believe, gladdens the heart of God. The Scripture is insistent saying '*sing a new song to the Lord*' (Psalm 33:3, 96:1). Sometimes God will give us our own song to sing, at other times He will inspire us to sing scripture or to sing in tongues. Wherever the Spirit leads we need to follow.

3. **Singing the Psalms:** I recently realised what part of the Scottish church has known for years. The Psalms are meant to be sung. They are not simply poetry, they are worship, and we can sing our own tune to each Psalm as we offer it to God in worship. The result of this is that when we sing through a Psalm, it cannot be

rushed, singing takes more time and concentration than reading. It also engages the soul. When we sing the Psalms, we begin to enter into their inspiration and find we are drawn closer to God through His living word. We may find we are dwelling on an idea in the Psalm or repeating a phrase in song, as God ministers its message to our hearts. We simply need to ask God for a tune, and launch out in faith, singing our own tune to the Psalms of David.

4. **Repentance:** Must never be far from our lips or hearts. The more we see of the Holiness of God, the more we realise our need of repentance. This is not a once and forever thing, which we do at our conversion, but as we look more deeply into our hearts and lives, there will be seasons of deeper repentance and cleansing. When God convicts our hearts of their stubborn sinfulness, we need to humble ourselves, and walk in honest confession and repentance. When we fail in our Christian walk, ‘through our own deliberate fault,’ we should not sit in brooding self-accusation, guilt and pity, but come again for cleansing in the precious blood of Jesus, not simply confessing our sins, but truly seeing them as an offence to God’s holiness. It is only when we see our native rebellion, and selfishness as deeply sinful, that we are able to appreciate the greatness of the love and forgiveness of Christ.

Repentance may seem introspective, but that is only half of the picture. There is no point in repenting if there is no grace or mercy to be found. A criminal will rarely own their crime, because of the judgement they are about to receive. When we look at our hearts, and repent of sinful thoughts and actions, and of our love of those sinful actions, we are not just looking within, but looking up to the God who forgives. Repentance looks inward in shame, but it looks upward in confident hope. Isaiah wrote, *“These are the ones I esteem: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and tremble at my word”* (Isaiah 66:2).

Repentance is foundational to the Christian faith. There is a move today away from walking in repentance to celebrating the ‘unconditional love of God.’ There is a great danger here. While we know that God’s love is unconditional, we also need to remember that His **forgiveness is conditional**. Forgiveness is conditional upon

us taking the part of the sinner, and turning from our sins in repentance and faith towards God. (See Hebrews 6:1-3.) Repentance is always the road back to God, it was the first message of John the Baptist, the first message of Jesus (Mark 1), and the first message of the Apostles (Luke 24:47). If we rationalise our sins, or excuse our sins, we remain in our guilt, and the Spirit of God cannot help us. Indeed, we are in danger of becoming hard hearted, self-indulgent and of resisting the Holy Spirit. My old pastor Henry Drabble was very helpful when he taught, ‘Christ died for our sins, not for our excuses’.

**5. Rest:** *‘This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it”’* (Isaiah 30:15).

Once we have sought God in repentance, we need to learn to rest in His love. This means ‘abiding’ in Him (See John 15:1-12), allowing His peace, welcome, forgiveness and great joy to sink deeply into our soul. Once our sins are brought to the cross in genuine repentance they are covered. We need to stop looking back to what is behind us, and look forward to a renewed walk with God. In His presence we *‘have our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience’* (Hebrews 10:22). The purpose of coming in to His presence is to find cleansing, and once we are clean, we need to soak in it like a hot bath. We need to rest in God’s presence until the very rest of eternity rests in us. I believe this is in part why Jesus said *“go into your room close the door and pray”* (Matthew 6:6). We must not undervalue the time we spend in God’s secret presence and to accomplish this we need freedom from distractions and time to linger.

**6. Soaking Prayer:** This form of prayer focuses on being still in the presence of the Lord. Psalm 46:10 closes with the words, *“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”* If we do not learn to be still in God’s presence, our life will always lack peace, and be performance orientated. We will live to please people, and not to please God. When we rest in the presence of God, something of the peace and joy of Heaven comes to rest, or abide in us. Many people are so busy doing things for God, that they forget God wants to pour His love out

upon us. We often want to work for God, while He is seeking first to minister into us.

He is a God who longs to enter into a deep personal relationship with us, and this relationship is formed in the presence of the Holy Spirit. *'God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us'* (Romans 5:5 HCSB). The love of God is received as we rest in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In practice soaking is straight forward, it is an art and not a science, and artistry takes time to learn. Take a soaking CD, (there are many of them\*) and play it whilst sitting in a comfortable chair, or lying on the floor. Do not hurry, give yourself enough time to engage, spirit to Spirit with God. Put on the CD then pray 'come Holy Spirit' and allow your spirit to reach out towards the Holy Spirit. Though it is possible to rest in God's presence without music, the music is there to bring your wandering mind back to focusing on God. To do this we need to use a measure of spiritual concentration and silently pour out our love towards God.

Allow the words of the songs to inspire your heart to reach out to God. Don't sing along, just ask God to come and presence Himself. He lives with you and wants to fill you. The Holy Spirit can be **with, in and upon us**, we need to encounter Him in all three ways. As you begin to sense God's presence, open your heart and ask Him to fill you. Then, as He draws close, ask for more. God is not miserly with His presence!

Once our sins are dealt with, we are told to come boldly before His presence. (Hebrews 4:16, 10:19-22). As we pray, 'more Lord', He is able to fill us and make us abound, in love and good works. The result is a deep sense of acceptance, peace, joy, love and confidence in God. Through soaking in His presence, we are opening ourselves up to the world of God's revelation, and are more likely to hear from God from moment to moment in our daily lives. We are also much less likely to treat others with judgementalism or carelessly as we begin to see people as deeply loved by Jesus. When we are soaked in God, life cannot be dry. Soaking is one sure means of going deeper in

prayer and experiencing more of God's cleansing love. Soaking can be done in a group or on one's own.

**7. Tongues:** Since the revivals in South Wales 1904-1905 and in Azusa Street L.A 1905, countless millions of Christians have been filled with the Holy Spirit and spoken in tongues. Yet even after over 114 years of the restoration of this gift, tongues are still debated, distrusted, dismissed, denied, doubted, discussed or **disused**. For the practising Pentecostal or Charismatic, disuse is the most serious indictment. Often even those who speak in tongues do not realise the worth of the gift they have. I would count myself among this last group. I received the gift of tongues a few months after my initial conversion at 19, but over the years have not used this gift in prayer consistently, nor did I realise its worth.

Jackie Pullinger, in her dramatic book 'Chasing the Dragon,' shares her experience of serving the drug addicts in Hong Kong, during the British mandate. She frankly saw no success until she began to pray consistently in tongues for at least 15 minutes a day.

Dave Roberson, an American preacher and evangelist, shares his remarkable story in his book 'The Walk of the Spirit,' and shows how his ministry came alive after learning the value of speaking in tongues. (I recommend his book to those who want an in-depth study of the purpose and practice of speaking in tongues.)

What is the purpose of tongues? Tongues is essentially the human spirit, praying in an unknown and unlearned language, empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is not a language known by the speaker, for Paul explains as I pray in tongues, *'my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful'* (1 Corinthians 14:14). The primary purpose of tongues is to speak to God. It is not primarily a public gift, - though it has a public application when interpreted-, but it is a private prayer language. This enables our human spirit to pray through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is not the Holy Spirit praying, we pray, but the Holy Spirit inspires and enables. The person speaking in tongues is not overcome by the Spirit of God, they are inspired by the Spirit, but they do the speaking and they are in control.

This means it takes a measure of faith to begin to speak in tongues. Some people expect God to pray through them, but Paul says, they '*pray in the Spirit,*' and as they do, they are built up in their most holy faith' (1Corinthians 14:1-4).

Praying in tongues is not a secret for the special few, it is a gift open to all who seek it, but first they must believe it is for them, and then they must seek the Holy Spirit to give them His gifts. Again, we find that either a lack of **understanding** or **unbelief** are the main reasons holding people back from a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit.

When we speak in tongues, and seek God under the inspiration of His Spirit, we are no longer praying about what we want to pray for, but about the things God want us to pray for. There is no need to shout, or even be greatly excited, though both can happen, but as we pray in tongues, we are pressing into the heart God for our lives, circumstances and world. When English has run out of words, God's Spirit praying through us in tongues will never run out of words. Speaking in tongues, because it engages the spirit and not the mind, we can even pray in tongues on a car journey.

The main purpose is to commune spirit to Spirit with God (1 Corinthians 14:2). The next is to praise God, declaring His wonders in prayer (Acts 2:11). Tongues can also be a prophetic message for the Church when it is interpreted into a known language (1Corinthians 14:5). We also need to realise that tongues may be a heavenly, or an earthly language (1Corinthians 13:1). Sometimes the people present will actually recognise the language, as on the day of Pentecost, where languages from all across the ancient near east were spoken. But, most often, if the tongues are interpreted in a meeting, the speaker will speak by faith and wait for the interpretation, in their own language.

Speaking in tongues is a doorway, a means of entry into the supernatural presence of God. It is a gift given to the Church that has never been taken away, and should be sought and used daily and diligently.

**8. The Word:** We need to be devoted to God's word. Here the danger is following the letter that kills, rather than the Spirit that gives life (2Corinthians 3:6). In the last several years my practice has been to read through the Bible each year. (though often it takes me longer than a year.) This fixes in our hearts the broad sweep of Bible History and teaching. It also grafts the heart of God into our hearts. When we know God's Word, we are not easily deceived by *'hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ'* (Colossians 2:8). Such foolish doctrines *'have an appearance of wisdom, --- but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence'* (Colossians 2:23). If we know the scriptures, and ask what they say, rather than what we think they should say, we will not be easily deceived.

I still recommend using devotional books and commentaries to take us behind the scriptures. Preachers should always do their commentary work, understanding that if we 'fail to prepare, we are preparing to fail.'

However, if we just read through using a system, we could miss out on God's specific word to us. This has been called the Ramah word, as compared to the Logos word. A Ramah word occurs when God takes a 'now' word from the 'eternal' word and applies it to our lives today. God always speaks in and through His written word, and will never inspire something which is directly contrary to or contradicts the revelation in His written word. This means that hearing from God is a combination of Word and Spirit. When they combine, He is able to speak directly into our lives. This is when the Word becomes living and active, penetrating to both soul and spirit (Hebrews 4:12). As we read, we should ask God to speak, and then, so that we do not lose what He says, we should write down what we hear, in a spiritual journal.

**9. Reading:** We all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before. We also need **Books** to inspire, and teach us on so many things, God's Father-heart, Revival or the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Prayer, Theology, etc. Every believer should read and learn from those who have a deeper experience than they do. It is wise to always be engaged with a book that inspires and takes you deeper into the

love of God. We need the humility to learn from those who have gone deeper, so that we are inspired to walk in their wake. We are not trying to copy them, but to know the God that they knew. Always have your next book ready. If prayer seems hard, begin to read what God has been doing elsewhere and pray out of that experience.

**10. Journaling:** (See Psalm 141 and 142.) Here David is writing out His prayer. *“I call to you, Lord, come quickly to me; hear me when I call to you. May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice”* (Psalm 141:1-2).

In, Habakkuk the Prophet writes, *‘I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint. Then the LORD replied: “Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it”* (Habakkuk 2:1-2).

Journaling includes writing out our prayers and seeking God’s answers, then recording anything we discern He is saying to us. Learn to journal in your prayers, and listen for and record His reply. This way His personal words of encouragement or guidance to you will not be lost or forgotten. You can then pray about, or share with others, what you feel God is saying.

Remember, His personal guidance will never contradict His written word. The writings of a journal are a record of our growth and experience with God, though they can contain a word from God, they are never the Word of God. Our own hearts and understanding are limited, yet even with our limitations God is able to speak into our soul. I confess, until God blessed me with a greater measure of His presence, I had found journaling difficult. I had read on the subject, but when I wrote, it seemed more like a prayer list, than a conversation. When God presences Himself, and our hearts are open, He can speak in **sentences, pictures, thoughts and feelings**. These are what we are recording. Each one will carry the kindness of a parent to their child. He speaks in love, even His reproof will be in love. He will not speak to us about things we have nothing to do with, but about things which concern our lives. Often God will give a thought and as we begin writing more revelation will come. We just write what we believe He is saying to our hearts at that time. Journaling is a journey of discovery and well worth the time to learn the art.

**11. Saying thank you.** When God speaks or presences Himself with us, our natural response should be praise and thanksgiving. The best gift God ever gives us is the gift of Himself. Once we have found God's presence, we have all we need. Seek His face, and you will find His gifts.

Learning to pray like this takes time, prayer is a life style, it cannot be rushed. All relationships take time to build. Right decisions, repeated often, bring blessing. Wrong decisions, repeated often, bring destruction. We must build our own relationship with God, He is not responsible for our prayer life, we are. By setting aside the time to develop a relationship with God, rather than simply saying prayers, we are investing in time and eternity. We are inviting God to indwell our lives so that in turn, we may carry His presence into the world we live and work in.

### **The Prize**

To those who seek, God gives Himself. This is the greatest prize we can have. He does not just give us gifts, He gives Himself. I have often heard people praying for more power. However, a better prayer is to seek more of His presence, for when we find His presence, His power and all His other gifts, come with it.

When we find God's presence, the very overflow of heaven rests upon us. We know joy, peace, hope and love. We witness to our faith, not out of duty but from the delight of sharing our friend Jesus. We love people because we know God loves people. We praise automatically from the heart, even in the most difficult situations. All effective ministry is an overflow from the presence of God, seeded in our lives by the Holy Spirit and watered in His presence.

The human soul was created to be the resting place for the Spirit of God. Our human spirit was designed to be filled with, and animated by, the Holy Spirit and, until that happens, we will never reach our full potential in Christ.

Christ died on the cross not only for our forgiveness, but so that He might pour out His Spirit into our hearts and lives. He died that we can be **forgiven and filled**.

### **Review:**

We need to ask ourselves ‘Do I see my need?’ ‘Do I want to seek and find God’s presence in my life?’ ‘Do I have a desire for more of God?’ ‘Have I got time to seek God?’ My question to you would be ‘How old are you?’ ‘Have you got time not to seek the Lord?’ Eternity is not as far away as we think, and we need to know God now. We must set out on the pursuit of God and take the next step in building our relationship with God.

Are we willing to buy the jigsaw, and put in the effort needed to construct it?

God calls us to embark upon a quest. To turn away from the sin that so easily entangles us, to understand the offer of His presence given in the Holy Spirit, to believe it is for us, and then to set out to seek His face. *“My heart says of you, ‘Seek his face’ Your face, LORD, I will seek”* (Psalm 27:8). If we are willing to seek His face - which is Bible code for His presence - He then says, *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; everyone who seeks finds; and to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. --- How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him”* (Luke 11:9-10, 13)

The prize is not just heaven; it is a rich sense of God’s intimate presence in this life. It is living in the Holy of Holies, knowing God is our Father, and with the promise of a home, yet to come.



### 3. HUMILITY: THE CLOTHING OF THE KINGDOM

*‘That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ James 4:6*

Pride and humility are polar opposites. Most if not all human accomplishments, are built on pride. In the world, pride is everything and humility is nothing. In God’s Kingdom humility is the only badge of honour. If we do not walk in humility, we do not progress, for we are following the one who set aside the glory of heaven and humbled Himself to become obedient, even to death on a cross (Philippians 2:8). If our King walks in humility then there is no other attitude that befits His subjects. John Stott, says, ‘Pride is your greatest enemy, humility is your greatest friend.’

If pride is considered one of the 7 deadly sins, we may well ask, why is it so deadly? The answer is simple, we cannot walk in the presence of a humble God in the pride of your own achievements or greatness. Pride destroys spiritual growth and distances us from God’s gentle presence. The Psalmist knew this, *‘Though the LORD is exalted, He takes note of the humble; but He knows the proud from afar’* (Psalm 138:6). There will always be a great gulf between a proud person and a humble God. So, Peter counsels, *‘All of you, **clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time’*** (1Peter 5:5-6).

One of the foundations of the evangelical faith is that we are clothed in Christ’s righteousness, but here we are told to clothe ourselves in Christ’s humility. Righteousness is a gift, humility is a choice, and when we walk in humility, we walk in the clothes that Christ Himself wore.

The humility of Christ is depicted in Philippians 2:5-11 *‘Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-*

*servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'*

Here a double humility is depicted. First Christ humbling Himself to take on human flesh, then humbling Himself to death on the cross. The first step is immense. Thomas Watson wrote, 'it took more humility for Christ to become a man, than it would for a man to become a worm.' The second step is immeasurable, Christ's humility is absolute. When the devil tempted Him with the kingdoms of the world, (Matthew 4:9) there was no pride present to give way to the temptation. If we follow Jesus we must walk in humility, it is an ugly thing to see a humble God, and a proud sinner.

**What is humility?** It will help first to define pride.

**Pride** is 'A feeling or deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements, the achievements of those with whom one is closely associated, or from qualities or possessions that are widely admired.' Oxford dictionary. This seems a fairly benign definition. The world argues pride is a good thing, indeed we are encouraged to 'believe in ourselves.' I have always thought that if we 'believe in ourselves' we have a very small God. When we place our achievements in the presence of God, they are minuscule - a grain of rice, standing next to a sky scraper, they have no spiritual value. He is the creator; we are the creatures. Whatever abilities we have are His gifts and we are responsible to use the gifts He has given for His glory, not our own.

To understand humility, we need to compare it with some of the attitudes which it is often mistaken for. Humility is not **reticence** or **shyness**, and it is not feeling **unworthy** or **insignificant**.

**Reticence** is holding back when God has called us forward. This is not humility but is a natural unwillingness to offer our gifts and abilities, when we are being called to do so.

**Shyness** is allowing our feelings of insecurity and smallness to govern our actions. Shyness is often linked to insecurity, and has not understood that God has loved us, called us and gifted us to serve in His kingdom. A shy person must overcome their natural embarrassment, and trust in God to overcome their natural reluctance. They need to find their giftings and do the things God calls them to.

Feeling **unworthy** can be debilitating, and the truth is **we are unworthy**, nothing we do can make us worthy. Serving God is not about our worth, it is about His call and our obedience. (Where God calls, He supplies.) We always need to hold in balance our unworthiness and His grace and calling. He loves us, He calls us, He equips us. Until we are cleansed through faith in the blood of Christ, we are unworthy, but once we are cleansed and forgiven, our standing changes. You *'were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.... Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household'* (Ephesians 2:12-13). Our worth does not consist in our gifting, but in the value, God placed upon us, and this value is measured in the blood of Christ.

**Feeling Insignificant** is a character flaw - the world tells us we are nothing unless we excel. It values privilege, honour, money, power, beauty, sporting prowess, leadership ability and business acumen. The world measures successes, boldly and visibly, by our accomplishments and highly values those who succeed.

God says we are significant, not because of our success or lack of it, but because He has made us and He loves us. He is able to make us fruitful (not quite the same thing as successful). *'And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having*

*all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*' (2Corinthians 9:8). I believe God wants us to succeed in our calling, but in order to do so we must first succeed in humility, for **'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'** (1Peter 5:5).

Humility is knowing that our gifts and significance are found in God. Standing at the full height of our abilities, whilst holding Daddy's hand, and knowing all we can ever accomplish is through Him. We are small, but He has called us and He is wonderful.

Humility comes through thankfulness and trust, as we acknowledge all our gifts are in and from Him. It is *'Christ in you the hope of glory'* (Colossians 1:27).

A humble person does not walk in self-centred pride, pointing out what they have done. Humility is not at all self-centred, as Rick Warren pointed out, 'Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.' It is the **attitude of Jesus** bearing fruit in us, who said, *'Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls'* (Matthew 11:29). This means that in order to walk with Jesus, we must be humble in heart.

I remember hearing the testimony of a newly qualified Local Preacher many years ago; as they spoke of their motivation and call to preach, they said they were sitting listening to a particularly poor preacher and thought 'I could do better than that!' At the time I smiled and thought it is probably true. However, 'doing better than someone else' is not the best motivation for preaching.

The two areas where humility is shown are first before God and then before others.

## 1. **We are to be humble before God**

**Humility is: The first step in prayer.** *"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land"* (2Chronicles 7:14).

Things are accomplished in God's kingdom '*not by might nor by power,*' but in prayerful trust knowing that all our strength, all our hope and all our wisdom is in Him, and we must seek that wisdom in humility. Before God promises to, '*hear from heaven*' we must come in humility to '*pray and seek His face.*' Seeking His face means seeking His presence, and when we find ourselves in His glorious presence, the only right attitude is humility.

**Humility is: The first step towards God using us.** Humility means God can trust us with His work, since we will not take the glory for ourselves. This is the reason God was able to use Moses so wonderfully. Numbers 12:3 tells us '*Moses was a very humble man, humbler than anyone else on the face of the earth.*' God was able to reveal His glory to Moses because of his humility. Humility ushered him into the very presence of God, it meant he could accomplish the purpose of God and, even when everything went wrong, he could stand in the peace of God.

Moses' humility first showed in His reticence. When God called, he exclaimed he could not speak: Exodus 4:10. Once his reluctance was set aside, he became the greatest example of someone who humbled themselves under God's mighty hand, so that in due time, they were lifted up (1 Peter 5:6). Without humility, all of our ministry will be self-seeking and self-centred.

**Humility: The first step towards wisdom.** '*He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way*' (Psalm 25:9). '*He crowns the humble with salvation.*' (Psalm 149:4). '*He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble*' (Proverbs 3:34). If we would know God's grace and wisdom, we must walk in humility. If we want His presence in our lives, humility is the only way to approach His Glory.

## 2. We are to be humble before others

**Humility is: Tested in our relationships.** When we are challenged, criticised, questioned or doubted by others, how do we respond? Often, we feel our position is threatened, and we attack others to defend our place. It does not matter if we are the sandwich maker / musician / steward or preacher, if we think someone is pushing us

out, we often react selfishly and assert our authority, we get angry or upset. However, *'human anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires'* (James 1:20).

**Towards God** humility is shown in trust, obedience and worship. **Towards others** it is shown in gentleness, kindness, graciousness, respect and honour. Humility comes from the overflow of God's love in our hearts. If we are seeking a practical definition of humility, it is 'the overflow of love.' So it was with Jesus, and so it must be with us.

In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis wrote: 'To even get near [humility], even for a moment, is like a drink of cold water to a man in a desert. Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man, he will be what most people call 'humble' nowadays... Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what *you* said to *him*... If you do dislike him, it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.'

In our conversations and attitudes to each other, we either display love and humility or selfishness and pride. Paul wrote, *'Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love'* (Ephesians 4:2). Our willingness to apologise or forget an offence shows if we are walking in humility. Forgiveness helps us, perhaps more than it helps them.

If you want to reach the heights with God, the principles and practices are **upside down** in comparison to the world. The world seeks to gain honour, grow in importance, gain wealth, become well known, and then you will prosper. In the kingdom the first step up is always down. *'Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up'* (James 4:10). *'Humility comes before honour'* (Proverbs 15:33).

Again, C. S. Lewis points us in the right direction. 'If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realise that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least,

nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.'

### 3. The closer we are to God, the humbler we become.

The Bible gives us many examples of humility. St Paul is almost always thought of as dynamic and autocratic, but that does not depict his inward character, or his attitude to God's people at all well. He had great revelations, great miracles and great success. Yet, when the church at Corinth fell into sin, he did not threaten them. This is what he wrote, *'I am afraid that when I come again my **God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged***' (2Corinthians 12:21).

He told the church at Colossae, *'As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience'* (Colossians 3:12). The words he wrote displayed the attitude he modelled to the churches; we must also live in humility, with our words and actions matching each other.

When he looked back on his time in Ephesus he wrote, for three years *'I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews'* (Acts 20:19). Paul's motivation and method were clearly to lead with humility, and because of his humility God was able to use him so greatly. It was the Pharisees who were arrogant and self-confident, it was Paul the Apostle who was humble and obedient to God.

The greatest example of humility is **Jesus at the cross**. As He approaches the Last Supper, John tells us, *'Jesus, **knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside his garments, took a towel and girded himself***' (John 13:3). In humility He washed His disciples' feet, before His blood cleansed their hearts.

In the garden He said to Peter, *"Do you think that I cannot **appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions***

*of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled”* (Matthew 26:53). In humility He submitted to the will of the Father.

At the Cross we are told, *‘When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly’* (1Peter 2:23).

**Humility and trust** are closely linked. We will never walk closely with God in selfishness and pride. Sometimes, humility even accepts that wrong has been done, but still trusts God to bring good out of evil.

I enjoy the poems of R. S. Thomas and his musings on ‘The country clergy’ speak to this idea.

I see them working in old rectories  
By the sun's light, by candlelight,  
Venerable men, their black cloth  
A little dusty, a little green  
With holy mildew. And yet their skulls,  
Ripening over so many prayers,  
Topped into the same grave  
With oafs and yokels. They left no books,  
Memorial to their lonely thought  
In grey parishes; rather they wrote  
On men's hearts and in the minds  
Of young children sublime words  
Too soon forgotten. God in his time  
Or out of time will correct this.

**Humility is: The way to life in God's kingdom.**

The closer we are to God, strangely **the more confident** we will be in our own gifts and abilities, and the more God will trust us. This is because we do not boast in our gifts, but the one who gave them. *‘Who are the wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom’* (James 3:13).

This is why Jesus said “*the greatest shall be the servant of all*” (Matthew 23:11). And “*In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you*” (Matthew 7:12). Humility is the ability to treat everyone with respect and value their presence, whether prince or pauper.

Having reflected on humility, I believe its true definition is ‘**walking with God in grateful smallness**, knowing you are loved and chosen. It is the attitude of Christ in you.’

It is also, ‘**walking with others, in gentle kindness**, sharing the gifts He has given you. It is the love of God shared through you.’

Humility allows us to enjoy God and His work without being self-centred or self-conscious, and it invites the anointing of Christ’s presence. This is the mind of Christ in us (Philippians 2:5).

If you have got it wrong, ‘*Humble yourself, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time*’ remembering, ‘**God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble**’ (1Peter 5:5-6).



## 4. REPENTANCE: THE ROAD TO LIFE

*'God's kindness leads you towards repentance.'*  
Romans 2:4

### **Repentance is the door to life**

'Repent' was the message of John the Baptist, *'John came, baptising in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins'* (Mark 1:4)

The first message of Jesus was repent. *'After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"'* (Mark 1:14-15)

It was also the first message preached by the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost. *'Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"'* (Acts 2:38).

### **Repentance marks the start of the Christian walk**

Many Christians see repentance as something for sinners. Whilst it is true that repentance is the doorway to God's kingdom, it is also the means we use to progress, whenever the Holy Spirit convicts us of the ugly sinful nature of our hearts.

### **What does it mean to be repentant?**

Let us first see what it is not!

1. **Repentance is not regret.** Regret is sadness over our past, to be sorry about what has happened, or what we failed to do. There are many reasons to be sorry, most criminals are sorry they were found out. It is good to be sorry for our sins, but sorrow and repentance are not the same. Sorrow is supposed to lead to repentance and repentance to renewal. *'Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly*

*sorrow brings death'* (2Corinthians 7:10). When we repent, we don't remain in sorrow because we find a new start, repentance does not **look back** to the problem it **looks up** to God and **looks forward** to a new beginning.

2. **Repentance is not remorse.** This is bitterness of soul. Repentance is focused on God, repentance is an outward movement, it is a cleansing movement, but remorse is focused on the self and looks inwards. It destroys the heart as it focuses on the past and cripples the future. Remorse destroys hope. Judas was full of remorse and he could only see what he had done, and not what God could do. The outcome of his remorse was destructive and not healing, he hanged himself.

3. **Repentance is not reformation.** This is to change our actions, to renew our character and behaviour. As the old saying goes 'he is a reformed man.' This is part of repentance, if we do not change our actions, we have never truly repented. But, just changing our actions without an understanding of our need of forgiveness and renewal from God is not repentance. Reform is about what we do for God; repentance is about what God does in us.

4. **Repentance is not restitution.** That is to return something stolen or pay for its cost. It means putting right what we have done wrong. This is something I had to do personally when I first became a believer. It was not enough to be forgiven, it was necessary, as far as I was able, to put right the things I knew I had done wrong. This illustrates our change of heart. To show his repentance Zacchaeus restored 'four times what he had stolen' (Luke 19:8). Restitution is important, but it is not repentance. Repentance is the attitude of the heart; restoration is the action of the hand. If we are not willing to restore, we are not truly repentant. I once knew a man who, as a youth, had been involved in an armed robbery. He came to faith, confessed his sin to God and found forgiveness. However, he was unwilling to restore what was taken. An unwillingness to put things right will always affect our progress with God detrimentally.

## What is repentance?

All these things are human responses to our sins. Repentance is the work of the Holy Spirit. Repentance is a gift from God, '*...God's kindness leads you towards repentance*' (Romans 2:4), '*God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life*' (Acts 11:18).

Repentance is a change of mind, and a change of direction, it means seeing our lives from God's perspective, it is not just an emotional attitude of the heart, it is a decision made by our will, it is a conviction born in our hearts by the **Holy Spirit** that God is right and we are wrong. It is the doorway into His presence. When we repent, **we judge our own sins**, so that God will not have to judge us (1Corinthians 11:31).

1. **Repentance is the attitude with which we must approach God.** We cannot come to God without repenting. That would be like coming to God and saying 'I have done nothing wrong; I don't need to change'. If we are not repentant, we have had no change of heart, and no change of mind. When I was first converted, it took me about 2½ years to begin to learn about repentance. Though I knew Christ as my saviour, I often slipped back into my old ways of living. It took a decision of the will and a public testimony of my failure and need of grace, to bring a lasting change.

Repentance is foundational to the faith: Hebrews 6:1 calls it one of the elementary teachings, '*Therefore let us leave the **elementary teachings** about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of **repentance** from acts that lead to death, and of **faith** in God.*'

2. **Repentance is the way back to God.** Not only is repentance the initial way to God but it also the way back to God. Repentance is for Christians. The aim of repentance is not to say we are sorry, it is to restore our relationship with God. The work of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin and draw us back to God.

Someone sensitive to God will understand that many things are sin which others do not even care about. Bad temper, sarcasm, criticism,

disrespect, selfishness, insisting on our own way, impatience, and lust are the inward sins that make us unclean, and the Holy Spirit will convict the Christian's conscience about them.

A deeper prayer life, working harder in our witness or reading more of our Bible are not the ways to deal with sins. Human effort will not restore God's peace to our hearts. Where sin has separated us from God, we must hear God's word of chastisement, and come to the cross for forgiveness. This is the only place of cleansing.

Ignoring our sins will not bring blessing nor will giving in to them bring us back to God.

**How do we walk in repentance?** It is not difficult, a three-fold prescription is given in Revelation 2:1-5, Remember, repent, and return. *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ... I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand."*

What is our first love? It is a love for God and for our brothers and sisters. The Ephesians had lost their love for each other as well as their love for God. It is in this area of love we so often sin. If we are part of God's family we do not reject and leave the other members of the family because we have difficulties. The family needs to know we are committed to putting things right.

3. **True repentance begins with brokenness**, which is a willingness to allow God to show us the things wrong in our heart. Roy Hession, in his book *The Calvary Road*, describes 'Self' as the main problem we face. All words beginning with 'self' cause so much trouble. 'Anything that springs from self, however small is sin. Self-effort or self-complacency in service is sin. Self-pity in trials or difficulties, self-seeking in business or Christian work, self-indulgence

in one's spare time, all these are sin. Sensitiveness, touchiness, resentment, and self-defence when we are hurt or injured by others, self-consciousness, reserve, fear, all spring from self, and all are sin and make our cups unclean.'

David was right when he said, '*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise*' (Psalm 51:17). We must come to God in humility, broken at our self-centredness, trusting in Him to forgive and not making any excuses.

4. **We must be willing to return to the cross.** The cross is the only place sins are dealt with. This is pictured in Isaiah 35:8-9 '*And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there.*'

**The Highway of Holiness.** We see firstly that there is a road the righteous are called to walk on, '*the highway of holiness.*' We need to imagine a road built up from the surrounding country side with a narrow path on top, like an Offa's Dyke, or canal embankment. The path is straight and uphill but plainly marked, anyone can walk it, and '*the simple shall not stray from it*' v8. On both sides there are dangers, v9 mentions the lion, and ravenous beasts, but as long as we stay on the path, we are safe. The only ones excluded are the **unclean** - the sinner who does not know Christ and the Christian with un-confessed sin are unclean.

The entrance to the highway is up a **small dark and forbidding hill**, it is the hill of Calvary. The hill has to be climbed with **humility**, on our knees; if we do not come that way there is no other way on to the path. If we are content to stay as we are, if we think it doesn't apply to us, then we will never humble ourselves and struggle up that blood-soaked hill. If we want to be in fellowship with a holy God, then we must be willing to hunger and thirst for righteousness, only then will we be filled.

At the top of the hill, barring the way is a blood-stained cross. It divides time, it divides humanity. There is no way past the cross, or round the cross, we must go through. The cross has become for us the posts of a door. The door is small and we must bow to go through. If we will not humble ourselves, we can never enter in at this door, *‘the unclean shall not pass.’* We must bend the stiff-necked self, we must be able to say, *‘I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me’* (Galatians 2:20).

So, we crawl through and, as we do, we are touched by the blood. We leave our selfishness, our irritability, our over sensitiveness, our envy, our judging and blaming others and our critical spirit behind. We leave our restlessness, our resentfulness, our un-forgiveness, self-indulgence, self-pity and impurity behind. These things must be bowed and broken at the cross. Before Christ’s brokenness our self-centredness is broken down. We see the blood and the thorns, the hands pinned by nails; we see His brokenness and see that our attitudes put Him there. We need to allow His brokenness for us to break our selfishness and we must hear again the words, *“Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34).

Love Divine!  
What hast thou done?  
The immortal God has died for me!  
The Father’s co-eternal Son  
Bore all my sins upon the tree;  
The immortal God for me has died!  
My Lord, my Love is crucified.  
Is crucified for me and you,  
To bring us rebels back to God:  
Believe, believe the record true,  
Ye all are bought with Jesus’ blood,  
Pardon for all flows from His side:  
My Lord, my Love is crucified.

(Charles Wesley)

This is the start, as we emerge from the far side of the cross, it is no longer dark and forbidding, but a road bathed in light goes on from the cross. *‘Only the redeemed will walk there’* (Isaiah 35:9). It is an

uphill and narrow path, for Jesus said, “*Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it*” (Matthew 7:13-14). There He stands beside us, the one who ‘*bore our sins in his own body on the tree*’ (1Peter 2:24.)

He offers us the cleansing water of life and we drink. Our cleansed hearts overflow with joy, we are born again, revived, forgiven. We are not struggling to find salvation. Christ is our salvation.

So, we begin to walk. At first, we only notice Jesus; later on, we notice there are others on the road with us. Some are ahead, some following on behind, **this is fellowship** and we rejoice together as pilgrims on the way.

### **What if we fall?**

Then suddenly as we walk along, and for no good reason, we sin. Our old ‘self’ is provoked, we feel insulted, our feelings are hurt. Things don’t go as we expected, someone is rude and unthinking or we are overlooked, people are unkind and critical, and we are offended. It may be, that no one thanks us for our effort and we feel slighted, or someone does the job we like to do and we are offended. We **become angry** and irritated and the moment we do **God shines His light on the darkness in our hearts.**

How we react when we are provoked is our constant choice. How do we react to our Christian brothers, or to our families? If we get annoyed or irritated, we can soon be cold and critical, it happens in marriages and it happens in churches.

We have the choice, either we humble ourselves and allow God to work more deeply in us, or we react selfishly. We defend ourselves and accuse the other person. Resentment and anger grip our hearts, we become stiff-necked and irritated, we complain and grumble, and say we were right and they were wrong. We hold a grudge and we ask others what they think about what happened to us. But because this is a highway of holiness, ‘*The unclean will not journey on it*’ (Isaiah 35:8). Because we are out of fellowship with each other, we are out

of fellowship with God. We have fallen off the narrow road, into the darkness that surrounds the path.

We are in the darkness, the blessing is gone, the joy is gone, the peace is gone, we feel discontent and wonder how to get the blessing back?

**God looks at our reaction**, to see if we react with the meekness of Christ, or the hardness of self. If we were being led by the Spirit of Christ, we would not have been irritated. You cannot humiliate a humble person; they are on the floor already.

So, if we find ourselves off the highway in the darkness, how should we react? Often, we try harder, we promise we will be better in future and we try to climb back up the bank, by our own efforts. We may become more devoted and religious, or work harder at being a Christian. We pray, read our Bible and witness. This is not the way back into blessing, these can all be the works of the flesh. Self-effort never got us on to the highway and it won't get us back.

We have to humble ourselves before the cross once more - the cross is always the door to forgiveness and blessing. As we do, the blood-stained hand of Jesus reaches down into our darkness and He lifts us back into the light. We are touched with the blood again, cleansed and renewed; we start again on the narrow path which leads to eternal life, even more amazed that He should choose someone like us.

We need to learn to come back to Jesus often, with our sin, especially with broken fellowship. When Christians disagree, God doesn't choose sides. He calls us to walk in the light of love and forgiveness. We need to value fellowship with each other more than hurt feelings or misunderstandings. Walking in the light with our brother or sister, with the blood of Jesus cleansing our relationships is true fellowship.

This walk is really very simple. It is not deep theology or astounding doctrine. It is a day-by-day walk with God in humility, keeping the peace of the Holy Spirit within and watching for anything that breaks

our fellowship. If we do sin, we quickly put it right. We should start in our homes.

Roy Hession said 'to start to live this life now will mean revival in our lives. To continue to live it will be revival continued. Revival is just you and me walking along the highway in complete oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ, and with one another, with lives continually cleansed and overflowing with the life and the love of God'.

5. **Agreeing with, not arguing with God.** This means being open to conviction of sin. '*When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement*' (John 16:8). The ministry of the Holy Spirit is not just to bring comfort, but also to bring conviction to the wayward heart. The indications of His conviction are a loss of peace, our self-justifying, or even anger can be a reaction against the Holy Spirit.

When I encouraged one lady to look into her own heart and see her reactions to the things round her, rather than blame the people or circumstances she was in, she replied, 'I can't go around always looking for my sins - that would make me miserable.' NO! Conviction followed by repentance makes us clean. We do not need to go looking for our sins, we do need to listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and, when sin breaks our fellowship or we lose our inward peace, we need to ask why. Our aim is restored fellowship. Repentance is the means of the cleansing we need.

6. **Repentance is a life-style.** Each time we find the Spirit convicting us of sin we need to humble ourselves in repentance. We need not fear God's welcome, it may be the first time we have become aware of our sinful nature revealing its ugly side, or it may be the one thousand and first time, God's love has not changed, He welcomes us through the blood because, '*perfect love drives out fear*' (1John 4:18).

We can depend on His welcome, '*if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself*' (2Timothy 2:13). The only time God is depicted as running in the scripture, is when the prodigal

returns. Repentance is a life-style and God runs to our side when we repent.

The question is; are we excusing our sins, denying our sins or bringing them for cleansing to Calvary's flood? Are we living it? Remember, '*God's kindness leads you towards repentance.*' (Romans 2:4).

## 5. WHAT IS HOLINESS?

*'It is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."'*

1 Peter 1:16

What does it mean to you? To someone studying theology, holiness is an attribute of God, a description of His essence. God is holy by nature and we are unholy. If we are to dwell on this for any time it could cause dread and fear. When the great reformer Martin Luther first studied the justice of God, he saw his own unholiness as a great barrier to salvation. He understood clearly that God is just, and that as a just judge He must punish the sinner. He saw no way of escaping God's righteous judgement and wrote, 'I came to hate God because of His justice.' He later found that salvation could not be earned, but was a gift given to those who have faith. The key was found in the verse, *'The just shall live by faith'* (Romans 1:17).

For most people holiness consists of lists of things we do or do not do. If we live in a certain way, we are holy, if we do not live in this way, we are not holy. Today's church has little understanding of the concept of holiness. Holiness is at the same time, both a **gift**, [or standing] we enter into, and a **process** of growing which we go through.

One is **positional** holiness, the other **progressive** holiness. We understand that holiness is only complete in heaven, but we must still seek holiness in life and conduct here on earth.

This is a profound and important subject. Holiness is part of the daily battle we face. It touches the whole person, **spirit, soul and body**. Our outward actions often reveal the inner battles of our hearts. There are four key subjects for growing in God, they are; Desire, Humility, Repentance and Holiness. If any of these are lacking, we cannot grow and flourish in Christlikeness.

We should remember that holiness is not optional; it is commanded by God. *'Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God'* (Leviticus 20:7). *'It is written, "Be holy, for I am holy"'* (1Peter 1:16). *'Make every effort to live in peace with*

*everyone and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord'* (Hebrews 12:14).

**What is Holiness?** We need to begin by understanding what it is not. There are two mistakes' people make.

**Firstly legalism:** This was the mistake of the Pharisees, to them holiness consisted in the keeping of many rules. The argument is that God had given rules for life so, if we just keep the rules that will show we are holy. In the church, during my life time, there have been rules about hair styles, make up, what clothes are appropriate, which Bible to use, which hymn book, what to do and not to do on Sundays, where you can go, and what kind of thing you can do as a believer. Many of the rules were wise and helped people avoid sin, but many were not about overt sin, they were 'rules taught by people.'

Isaiah warned about this tendency, *'The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules which they have been taught"'* (Isaiah 29:13). Jesus applied this teaching to the Pharisees, in *"They worship me in vain; their teachings are but merely human rules"* (Matthew 15:9). I hope we can see that rules imposed from the outside cannot touch the heart. Holiness springs from inward change, not outward impositions.

The dangers are either pride or despondency. When we fail to keep the rules which people lay down, it ties us up in knots, and heaps guilt on our heads. Failing to keep the rules leads to condemnation and despondency. Many have given up on faith, because they think it is about keeping rules, they know they cannot make the grade, so they give up.

If we do manage to keep the rules, this leads to pride and judgementalism. We judge others as unholy because they do not keep the same set of rules that we do. This is largely a religious problem, and any religion can fall into this trap. Put at its simplest, it divides people into good and bad, rather than forgiven and unforgiven, and

there is a world of difference. All of us are bad, none of us are holy, but all of us can find forgiveness.

**The second mistake is antinomianism:** this is not so familiar to people today, but is actually very popular in the church. The argument is that there are no rules, or at least they do not apply.

‘The word *antinomianism* comes from two Greek words, *anti*, meaning ‘against’; and *nomos*, meaning ‘law.’ *Antinomianism* means being ‘against the laws’ of God. It is the belief that there are no moral laws God expects Christians to obey. They would argue that the only law is love, and any act done in love must, in and of itself, be a moral act.

Each person must be guided by their own conscience and as long as they believe and do not harm people, it does not matter what they do.

The danger here is that we ignore the Bible completely and soon find ourselves doing things the Bible specifically condemns. We make up our own rules for holiness based on our own desire. As long as we are loving, it does not matter if the Bible speaks against it. Their argument is that the Bible had cultural relevance in its day, but not today. The result is that sin is ignored, or even celebrated, God’s people are divided, and God removes His hand of blessing.

Antinomians teach that there is no rule for holiness except the rule of the heart. Both legalism and licence destroy the Christian faith and have nothing to do with true holiness. St Paul asks, “*Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means!*” (Romans 6:1-2).

### **Holiness begins with 4 essential changes**

1. **A changed nature:** “*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (2Corinthians 5:17).

Here we see an act of spiritual recreation wrought in the believer’s life. Before, by nature we were sinful. ‘*All of us also lived among*

*them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath* (Ephesians 2:3). The scripture describes the unconverted as *'dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh'* (Colossians 2:13). But Ephesians 2:4-5 tells us: **'God, being rich in mercy, ... even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ.'** He changed our nature from death to life.

This changed nature comes through faith, by the blood of the cross and is the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Faith provides the **moment**, the cross the **method** and the Spirit the **means** of salvation. Salvation is not just an act God does to us, like saving us from a disaster, it is an act God accomplishes in us by changing our nature.

It is described as a rebirth, *'You have been **born again**, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God'* (1Peter 1:23). We are *'children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but **born of God'*** (John 1:13).

We are even shown how God changes our old nature. God plants the seed of His eternal nature within us, *'No-one who is **born of God** will continue to sin, because **God's seed** remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God'* (1John 3:9).

2. **A Changed Standing:** We move from enemies to sons and daughters, from darkness to light, from lost to found, from unsaved to saved, from the image of Adam to the image of Christ. *'When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son'* (Romans 5:10). Peter describes our new standing before God, *'You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy'* (1Peter 2:9-10).

3. **A Changed desire:** God changes our desires; a changed nature presupposes changed desires. Our **inward nature changes**, so that sin is no longer attractive to us. We need to understand that when Christian's sin, they are acting against their new nature, that is why it is so heart-rending and upsetting when we do sin. I do not mean we cannot sin, but it is now base ugly and unattractive to us. We have an inbuilt love of God and of holiness, so sin becomes an enemy, an aberration. You cannot have a spring of holiness and unholiness flowing from the same heart. If we persist in sin, we actually set up a moral dichotomy (a battle) within our soul and become mentally stressed, oppressed, and unbalanced. This is why some give in to sin, and even embrace it; they are seeking to avoid the battle and find peace within. However, we were not recreated for sin, we were recreated for righteousness, Paul says, *'We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?'* (Romans 6:2).

Sin promises to serve us and please us, but it lies. In the end it enslaves us and dominates us. Someone in whom the nature of Christ dwells has received a new set of desires, based on righteousness, holiness and redemption (1Corinthians 1:30).

4. **A Changed Position:** God changes our position, we are now *'In Christ'* (2Corinthians 5:17). Before, we were outside of Christ and His influence, now He in us and we are in Him. This is a geographical change; before we were in the world, now we are *'in Christ'*; before we were lost in trespasses and sins, now we are *'in Christ.'* There is still a battle, the flesh versus the Spirit, but this is where Holiness is worked out in human life. Our problem is that we are not used to walking in the new nature. We have nurtured our old nature of selfishness for so long, that we are not familiar with the selfless love of the new nature that God has seeded within. Like David, we do not fit in Saul's armour, because we have not grown into it yet.

We need to learn to walk in the new life that God has released with us. This means we do not become holy in order to find God's approval. We seek holiness because we want to be like the Holy one who dwells within us.

Our identity '*in Christ*' also affects our prayer life. If we come as a lost sinner, we will be looking at our old nature. When we fall it is necessary to come in confession and repentance, but we come as sons and daughters, not as sinners. We are people with a new nature, a new standing, new desires and a new position, and we are learning to walk in newness of life.

When we are forgiven through Christ's blood, God counts us as holy. He also places His nature within us, so that we may grow into true '*righteousness, holiness and redemption*' (1Corinthians 1:30). This clearly shows the difference between Positional and Progressive holiness. The one is a gift the other a way of life '*in Christ*.'

Now that we have examined the nature of holiness, we can **begin a definition**: 'Holiness is the character of God formed in us.'

In order to enable His character to grow and mature in the believer, He gives us two foundations, His eternal Word and His eternal Spirit. The Pharisees (legalists) don't understand the spirit of the Law, the Antinomians (licence) don't understand the demands of the law.

Christians measure their progress in holiness alongside God's moral law, and through His indwelling Spirit. The moral laws, revealed in the Old Testament, still apply today, for they reveal the heart of God on how a people, chosen and called by Him should live. They show the standards of sexual and social behaviour God expects of His people. These laws may not be directly applied to the world, they are '*dead in sins and in the uncircumcision of their sinful nature*' (Colossians 2:13). They do, however, apply to the church, who claim the name of Christ, and proclaim the new birth. If we disobey His Word, we will always find ourselves in conflict with the Holy Spirit, who inspired His Word. Remove one of the foundations Word or Spirit, and we have no firm ground for holiness, the great arch of holiness comes crashing down.

### **Why is holiness important?**

1. God commands holiness from His followers. This is clear from the calling of Israel. His people are to be **distinguishable from the world**

around them. He said to Israel, *“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”* (Exodus 19:5-6).

He says the same to the church, *“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’”* (1 Peter 1:14-16). And He says, *“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”* (1 Peter 2:9). Since we are God’s holy people, we need to live by God’s holy standards. *‘Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people’* (Ephesians 5:3).

We are truly as the hymn says ‘Called unto Holiness Church of God.’ In the scriptures believers are called the ‘*hagios*,’ the ‘sacred or most holy’ ones - ‘Saints’, and saints are called to be holy.

2. Because we know the renewing presence of the Holy Spirit within, and our nature is changed, a holy life reveals the presence of the Holy Spirit. *‘We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ... What benefit did you reap ... from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!’* (Romans 6:2, 21). Sin will always create death at the core of our being; once we are redeemed, we are no longer built for sin, but for righteousness. *‘Those who sow to please their sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; those who sow to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life’* (Galatians 6:8).

Here then is a **working definition** of holiness: ‘Holiness is the character of God formed in us, it is guided by His Word and nurtured by His Holy Spirit.’ This means that the Holy Spirit constantly seeks to renew our desires in line with the revelation in God’s Word.

We must do our part, for Hebrews 12:14 reminds us to *‘Make every effort ... to be holy.’* There has to be a cooperation between our human will, God’s Holy Word and the indwelling Holy Spirit, in order to live a holy life. We will still be tempted, but we have the choice to flee temptation, resist temptation or fall to temptation. If we want to get close to God, holiness is essential. Without continual cleansing we cannot stand in His presence. The Psalmist asks, *‘Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart’* (Psalm 24:3-4).

**What if we fall?** Our position has not changed, we are *‘in Christ,’* but the work of the Spirit changes. He seeks to convict us of our sins and bring us in humility to repentance. Once we have sought cleansing, we can walk closely with Christ again. When we fall, we have the Cross, we have the cleansing of the blood and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. We are not rejected. As God’s children, this is our position, He is still our Father and, like every prodigal, we need to return in repentance and love. If we continue to excuse our sins and not repent, at that point, we are proving that our nature has never changed, and we are not God’s children at all.

Our position as believers is that God counts us as holy for Christ’s sake. We are clothed in His righteousness and forgiven; this is positional holiness. However, positional holiness must lead to progressive holiness, because the closer we are to God, the less we will want to sin. The more we allow His Holy Spirit to dwell within us the more we will love holiness and walk in the light of His Word.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, ‘do we feel called to a closer walk with God?’ God’s call for holiness does not drive us away in despair, but draws us deeper in worship. The desire for holiness comes from a desire for a deeper walk with Jesus. It is our unholiness that keeps God at arm’s length and makes us concentrate on religious rules, rather than a relationship with Him. Yet, once our sins are cleansed, God invites us into His presence. He tells us to *‘come boldly before the throne of grace’* (Hebrews 4:16). Once we find His forgiveness, peace and presence, the barrier to knowing Him more deeply is removed, and we desire holiness, because we love His

presence. It is the manifest presence of God in our lives that draws us into deeper holiness.

We need to rejoice in the positional holiness God has granted us, and seek personal holiness through a living connection to His Holy Spirit in the secret place of prayer. Once we are cleansed there is no longer any barrier to God's love, peace, joy and a deeper expression of holiness flooding our souls. Indeed, we can come to the place where we do not want to walk in anything that offends God our Father, because we do not want to lose His precious presence. A deep walk in holiness will always rise out of a deep experience of the presence of God.

Holiness is not measured by the rules of people, nor an excuse for disobeying God's moral laws. It rises out of a love relationship with the Father, it is our desire, *'our joy and our delight, always and everywhere to give Him thanks and praise.'* We love holiness because the Holy One lives within us. Like Jesus, we learn to love righteousness and hate wickedness, and the result is that we receive the anointing of joy (Psalm 45:7).



## 6. GRACE: THE POWER OF LOVE

*“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9*

**What is grace?** Grace has been described as God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense. This is a beginning of an understanding, but not an end.

The concept of grace is hidden in the Old Testament but supremely revealed through Jesus in the New. *‘For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’* (John 1:17). Grace is the attitude which dictated God’s dealings with humanity, and especially with His people, the Church. To understand grace, it is essential to understand the heart and mind of God. Yet today grace is dangerously misinterpreted, and greatly misunderstood. Grace works in conjunction with mercy, but grace is not mercy. Grace is the expression of God’s love, but love and grace differ in application and purpose. Love moves God’s heart to act in grace, but grace must be received and responded to. Love is the motivation, and grace is the action. Grace can be both rejected and missed, because of our stubborn hearts (Jonah 2:8).

Grace pervades the New Testament. Each of Paul’s Epistles begin and end with the theme of Grace. *‘To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.’* (1Timothy 1:2). *‘To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour.’* (Titus 1:2) *‘Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ’* (Galatians 1:3). *‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen’* (Galatians 6:18). *‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.’* (1Thessalonians 5:28). The Book of Hebrews also closes with the salutation, *‘Grace be with you all’* (Hebrews 13:25).

So, what is grace? Should we use grace like the Hebrew Shalom? A welcome or parting greeting, a sort of spiritual hand shake? Is it little more than the blessing at the end of Christian services, and a phrase used at the beginning and end of Paul’s Letters?

Does grace simply mean kindness or graciousness, a character trait and attitude, by which we treat each other with respect? *'Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone'* (Colossians 4:6).

Grace is far more than an attitude or greeting, it is the power of God's love at work. Love is the **motivation**; grace is the **action**. Because God loves us, He reaches out in grace towards us. Grace is God's favour and power bestowed on the underserving. Bill Johnson gives Grace two definitions. 1. 'His mercy and favour towards people through the blood of His son.' 2. His 'operational power', 'He gives us this grace to empower us to become like Christ.'

In the Scriptures, grace is always the gift of the greater to the lesser. Love raises someone up, and honours them as an equal; grace always stoops. It reaches down to those who can never be an equal. The Maundy money given by Queen Elizabeth is not earned, it is a gift given at the grace and favour of the Queen. She stoops to walk among her subjects, and bless them with her favour. Grace is the combination of love received in humility, poured out on the underserving.

To understand grace, we must compare grace with justice and mercy.

**Justice** dispenses what the offender deserves. At its best, justice is not vengeful but proportionate to the crime committed. When we stand before God, we do not want to receive justice. That would be eternal loss. We cannot endure the justice of God, because of His eternal unyielding holiness, and our tainted sinful nature. We cannot stand in the presence of God's justice.

**Mercy** forgives the offence and does not give what the offender deserves. We receive mercy because of Christ's death on the cross. He receives judgement, and we receive mercy. Mercy is available because the just sentence for the crime was pronounced over Jesus. *'He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed'* (Isaiah 53:5).

**Grace** goes beyond mercy; it lifts up the offender and gives them gifts they could never deserve. Grace restores us to God's family and gives us strength and courage for the journey. It is God's grace that makes us sons and daughter, not servants, and opens the door to a life of fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

**Mathematically**, Justice is negative, mercy is neutral, and grace is positive, offering abundance.

To understand grace, we also need to see the utter unworthiness of the one offered grace. To see the condescension and magnificence of God's grace we need to understand our lost position before Him.

**The back drop** to the drama of grace is like an immense Greek tragedy, with the fires of Hell constantly burning in the background. God sits centre stage as Judge and humanity cavorts carelessly in the foreground before the **holy and eternal judge**, who is about to condemn them. Jesus mounts a rescue mission, saving all who will come in truth and faith, to repentance.

If we do not appreciate God's Holiness and the lost nature of humankind, the true measure of grace will always elude us. If we think we are essentially good and decent people, trying our best, hampered by our environment and learning, then we do not know that we are utterly lost and helpless before a Holy God; convicted by the depths of depravity of the human heart.

John was born in London in 1725. His mother was a puritan believer, but died days before his 7<sup>th</sup> birthday. His father was a merchant ship master, and sent John to boarding school, until he was eleven. He then took him on board as the ship's cabin boy. John travelled on six Mediterranean voyages, before his father retired in 1742.

At seventeen he entered the employ of a ships merchant's office, but had picked up bad habits from his days at sea. He was dismissed swiftly for angry, impatient, unreliable and unrestrained behaviour. He became a drunken, womanising reckless youth, and the next year, while visiting friends in the country, was captured by the king's men, and pressganged into the Royal Navy.

As an experienced sailor he was made a midshipman, aboard HMS Harwich. He hated the discipline of the Royal Navy and rebelled at every turn. Later he wrote, “I sinned with a high hand, ... and I made it my study to tempt and seduce others.” When he got the chance he deserted, but was captured and whipped in front of the crew with 8 dozen lashes, then reduced to the rank of ordinary seaman. His plan from that day forward was to kill the captain, but before he could carry out the plan, the captain, seeing him as worthless, traded him to Amos Clowes, the master of a slave ship bound for Sierra Leone.

Clowes promised John a share in the slave trade, and that he would live as a king in the West Indies. John even indulged in abusing the female slaves that were being shipped abroad. But, when Clowes was travelling on his foul business, his mistress, an African Princess, enslaved John on their lemon plantation.

The Harwich returned to the UK, without John, and his father commissioned a captain sailing to Africa to seek out his prodigal son. He was rescued on a raid on the plantation, and put on a ship called the Greyhound, carrying cotton, back to England. He was to work his passage back to Liverpool. On the journey he continued to be as profane and foulmouthed as ever.

Soon, the ship was overtaken by an enormous storm, off the coast of Donegal. Hands were called to the pumps, and John joked that they would be laughing about this tomorrow in the tavern. His sea-mate, ashen-faced, said “do you not fear God, since we are going to drown.” At that point he saw his danger for the first time and realised there was no hope of rescue.

John had been reading Thomas a Kempis’ ‘The Imitation of Christ’, and was struck by a line about the ‘uncertain continuance of life.’ He also recalled the passage in Proverbs which said, *‘Because I have called and ye have refused, ... I also will laugh at your calamity’* (Proverbs 1:24 + 26). He was filled with a great fear of death, and literally fell on the deck and called out to God. As the ship filled with water, the cargo shifted in the hold and stopped up the hole below the water line. It was several days manning the pumps before the ship

limped into port. During that time, he began to read the Bible. He marked this experience as his conversion to evangelical Christianity.

He did go back to sea as first mate, and actually captained 2 slave ships himself, before leaving the sailor's life and becoming the excise and port inspector in Liverpool.

There he trained to become an Anglican Priest, which he did in 1764 at the age of 39 and was sent to Olney in Oxfordshire. He wrote against slavery from first-hand knowledge. Looking back on his life, he was amazed at the change God had made in a lost ugly sinner.

We know him from the most famous hymn of all time. He wrote *'Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see... T'was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed.'* John Newton.

He understood his own wickedness, and that grace was God's love and mercy reaching out to someone who absolutely did not deserve it. He received both grace for forgiveness, and grace to change.

The picture the Bible clearly paints is that **we all stand guilty before a Holy God**. Our guilt may be less obvious than John Newton's, but it is real. *'As it is written: 'There is no-one righteous, not even one' (Romans 3:10). 'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23). 'The whole world is under the control of the evil one' (1John 5:19). 'Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed' (Romans 2:5).*

There is a day when justice will be levelled and, unless we respond to the gospel of God's grace, we are, as Jonathan Edwards said, "sinners in the hands of an angry God." This is 'justice', it is what we deserve, but God does not desire to give us what we deserve. He could justly punish us eternally, but He does not choose to punish us. He offers us mercy, forgiving our offences and grace to empower us to live for Him.

The Methodist Church put this succinctly in the four 'Alls', 'All need to be saved. All can be saved. All can know themselves saved. All can be saved to the uttermost' (that is sanctified or made Holy.)

Seeing our situation, God's love prompts His action, and in grace He sends the Saviour Jesus. This is God's offer and we must accept it. Grace is only available through Jesus, God will not treat all people with grace, only those who come to Him through His Son Jesus Christ. *'For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ'* (John 1:17 NKJ).

### **The accomplishments of Grace.**

1. **By Grace; we are saved.** The Bible is clear, each of us is saved by the grace of God. The offer of salvation is an offer of pure grace to the underserving. *'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared good works in advance for us to do'* (Ephesians 2:8-10)

This famous verse shows clearly that salvation **originates with God**, it is *'not of yourselves'* and that there is **nothing we can do to earn it**, it is *'not by works.'* We should also note that **works, are expected to follow** salvation as proof of God's work within us since, *'God has prepared good works in advance for us to do.'* Anyone who does not bear the fruit of holiness and service has never experienced grace.

In grace God stoops to offer us His friendship and favour. A humble and repentant faith is the response He is seeking. 'Faith' is the touching point at which grace is received into our lives. The offer is one of grace, but faith is the conduit through which grace passes to reach our lives. Salvation is **'by grace, through faith.'**

However, grace is more than God's offer of favour towards the unworthy, it is also His empowering. His power to keep us, power to inspire us, power to overcome sin.

2. **By Grace; we stand.** This is God's power to the human soul, 'God's operational power.' 'He gives us this grace to empower us to become like Christ.'

St Paul faced an implacable problem, perhaps an illness, demonic oppression, or a persistent handicap? He writes, *'Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"'* (2Corinthians 12:8-9). Grace was the power he needed to overcome in his weakness.

Grace is the power of God to stand in temptation, it is the ability to persist with joy in trials. It is the power to overcome sin and temptation. God longs to give us more of His grace, but only the humble can receive it. The Bible says, *'He gives more grace... "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble"'* (James 4:6).

Selwyn Hughes spoke to a young man addicted to pornography, who seemed to have no power to overcome his temptation. He asked when the temptation began. The young man responded, when his girlfriend left him, he was miserable and found himself standing outside a dirty book shop. He went in and found the pictures eased the pain. Selwyn's response was that as he stood outside the book shop, grace was flowing like a mighty river to enable him to stand, once he gave in to the temptation and entered the shop, he had resisted grace and accepted the temptation.

More grace seems to be the key to an abundant Christian life; *'how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ'* (Romans 5:17).

We need to seek God's grace. For every temptation grace is available, but our will often capitulates, and ceases to resist the temptation. We fall into sin because we enjoy the sin. Whatever our moral weakness is, God's grace gives us the power to overcome. We need to learn to choose grace, so that we may reign in life. Once we fall into sin, rather than excuse our temptation, desire or orientation, we need to find grace to repent.

3. **It is Grace; we must seek.** Just as in Salvation, the grace offered must be received through faith, so more grace must be sought through faith. The psalmists understood this, *'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour me'* (Psalm 50:15). *'He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him'* (Psalm 91:15).

The writer to the Hebrews says, *'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need'* (Hebrews 4:16).

Grace is offered to all, there are no favourites with God, but not all spend the time needed to seek and find His grace. Abundant grace is only found in His presence as we spend time before the throne of grace.

The gift of grace comes through the work of the Holy Spirit, He is the *'Spirit of Grace'* (Hebrews 10:29).

This is why the Epistles start and end with the grace. The Apostles understood we need grace to be saved, but we need more grace to stand.

We receive grace for salvation as we believe that Christ died for our sins. At that point the Holy Spirit enters our lives and we are *'born again of the Spirit'* (John 3:8). We receive grace to stand, as we learn to abide in God's presence. It is the **love of God**, that brings the **grace of our Lord Jesus Christ** into our lives, through the **communion with the Holy Spirit** (2Corinthians 13:14).

The more we know of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the more of God's sustaining grace we will experience. To get more grace we must have more of the *'Spirit of Grace'* in our life and experience.

Grace is offered, it is the unmerited favour of God, but it is also power to stand. It cannot be earned, but must be sought and received through faith in humility.

*'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen' (2Corinthians 13:14).*



## PURSUING GOD - THE THEOLOGY

We move now from practical concerns about how to commune with God in spirit, to theological concerns about the foundations our practice is based upon. Christianity, must be spirit and truth, doctrine and practice. We are living in an age where many people are seeking an experience of God without any clear idea of what they believe. It is important to realise that all practice flows out of doctrine, and bad doctrine produces bad practice.

This is not an exhaustive study of Christian doctrine, but an exploration of some of the essentials of evangelical theology.

*'The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth'* (John 4:23-24 NKJ).

These next chapters look at the foundations of our faith, and deal with worship in truth.



# CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH:

## 7. THE DEITY OF CHRIST

*‘Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.’ Jude 1:3*

What is unique about the Christian faith? What is unalterable? What is handed down from generation to generation? What can we never let go, and if we do, we are no longer Christian? What is at the heart of the Christian faith? We need to begin with the understanding that God Is, God is Holy, and God has revealed Himself uniquely in Christ.

### The Deity of Christ

The first question to answer in the Christian faith is, ‘who is Jesus?’ The first confession of the early Church was ‘Jesus is LORD.’ *‘If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved’* (Romans 10:9). *‘At the name of Jesus every knee should bow,... And that every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’* (Philippians 2:10). So, what do we mean when we say Jesus is Lord?

The name ‘Lord’ was first revealed to Moses and comes from his encounter with God at the burning bush. *‘Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ This is my name for ever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation”’* (Exodus 3:13-15).

Lord and YHWH become interchangeable. In the Authorized Version of the Bible LORD in capitals is the way YHWH is rendered.

This concept of Jesus being LORD was difficult for the disciples, they were all Jews and their national creed was 'The Shema', '*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one*' (Deuteronomy 6:4). This is their confession of faith, there is only One God. Yet they came to understand that when they had met Jesus, they had met God.

John begins his Gospel expressing this truth, '*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*' (John 1:1, 14).

Paul said '*In Christ all the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form*' (Colossians 2:9). Hebrews: 1:8 is very clear, '*About the Son he says, Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the sceptre of your kingdom.*'

**The Pharisees clearly understood this problem too.** Twice, in John 8 and John 10 they want to stone Jesus to death because of what He said; '*I tell you the truth... before Abraham was born, I am!*' (John 8:58). In John 10:30 Jesus said, "*I and the Father are one.*" Both times they respond with wanting to stone Him to death. So, Jesus says, "*I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?*" "*We are not stoning you for any of these,*" replied the Jews, "*but for blasphemy, because you, a mere human being, claim to be God*" (John 10:32-33).

Some years ago, I took a funeral at Mere Brow, near Southport, and afterwards a pleasant lady, who had been clearly moved by the service said 'you almost had me believing; till I you said "Jesus was the only way to God."' She thought this was arrogance. And asked what about all the other religious leaders who have lived? Today, people think there should be a multitude of options, many ways, to God. But who will you compare Jesus with? I tried to explain, as well as I could, that there was no comparison. At best, others were like a brick in the wall, they played their part, while Jesus was the owner

of the house. The pinnacle, of God's work on earth. If Christ is 'God with us', and He is, then it is both presumptuous and arrogant to assume that there is any other way to God. He is not like all the others who have come and gone. Jesus was and is the living embodiment of God.

At His birth He is unashamedly worshipped by angels and humans. When a Christian proclaims 'Jesus is Lord,' they are identifying Him with the God of the Old Testament. Confessing that 'Jesus is Lord,' is proclaiming that He is God.

C.S Lewis takes up this point in 'Mere Christianity'. 'I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.'

Then the situation becomes even more profound; on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit is poured out and suddenly the disciples were filled with God. As Jewish believers, they believed in God the Father, they have met God in the Son, and now they are filled with God the Holy Spirit. This is why a Christian in both theology and practice is Trinitarian. Less than seeing Father - Son - and Holy Spirit as the complete eternal revelation of God, is to rob God of His greatest Glory, and His greatest Glory is shown in His humility, when God became human. We follow the God who humbly walked among us. This is the first lesson of the Christian faith; Jesus is God and I must worship Him.

There is a mystery at the heart of the Christian faith that is implicit in the Christmas story. It is not a detective mystery asking who did it? More of a 'who is it?' Even Christian leaders have not understood its importance. The mystery is around the miraculous conception and virgin birth of Jesus. Former Bishop David Jenkins of Durham caused a great furore when he said he did not believe the virgin birth was important. If Jesus is God, the virgin conception and birth are actually crucial.

*'Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory' (1 Timothy 3:16 AV).*

Thomas Watson in his 'Body of Divinity' seeks to explore this mystery. 'Behold here a sacred riddle or paradox - 'God manifest in the flesh.' That man should be made in God's image was a wonder, but that God should be made in man's image is a greater wonder. That the Ancient of Days should be born, that he who thunders in the heavens should cry in the cradle; ... that he who rules the stars should suck the breast; that a virgin should conceive; that Christ should be made of a woman, and of that woman which He himself made; that the branch should bear the vine; that the mother should be younger than the child she bare, and the child in the womb bigger than the mother; that the human nature should not be God, yet one with God; this was not only marvellous but miraculous. Christ taking flesh is a mystery we shall never fully understand till we come to heaven, when our light shall be clear, as well as our love perfect.'

This is the mystery at the heart of the Christian faith, Jesus is the human who is God. The tension between His humanity and His deity is the tension on which Christian theology is developed.

Like a tightrope walker, if we loosen an end of the rope we will fall. If we let go of His humanity, then Christ is unlike us. If we let go of Divinity, then He is no more than a human. Without both the humanity and Divinity of Christ, we are less than Christian.

The Church struggled to understand this mystery in its early centuries. Two errant teachings emerged. **Docetism** - the idea that

Jesus only appeared to be human, but He was not truly human. This was aimed at helping the Greeks who thought God could not become a human, because humanity was sinful.

**Arianism** - decided in the opposite direction. It taught that Jesus was an exceptional human, but not truly God. WHY DOES IT MATTER? If He is human, then He is a sinner and cannot be my saviour. If He is God, He cannot represent humanity as their substitute and sacrifice in His death. In Christ, a human is paying the price for the sins of humanity. To be an effective sacrifice for sins He must be both human and God.

We get help in understanding from the word 'begotten.' It is often missed out of our modern translations because the word has fallen out of use today. However, we know what it means. To beget is to become the parent of. The idea that Jesus is the 'only begotten son' explains clearly who He is.

My sons are no less human than I am, though younger, by nature they carry the imprint of their father. When the three of us stand together it is obvious we are related - our looks, manners and voices all show our relationship. My sons are by nature fully human. This seems obvious, but people often miss the point. When people have children, their children must share their nature, they must be human. It is a law of nature that each species begets according to its own kind. A swan lays an egg which hatches into a cygnet, and grows to be a swan. A horse has a foal, a cat has kittens and a woman has a human child. This means that if God is to beget a child, and that is what the Scriptures say (John 1:18, John 3:16 + 18, Acts 13:33, Hebrews 1:5, 5:5, 11:17, 1 John 4:9), that Son must be of the same nature as the father.

We need to be very clear; Jesus is both human and Divine. The **virgin birth** explains both sides of His nature. He inherited His humanity from Mary, and His Divinity through the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Romans 9:5 addresses both sides of the mystery of Jesus. *'Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, for ever praised! Amen.'*

With the challenges of Docetism and Arianism the Church needed to come to an understanding of the nature of The Christ, and its creeds were the lasting formulation of this doctrine. In AD 325 at Nicaea, and again at Constantinople, the classic formula was reached.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father.  
Through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
He came down from heaven:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

## 8. THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD

*“The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” John 4:23*

1. **God is known through His Word and by His Spirit.** Here we are considering the inspiration of the Word and The Authority of the Holy Spirit. John tells us, *‘there are three that bear witness in heaven: The Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one’* (1John 5:7-8 NKJ).

The belief that the Scripture is inspired and without error is fast disappearing from the church. As a Church, we no longer want to base our practices upon the revelation of God in His Holy Word, but rather upon the changing wisdom of our age. As a church, we are in great danger of authorising practices that God's eternal Word says are sinful. Within months there is a very real possibility that the Methodist church in the UK will redefine their definition of marriage and the new definition will be in conflict with the revealed will of God in His Holy Word.

Traditionally Methodists have sought to understand the will of God using four tools. Scripture - Tradition - Reason and Experience. This is known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Today we are elevating reason and experience above the Word of God. We are teaching that God's word is not directly applicable to today's context.

Tradition, reason and experience are only tools to help interpretation, they are not equal to God's Word. Only the Scriptures claim to be inspired by God.

**Tradition:** can be a guide, ‘we all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before.’ If we are the first to think this Idea is right, then we are probably wrong. It is important to look at the History of the Church, and understand that what God has done before, He can do again. The problem with tradition is that it can become our Jailer.

At best it provides wisdom, at worst it traps us in the past. Tradition is not a faultless guide.

**Reason:** is a shifting sand-bed in a moving tide of opinion. The unregenerate mind has no concept of holiness, righteousness or redemption. Our reason is fallen, and our abilities are limited. What seems reasonable to us today, would have been abhorrent to our parents and grandparents. *'The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so'* (Romans 8-:7). If we are to please God we need to be *'renewed in the spirit of our mind'* (Ephesians 4:23). When our wisdom makes an argument for disobeying the plain meaning of scripture, that is not enlightenment, it is rebellion. Tradition is fallible, and reason is fallible. It is only when our mind is captive to the word of God, that we are able to use our reason correctly. C H Spurgeon spoke on the depths of understanding we gain when we seek to understand the master science of God.

'There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, 'Behold, I am wise.' But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumbline cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with solemn exclamation, 'I am but of yesterday, and know nothing.' No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God....'

But while the subject *humbles* the mind, it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe.... The most excellent study for expanding the soul, is the science of Christ, and Him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity.'

**Experience** is perhaps the worst guide of all. When we start with experience as our guide, we always end up distorting God's word to fit our experience. All experiences, good and bad, must be measured against the revelation in God's Word. If our experiences lead us to do things that God's Word denounces, then our experiences need to submit to His Word, not His Word to our experience. The Scripture is clear, following the desires of our heart will only lead to sin and loss. *'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?'* (Jeremiah 17:9). Our reason, experience and traditions are all fallen faculties, the only infallible guide for the believer is the Scripture.

**Why is the Scripture so important?** The answer is because it is uniquely inspired. Paul told Timothy that *'All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness'* (2 Timothy 3:16). The concept is that God breathed into the very words of His book.

**How did He do this?** *'Prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit'* (2 Peter 1:21). The written word is a cooperation between the Holy Spirit and the author. The Psalmist tells us that God's word *'is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens'* (Psalm 119:89). Isaiah warned his generation, *'If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them'* (Isaiah 8:20). Jesus said *"Scripture cannot be broken"* (John 10:35). He also said, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away"* (Luke 21:33).

The picture we are given of inspiration is that the Word of God is at one and the same time 100% written by men, with their gifts and abilities not being supplanted. The gifts they had were the ones they brought to the scriptures when they wrote. This allows for differences in style and ability. However, since they were 'carried along' by God the Holy Spirit, or the scripture was 'God breathed' (inspired) it is also a book that is 100% given by God. It is impossible to separate the human agency from the Divine inspiration. This is the only 200% book, 100% of God and 100% of humanity. We should not be surprised at this

for, when Jesus, the Word made flesh walked among us, He was also 100% human and 100% Divine.

**Interpretation** of scripture is important: We need to understand the context of the passage, and the type of scripture we are dealing with. It makes a difference if the record is prophecy, Gospel, poetry, allegory, parable, history, prayer, letter or a commandment.

We should always ask, who is this written to? Why was it said? What did it mean to its hearers, and what is its plain message for today? If we are not sure of its interpretation, we need to compare the passage we are looking at with other scriptures on the same subject. This is using scripture to interpret scripture. If we do this, we will guard against interpretation becoming distortion.

An example of using scripture to interpret scripture answers the question, ‘why does the church not apply the food laws of the Old Testament?’ Why is the church free to eat shell fish and pork, when the Jewish nation were not?

The answer is found in Acts 15. The church met in Jerusalem and addressed this issue. They determined that the food laws did not apply to the new Gentile converts and recorded this in the scriptures.

So, does this mean that we can ignore the moral laws of God, because we do not keep the dietary laws of the Old Testament? We need to ask if the scripture ever repeals the moral laws of God? For example, do the scriptures ever repeal the laws that apply to sex and relationships? The answer is ‘no’. We also need to remember that the moral laws of Leviticus 18 were written to show a clear contrast between the people called into covenant with God and the people of the surrounding nations. These moral laws were written to God’s people. We cannot judge the world for not following God’s word, but we must judge ourselves. Paul asks the Corinthian Church, *“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?”* (1Corinthians 5:12).

When we disobey God’s eternal laws because of our personal preferences we are elevating our experience and desires above the

written Word of God. Experience must always be subject to and never master of the Word of God.

God's moral laws were written for Israel as an example of how the people of God should live. They were set apart as Holy compared to the surrounding dark and evil cultures. God still expects His people to live by His moral laws. God has not changed, Scripture has not changed, holiness and unholiness have not changed and our desire to go our own way has not changed. *'The Scripture cannot be broken'* (John 10:35), it is still God breathed. We must bring our experience to scripture and allow the scriptures to measure our actions. If we seek to put our experiences above scripture, we will soon justify our desires and actions and find ourselves abandoning, or even living in opposition to God's revealed Word. We are supposed to measure our experiences and desires against God's Holy Word and then humbly repent and change our ways, rather than rejoice in our sin and change God's word.

A young man responded to the altar call in Times Square Church, New York. He was deeply affected by God's Word and looking up to the preachers said, 'I work in the pornography industry. Is that a sin? Will I have to give it up?' That the question even has to be asked shows the current thinking of our society.

### **How should we use Scripture?**

We need the Word and the Spirit, a living witness not a dead letter. *'The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned'* (1 Corinthians 2:14). There is an interaction between the written Word, the Spirit of God and the heart of the reader.

The danger is that we equate our feelings with the prompting of the Spirit. We argue that God is a God of grace, He loves us, He forgives and wants us to be happy, so it is okay to do the things that make us happy. Some people even make a distinction between the God they see in the Old Testament and the accepting, forgiving revelation they see in Jesus. They argue that Jesus would never agree with the things

done in the Old Testament. They are trying to separate the living Word from the written Word, and you cannot do it. What God was to Moses He will be eternally. God's aim is not to make us happy, but to make us HOLY.

We are told to, *'Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off'* (Romans 11:22). If we claim to be His people and purposely break His word, we will be judged to be false disciples.

When we bring our Spiritless arguments to the Word of God, we will never understand or agree with it. To see His Word, we must come in a spirit of humility and repentance. We come as a student not a master, we come to hear His voice, and not to impose our secular wisdom on the eternal Word. The Word may not be honoured in the world, but it should be in His church.

It is the Holy Spirit who inspired His Holy Word, and He cannot dwell in an unholy heart. We are living in days where the Word of God is not honoured, reason and experience are being accepted as our guiding lights, but they are poor blind guides, if they lead us to disobey God's Word. The Holy Spirit will never inspire us to do something that the Holy Word speaks of as sinful.

The first two principles of the Christian faith are: Christ is God, and God's Word is true, forever. If we build on any other foundations, we are on sinking sand. *'Jesus said, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching'* (Matthew 7:24-28).

## 9. THE HUMAN CONDITION

*‘Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.’ Ephesians 2:12*

At the heart of the Christian faith are three truths.

1. Christ is God with us.
2. God’s Word is inspired and authoritative on all matters of faith and practice.
3. Humanity has fallen from its original sinless condition and needs a Saviour.

Humankind from God’s perspective. The psalmist asks, *‘what are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?’* (Psalm 8:4).

The first thing we need to know is that humankind is loved, but humankind is lost. Jesus is very clear about this. He tells us, *“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost”* (Luke 19:10). He describes this loss in the parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son. In each case the reason for the loss was different. In the case of the coin, the owner knew it was lost, but the coin was not capable of realising it was lost. It was ignorant of the fact it was lost. The sheep knew it was lost but had no power to help itself, it was foolishly lost. The son decided to leave his father, and abandon his provision and care. He was wilfully lost. Whether we are ignorant, foolish or wilful, the condition of each us is the same, we are lost and no longer in our owner’s care.

This is the first thing we learn about humanity in the Genesis account. We were created to know God, and abide in His love, but through wilful rebellion we are lost, and need a saviour.

If we go to Genesis chapters two and three, we see the creation and fall of humanity. Perhaps it is important to stress, that I believe

Genesis is a literal account of the creation of humanity. However even if we do not agree about its literal meaning, it still reveals God's viewpoint of humanity's condition. Genesis three is foundational for the Christian faith. If we do not understand that, we are fallen, we will never understand our need of a saviour.

The Bible is clear that humanity was **made perfect**. We were made in the very image of God, sharing His perfection, His nature, His holiness and His goodness. This perfection extended through every facet of our nature, we were perfect in spirit, soul and body. The human spirit was the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and Adam was renewed by His presence daily. The soul - our mind, emotions, personality and will, was selfless. We had the capacity to experience only what was good, righteous and true. Our souls were not self-centred but God-centred, and as such we loved what God loves, and hated what He hates. Our body was constantly being renewed, they had the power of the breath of creation in it, and would be constantly revitalised by the indwelling Spirit of God. We even had access to the tree of life. This was God's original intention, to create an independent, rational, love-centred being made in His own image.

**The Prohibition:** However, in order to test humanity's perfection, a prohibition was placed on one thing, this was a test of obedience. Adam and Eve were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. *'And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"'* (Genesis 2:16-17).

This test of obedience revealed God's heart, in that He did not desire humanity to experience evil His intention was only to lavish good on His creation. God's laws are always for our good and never given to limit or harm us.

Sadly, the first parents chose knowledge over relationship. In disobeying they stepped out of relationship with a Holy God, and entered into a relationship with sin. When the Bible speaks of having 'knowledge' of good and evil, it is not speaking academically, or theoretically, of understanding the difference between good and

evil, it is speaking experientially. To know good and evil means to experience both good and evil, to know it to the depths of our being, and as our daily experience. When the book of Genesis says Adam, '*knew his wife*' (Genesis 4:1) means he had intimate relations with her, and in the same sense, an ongoing intimate relationship between good and evil was initiated at the fall. In that first act of disobedience, they experienced the bitter fruit of evil. As we will see, we are still experiencing the consequences of that act.

The Fall is described in Genesis Chapter three. It begins with the temptation which is initiated by the serpent. In Scripture, the serpent usually signifies the devil or Satan. Revelation 12:9 speaks of '*That ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.*'

We need to be clear that human sin is not God's fault and it is not the Devil's fault. We stand guilty of our own choices. We may choose our actions but we cannot choose the consequences of our actions.

Temptation is not sin, our first parents had free will, and had the ability to resist the temptation. They knew God's command, but made a moral choice to disobey. As a result, the consequences that God had outlined came inevitably to pass, since God cannot lie. God gave humankind the ability to stand, but by an act of rebellion we fell from His presence, we chose knowledge over our relationship with God. To this day, knowledge is prized more highly than a relationship with God.

The method used by Satan, to coax disobedience, was to seed doubt into the mind of Eve. '*Now the serpent -- said to the woman: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*' (Genesis 3:1).

The effect of this question is to raise doubts about God's goodness. Did God say this, if He did, then He cannot care for you. Why would God withhold that which is good from you? You will also note that the question itself is a lie, and Eve tries to correct it saying, '*We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, "You must not*

*eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die”* (Genesis 3:2-3).

At this point there is a choice, doubt is not in itself a sin, it is a moment of choice, doubt is faith in two minds, it can either believe God's Word and goodness or it can degenerate into disbelief. However, the lie has done its work and doubt now becomes disbelief, as Satan challenges God's word directly saying *'you will not surely die'* (Genesis 3:4). The choice is made to take Satan's word over God's and having considered the proposition Eve decides to disobey. *'When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it'* (Genesis 3:6). The disobedience is a wilful and considered act and asserts human wisdom over obedience to a loving Father God. The fruit of this attitude is very much alive today. The consequences are death. Not immediate physical death, but immediate spiritual and moral death, with physical death stalking us all our lives.

**The consequences of the fall:** The consequences of the fall are also depicted here. The first thing that happens after their eyes are opened, is that their relationship with God changes. *'Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden'* (Genesis 3:8).

The God who they were accustomed to walking with in close communion was now feared. Their spirit was no longer a resting place for the Holy Spirit of God. A Holy God cannot dwell in an unholy vessel, and because the eternal God no longer lived at the core of their being, they could no longer draw on His strength. Bereft of the Holy Spirit they were spiritually dead. Their soul was in deep conflict, the fact that they hid illustrates the deep sense of fear, shame and guilt they felt because of their disobedience. From the moment they chose the knowledge of good and evil over life, they began to degenerate physically.

(People often doubt the longevity of the descendants of Adam and Eve. My own belief is that the power of the creative act was so great that the very essence of God was seeded into the human body, as such we were created to live forever. Once we were separated from God, the initial strength of that creative force took centuries to disperse, but without the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit living within the human body, we finally degenerated to a life span of around 70 to 80 years; see Psalm 90:10.)

Once God confronted Adam and Eve with their sin, they faced a further choice, they could blame or they could confess. They chose to blame others for their rebellion and disobedience. Adam blames both God and His wife, saying, *“The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it”* (Genesis 3:12). Then feeling totally abandoned, rejected and alone, Eve follows the example of Adam, and blames the serpent. However, their excuses do not mitigate their judgement. *“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return”* (Genesis 3:19). *‘And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken’* (Genesis 3:22-23).

The effect of sin is not confined to those first parents, it passes on inexorably to their descendants. The objection is sometimes made that it is not right that God should condemn us for the sin that Adam committed, since we had no hand in it. However, this is to misunderstand the situation. God does not condemn us for Adam’s sin, we are all judged for our own sin. We are tainted by Adam’s sin, he passes on the pollution of sin, but we will be judged not for what Adam did, but for what we have done. We face the same choice as Adam, repent or excuse our sins.

This depiction of humanity as fallen and lost continues throughout the Scriptures, Jesus tells us that we are sick and need a physician, (Matthew 9:12), that by nature we do not understand spiritual things, (1Corinthians 2:14), that we are blind and foolish, enemies of God,

(2Corinthians 4:4, Romans 1:22, Philippians 3:18), that we are lost, (Matthew 16:26), destined for destruction (Matthew 7:18-20), and dead in sin (Romans 6:23, Colossians 2:13). The Bible's conclusion is *'sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people, because all sinned'* (Romans 5:12). St Augustine concluded that *'mankind does not have the ability not to sin and die.'*

The original holiness, joy and righteousness we walked in was sold to sin, and through disobedience, un-holiness and judgement took its place. This is the picture of humankind, revealed in the Scriptures - we are lost and unholy, separated from the source of life and in desperate need of a saviour.

**The Saviour:** We are also shown that God will not abandon forever that which He created and loves. From His birth, Jesus is introduced as The Saviour. Joseph is told that Mary, *'will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins'* (Matthew 1:21). Paul writes, *'You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly'* (Romans 5:6).

It is through Christ, that we are re-born into the kingdom of God. Our spirits are cleansed by His blood, so that they can again become a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. Then, God begins to rebuild our broken soul, into His own image, as we learn to walk with Him, and one day our bodies will be liberated from their cycle of decay and death. Christ is God's offer of life, not just eternal life, though that is included, but spiritual life. Through Him our lives are cleansed, so that we can again be a fit vessel for the Holy Spirit to live in. The Holy Spirit then begins to recreate within us the image of God, by causing us to love what He loves and hate what He hates. God has restored us to fellowship with Himself, and deeply desires us to spend a life-time walking with Him.

We are recreated for, *'if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!'* (2Corinthians 5:17). Once we were lost but now we are found, once we were guilty and condemned as those who broke the laws of God. Now, *'through Christ Jesus the*

*law of the Spirit of life sets us free from the law of sin and death'* (Romans 8:2).

### **What do we need to do?**

Humankind again has a choice to make - believe God and accept His word or doubt and disobey.

The first thing God asks of us is to **repent**. *'God -- now commands all people everywhere to repent'* (Acts 17:30). The beginning of Salvation is repentance. It is the first message of the New Testament, *'John came baptising in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins'* (Mark 1:4). It was the first message Jesus preached, *'Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel"'* (Mark 1:14-15). It was the message that the Apostles were to take to the world. *'Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem'* (Luke 24:47).

The first call of the Gospel is not to have faith but to repent. Without repentance there is no salvation. Today people often major on the love of God and forget the lost nature of humankind. We even dare to celebrate our sins and ask what we have to repent of!

What is repentance? It is more than confessing our sins, repentance is, a **change of mind**, and a **change of direction**, it means seeing our lives from God's perspective, it is not just being sorry, it is a decision made by **our will**. It is a conviction, born in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that God is right and we are wrong. It presupposes humility and is the doorway to forgiveness. When we repent, we judge our own sins so that God will not have to.

We cannot come to God without repenting. That would be like saying 'I have no sin, and have done nothing wrong, I do not need to change'. If we are not repentant, God's Holy Spirit is not at work in our lives. If we seek cleansing and restoration, then repentance is the attitude with which we must approach God.

However, repentance is only the beginning. Repentance must lead to **faith**, for *‘without faith it is impossible to please God’* (Hebrews 11:6). We are to live in *‘repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ’* (Acts 20:21).

Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin, without faith repentance is of little use, it is self-examination without cleansing and leads only to remorse. Without repentance and faith, we are holding a counterfeit coin, which has no value in heaven. The book of Hebrews calls these two principles, elemental to the faith. It asks us to take them as part of the foundation of our lives. *‘Therefore, let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God’* (Hebrews 6:1).

God places no limits on who may come, for *‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’* (Acts 2:21). However, when we come, we must come through repentance.

These then are two defining principles of the Christian faith, we cannot depart from them, and still call ourselves Christian. Humanity is fallen, we are lost and in need of a saviour. Jesus is that Saviour, and we are called to respond in repentance and faith. Through repentance and faith, we are re-united with Christ, re-born into the kingdom of God, our sins are removed, and our whole being, body, soul and spirit is renewed in the image of the creator.

This is **the message we are called to share**, *‘We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God’* (2Corinthians 5:20).

## 10. His Substitutionary Atoning Death

***‘For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.’ 1Peter 3:18***

There are four things that are the bedrock of evangelical Christianity. Without them you can be involved in outreach and mission, you can sing all the modern songs, raise your hands and clap along, read your Bible and pray, and even have a testimony, but unless these four things are in place you have not understood the essence of what it is to be a Christian believer. These four things are the Deity of Christ, His Substitutionary Atoning Death, the Inspiration and Authority of the Word and Salvation by Faith.

We have already looked at the Deity of Christ, *‘who is God over all forever praised’ (Romans 9:5).*

The study of Christ is separated into two areas, His person and His work; who He was and what He did.

Now we turn to His substitutionary atoning death.

*‘Sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God’” (Hebrews 10:3-7).*

*‘Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied’ (Isaiah 53:10-11).*

The first purpose of Christ’s coming was to suffer and die for our sins. He did not come first as a teacher, a healer, or a prophet. He took

flesh so that He could offer Himself in sacrifice for our sins. *'God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement'* (Romans 3:25).

This is what so many of our great hymns are about. Wesley wrote, *'His blood atones for all our race, and sprinkles the throne of Grace.'* *'And can It be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood'* Cowper wrote, *'There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel vein, and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stain.'* *'How wonderful, how marvellous,'* *'He took my sins and my sorrows, and made them His very own,'* *'Wounded for me, wounded for me, there on the cross He 'was wounded for me'.*

*'Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?'* The sacrifice of Christ is the central theme of our worship, it will be celebrated through eternity, Christ died as a sacrifice for my sins.

Understanding that He is a Saviour, means we accept that we are a sinner, that we are fallen and need God's forgiveness and grace.

Of the 89 chapters in the Gospels, 30 concentrate on the death of Christ. The writers clearly want us to know that this is why He came.

The root meaning of the English word 'Atonement' is to bring together. It means to take two opposing parties and reconcile them to each other. It has been described as *'At - One - Ment.'*

Humanity is estranged from a Holy God because of our sin, so God in Christ acts to pay the debt for our sins.

In Hebrew teaching atonement can only be made through a blood sacrifice. *"The life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life"* (Leviticus 17:11). *'In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness'* (Hebrews 9:22). When Jesus is introduced to the crowds at His baptism, He is introduced as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29, 36). This is His purpose; this is why He lives and why He died. He *'gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and*

*to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good' (Titus 2:14).*

Three words help us understand this act of atonement. Substitute, Propitiate, Redeem.

**Substitution:** The Passover lamb was a sacrifice, but it was brought into the house a week before Passover. The priest would then visit and ask the householders, 'do you love the lamb?' If you did not love the lamb the sacrifice was not acceptable. When bringing a **sin offering** the worshipper placed their hands on the lamb and confessed their sins, so the lamb bore their sins, it became their substitute. They were saying that their sin was worthy of death, but God has provided a substitute.

This teaching goes right back to Abraham, when He offered Isaac on Mt Moriah. *'Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering"' (Genesis 22:6-8).*

We understand that Isaac, the son, was the original offering. Isaac is a picture of Christ, the son who actually was offered, but God stopped Abraham offering his son and provided a substitute. When we put our faith in Christ, we are putting our faith in Him as our substitute offering. Because He was slain for our sin, we will never be called to suffer the punishment of our sins. This means Christ's death is vicarious, it is effective on behalf of another. He stands in our place and in our stead. A Vicar, is one who stands in the place of Christ.

**Propitiation:** A word that is used four times in the New Testament, in Romans Hebrews and 1 John. The Authorised Version, New American Standard Version, and New King James Version, translate the word correctly, but it was dropped from the New International Version. *'He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world' (1John 2:2).*

Propitiation is an unpopular concept, because it is linked to God's wrath. It means to turn away wrath by offering a gift. The hymn, 'In Christ alone,' takes up this concept, saying 'The wrath of God was satisfied.' People do not like to think that God is angry at our sin, because God is love they cannot see that God is wrath. He is Holy and righteous, and all sin is an offence to His Holiness.

Yet it is God's love that motivates His actions, *'In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins'* (1John 4:10). It was God's love that provided the propitiation.

If we do not see that our sin is an offence to God's Holiness, we will never understand the anger He feels at sin. The word wrath is used 190 times in the scriptures; mostly about God's wrath against His wayward people, and 10 times in the Revelation against the whole world.

*'They mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people'* (2Chronicles 36:16).

*'Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment'* (Psalm 2:12). *'O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath'* (Psalm 6:1). *'Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due to you'* (Psalm 90:11).

*'The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of those who suppress the truth by their wickedness'* (Romans 1:18). *'Let no-one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient'* (Ephesians 5:6). *'They called 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 their wrath has come, and who can stand?"'* (Revelation 6:16-17).

**How is wrath turned away?** It was the sacrifice at the altar that turned away God's wrath. *'Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the LORD"'* (Numbers 16:46). The sacrifice stood between the people and the wrath of God.

This is a picture of the cross. His wrath poured out on Jesus, and it was extinguished on the cross. Max Lucado sees wrath as consuming fire streaming from the throne of God - the only safe place is behind the cross.

Make no mistake, God is Holy and Righteous, no one will get away with anything, and unless we have a sacrifice to turn away His wrath, we are utterly lost.

**Redemption:** Payment of a price to set free.

Egypt is the archetypal Old Testament picture of redemption; the cost of the redemption of the Israelites from Egypt was the death of the first born. The lamb was sacrificed in their place, as a substitute. The wrath of God fell on Egypt who had no sacrifice, but not on Israel who were sheltering under the blood. They were redeemed, by blood from slavery.

This redemption story is told again and again in the Old Testament. Boaz pays the price to redeem Ruth and Naomi. God redeems Israel from Babylon, and promises a redeemer for the world.

We are also redeemed from slavery, that is slavery to sin. *'Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin"'* **John 8:34**. We have been taken captive by sin, we are slaves to sin, but Christ sees our plight and comes as a redeemer to pay the price and set us free.

*'You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect'* (**1Peter 1:18**).

This is the purpose of Christ's coming; He came to offer Himself as a sacrifice of atonement for our sin. He died as our substitute, He turned away God's righteous wrath, He bought us back from slavery to sin, and all He asks of us, as our High Priest, is 'do you love the lamb?'

If we love Him we will follow Him, if we love Him we will worship Him, if we love Him we are the redeemed.

This is the cornerstone of the Christian faith, it is what our hope is built upon, Christ is God and died for me. 'His blood can make the foulest clean, His blood avails for me' (Charles Wesley).

## 11. THE JUDGEMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

*'We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to them for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.'*

2Corinthians 5:10

The one thing that is for certain, is that we are not certain of all the events surrounding the return of Christ. Some events are clearly revealed, others are in dispute.

We can say for certain that Christ will return for his own, (see 1Thessalonians 4:15-18 *'the dead in Christ will rise'* and *'we who are alive will be caught up in the air'*). That return will be personal (1Thessalonians 4:16), visible (Acts 1:11), sudden (Matthew 24:27), unexpected (1Thessalonians 5:2-3), glorious (Hebrews 9:28) and triumphant (Revelation 12:5).

Up to this point evangelicals agree, here the difficulties begin. What will follow the resurrection of the dead and the rapture? How does the time of great tribulation fit into the end times? What will Israel's part be? When will the battle of Armageddon occur? What is the link between the tribulation, the antichrist and the wrath of God? Will the church endure tribulation? Will there be a 1000-year millennial reign? These are interesting and ultimately future questions that will be fulfilled in their proper time.

I am more concerned with Peter's question, *'Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming'* (2Peter 3:11-12). We should therefore, *'Run in such a way as to get the prize'* (1Corinthians 9:24).

Most Christians understand that there is a Hell to shun and a Heaven to gain, but few realise that believers will also be judged by Christ. If we are to live in the light of eternity, we need to understand that at the judgement, there will be reward and loss. Knowing we will be judged should focus our thought and cause us to prepare for that

great day, becoming mature in our understanding, and holy in our lives.

The Proverbs tell us that *"the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom"* (Proverbs 9:10), and that *"the fear of the LORD leads to life"* (Proverbs 19:23). The New Testament church walked *"in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 9:31 NKJV). Today many Christians seek the comfort of the Holy Spirit but know little of the fear of the Lord.

We understand from Scripture that there will be two **judgements**: one is the 'Great White Throne', where those who reject Christ will be judged along with the devil and his angels of darkness. The other will occur at the resurrection of the righteous when we will all stand before the judgement seat of Christ. The one is of the goats, the other of the sheep (Matthew 25:31-46); the one is for sin, the other for faithful service. Both judgements will be genuine judgements, our sins are not overlooked.

### 1. Great white throne

*'Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire'* (Revelation 20:11-15 NKJV).

This is a fearful judgement, there is no advocate and no court of appeal; it is irrevocable and eternal. It will also be proportional, for each will be *'judged according to his works.'* This is a judgement of sin, and a judgement to condemnation. Believers will not be at the great white throne for our condemnation fell on Christ for, *'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed'*

(1Peter 2:24-25 RSV). Because He has borne our sin, we will never bear the penalty for sin; but because He has borne our sins, He bears the right to judge us. In Christ, our sins are not simply overlooked they are looked over to the Cross. They are not forgotten, they are forgiven.

## 2. The judgement seat of Christ

There is still a judgement of believers. *‘We will all stand before God’s judgement seat. It is written: “‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’” So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God’* (Romans 14:10-12). Here Paul is speaking to believers.

The judgement seat of Christ will be of reward and of loss, not a prize-giving at a school sports day. Many Christians are unprepared to stand before God in Judgement. They think salvation is all there is and have not matured or grown into their reward.

The principle we need to hold in mind is the principle of **proportional reward**. That each person’s reward differs in heaven is very plain in the scripture. Not every Christian will receive the same reward.

Paul puts it in a simile when he speaks of the resurrection: *‘The sun has one kind of splendour, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendour. So, will it be with the resurrection of the dead’* (1Corinthians 15:41-42). We will not all shine with the same splendour in God’s heavenly kingdom.

**The disciples understood this.** *‘Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”’* (Mark 10:35-37). They understood that in Heaven some would take first place, near to His throne.

**Jesus’ parables teach this.** Jesus’ parable of the minas shows the principle of proportional reward. *‘He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So, he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas.*

*'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'... The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.' 'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.' The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.' His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'* (Luke 19:12-13, 16-19). The teaching is clear, those who prove trustworthy in this life will be trusted with greater honour in the next. *"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So, if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?"* Luke 16:10-11

Jesus continues in this very shocking illustration as He instructs Peter, *"That servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be **beaten with many blows**. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be **beaten with few blows**. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked"* (Luke 12:47-48). Whatever we understand by the servant being beaten with few or many blows, the clear teaching is that our reward is proportional to our service.

God does not only know our actions, He knows our hearts, and this is where the change must occur if we are to receive the reward God seeks to give us. The moment we step out of the clothing of this life and into eternity, what we were on the inside will be clearly evident to everyone. Our motives, our thoughts, our character, our inner secrets will be openly displayed. *"What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs"* (Luke 12:3). *"There is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open"* (Luke 8:17). *"I say to you that for every idle word people may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgement. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned"* (Matthew 12:36-37 NKJV). God tells us, *'then we shall know fully, even as we are fully known'* (1Corinthians 13:12).

When we stand before 'The Judgement Seat of Christ' what we were in this life will be transparent. There will be reward and loss; **the reward will be just**, as it will exactly measure who we were in Christ. We will be rewarded according to our faith and our obedience. We will be satisfied with our reward because it will perfectly reflect who we are in Christ. Yet our sins will not be hidden; they will be clearly known, not to make us squirm and feel ashamed, but rather to show how wonderful God's grace and mercy are, that Christ should save sinners like us. His beauty and forgiveness will seem all the more wonderful against the dark motives and inner failures of our sin. We will not boast about what we have done, but He will celebrate what He has done in us. Our testimony will be, 'this is what I truly am, and Christ has redeemed me.'

The judgement will not just be a reward, for many there **will also be loss**. The Scriptures clearly show this. *'No-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, that person's work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of everyone's work. If what they have built survives, they will receive their reward. If it is burned up, they will suffer loss; the builder, however, will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames'* (1Corinthians 3:11-15).

Every Christian builds their life on Christ and His finished work of salvation, but how we build on this foundation will be reflected in Heaven. We can build our own house, with gold, silver and precious stones, which are materials refined by fire; or wood, hay and stubble, which are burned up in the flames. We need to avoid our life work being based upon wood, hay and straw in the sight of God.

**This is our situation**; there are two judgements, one for sin and one for service. If Christ has forgiven our sin, then we will not be judged to Hell, the wrath of God has fallen on Christ and we are forgiven, but we will be judged for service. For *'We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to*

*them for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad'* (2Corinthians 5:10).

### **What will we be judged for and how do we gain a reward?**

Firstly, we will be judged for our **obedience** to God's revealed word. There is an old saying that comes from the Puritans: 'the law sends us to Christ for salvation, and Christ sends us back to the law for sanctification.' There is truth in this, but it is not the whole truth.

We are called to walk in obedience to the **Word of God and the Spirit of God**. There is a great danger here of religious pride. If we manage to obey the Word of God, the result is that we think we are doing fairly well as Christians. Then we begin to judge those who do not obey the same set of religious commands and rules as us. We can actually begin to measure our progress by how well we keep the commandments. What has happened? We have moved from grace back to law.

This is the attitude of the **Pharisee**. It is rife in the Church and shows in many ways. It shows in the superiority of one denomination over another, and open suspicion of other believers. It shows in putting church rules before the Scriptures and in insisting that our experience must take primacy of place over God's Word. We are called to obey God's Word in the power of His Spirit. His word is not just a book of rules; it is a book of life, and its top two commandments are: 'to love God' and 'love our neighbours' (Luke 10:27). If our doctrine does not lead us to a profound love of God and His people then our doctrine is profoundly mistaken. However, if our experience leads us to disobey God's Word in the name of love, our experience is profoundly disobedient.

If we are to stand clean on judgement day we need to get beyond legalism into a relationship with God. *"God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth"* (John 4:24 NKJV).

The attitude of religion is a '**can't do**' attitude, it is negative and prohibitive. God wants a relationship with His people, not a religion. It is the **Spirit of God who enables our spirit to walk in truth**. It is

not a matter of self-effort and grim determination as we keep God's commandments; it is walking so close to the Holy Spirit that we could not even think of wounding God and losing His presence. *'Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit'* (Galatians 5:25).

Here is the deeper truth; God is looking at our **attitudes**. *'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but **made himself of no reputation**, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, **he humbled himself**'* (Philippians 2:5-8).

If the Son of God was clothed in humility, we have no option but to **walk humbly** before Him. *'What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God'* (Micah 6:8). The first virtue a Christian must put on is **humility**. The badge of heaven on earth is not glory but humility, it is not self-centredness, it is Christ-likeness. Peter tells us to *'be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble"'* (1Peter 5:5 NKJV).

### **The importance of Humility**

We have already looked at the importance of **humility**: Jesus says, *'I am meek and lowly in heart'* (Matthew 11:29 KJV). The world looks for 'pride of place' but Jesus says, *"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth"* (Matthew 5:5).

True humility does not mean despising ourselves, it is realising that all our strength is found in God. The Nelson's Bible Dictionary defines humility as: 'A freedom from arrogance that grows out of the recognition that all we have and are comes from God.'

Selwyn Hughes identifies three areas of true humility, **1**: It is a right estimate of ourselves. We understand that we are sinful by nature, but we also know that we are valued and loved as children of God. **2**: Self-forgetfulness; for the humble person their life does not revolve around their goals and desires, it revolves around God's goals and desires. A humble person is so taken up with Christ and seeking to be a blessing that selfish desires are burned up in His presence. **3**: The

humble person recognises that without God they can do nothing. The proud person thinks God can do nothing without them.

### **Pride is the opposite of humility**

The smallest hint of pride in our hearts will separate us from God's blessing, because *“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time* (1Peter 5:5-6). The attitude of humility brings God's favour, *‘for though the LORD is exalted, yet he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar’* (Palms 138:6 NASU).

Without humility we cannot walk in the presence of the Lord; without humility all our works are wood, hay and straw; they will be burned up in the fire of Judgement. The hymn writer understood this when they wrote: *‘Let holy charity my outer vesture be and lowliness become my inner clothing; true lowliness of heart, which takes the humbler part, and o’er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.’* God is not looking for outward obedience to religious laws but an inward attitude of heart, which means we are beginning to think and act as Christ would think and act.

### **Robbers of our reward**

There are several obvious areas which will rob us of our reward.

- **The first is compromising habits.** Some sins are hard to break, they have a hold on us and they are often related to lust. [However, it can just as easily be a habit to moan and complain; a negative attitude to life and people can also be a habit.]

We sin because we enjoy it, but we do not realise our habitual sins are bringing death into our lives. *‘Each one is tempted when, by your own evil desire, you are dragged away and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death’* (James 1:14-15). If we **make a truce** with our besetting sins then we will never know the victory Christ desires in our lives. Jesus is very clear here, He says, *“I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it for ever”* (John 8:34-35). As children of God, we are not called to make a truce with our sins;

we are called to gain the victory over our sins. Jesus did not say: “blessed are the truce makers”, He said, “*blessed are the peace makers*” (Matthew 5:9). We need to battle our sins till we win the victory and so have gained peace. In over 40 years of walking the Christian road I have found that the only thing that keeps me from sin is living in the presence of God. When I am too busy and God seems distant, sin is attractive; when God is close, sin is repulsive. Habits that master us must be brought to the Cross in confession and repentance so that we can find new life and strength in Christ. If we say our habits are not sinful, we are only deceiving ourselves.

- **Our Relationships.** It is those we are closest to that we often hurt the most. Husbands, do you love your wife? We took a vow to love on our wedding day, but does our wife know to the depths of her soul that she is loved? We will be judged on how our relationships are lived out. If we are more interested in our work than our family, we will be judged. If our children do not know how precious they are to us, then we have missed God’s best for our lives and theirs. A strong marriage relationship is the most important thing we can build on this earth. Our families are a gift from God and we must invest the time needed to show them our love and devotion. When they take second place to anything but God, we stand under the judge’s scrutiny.

**Our relationships** do not only include our immediate family; they extend to our Christian brothers and sisters. Many of the New Testament epistles begin with doctrine but then move on to instruct Christians on how to treat each other. Corinthians speaks of division factions, court cases and immorality. Galatians, Romans and Colossians remind us that there are no longer any racial barriers between believers. ‘*There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all*’ (Colossians 3:11). The most important thing is to treat each other with honour and respect. ‘*Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience*’ (Colossians 3:12).

These injunctions to live as people of the light, carrying the attitude of Christ toward each other, are the expected application of our doctrine. If we are complaining, uncooperative, critical, accusative,

bad-tempered and unkind to God's people, then we have disobeyed His word and God Himself will hold us to account. The Bible is very clear on this: *'Don't grumble against each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!'* (James 5:9). Our attitudes matter to God; the way we treat our family and our brothers or sisters in Christ is measured by God and He will hold us to account. *'Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith'* (Galatians 6:10 NKJV).

- **Forgiveness.** Again, the Scripture makes this very simple. *'Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you'* (Colossians 3:13). If we hold any grudges as we pass through the gates of Heaven, we will lose our reward. If Christ could forgive His persecutors and He lives in us, then He can give us the strength to **forgive** those who wound us.

Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant focuses on this very issue. Having been forgiven a great debt by the King, the servant was unwilling to forgive someone who owed him a small sum. *"The same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me that which you owe.' And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.' And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, "O thou wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt, because you desired me to: Should you not also have had compassion on our fellow servant, even as I had pity on you?" And his lord was wrath, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you do not forgive from your heart everyone their trespasses'"* (Matthew 18:28-35 KJV modernised).

- **Finances.** What we own is not supposed to be exclusively for our benefit. Western culture is inherently greedy and self-centred.

Our wealth is a trust from God to be used at His disposal. Jesus says: *“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?”* (Luke 16:10-11).

All our wealth is a trust. Do you use what you have to bless God's people now? If the answer is no, then you would not bless others if God granted you more. Do you give generously now, even if you only have a little? Then you will give generously when God trusts you with more. Many years ago, I had a church member who won an amount on the football pools; they came to me and genuinely said, “if only we had won a little more, then we would have been able to give some to the church”. Our use of money matters to heaven; it will either gain us reward or loss. *‘He that sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully. (Let) each man (do) according as he hath purposed in his heart: not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver’* (2Corinthians 9:6-7 ASV modernised).

**Heaven does not measure things as we do;** what seems of great worth here may have very little value to God. We could find that our doctrine is worth very little if we do not live out the life of Christ from the heart. I believe if, under God's loving guidance, we begin to address prayerfully these areas of habits, relationships, forgiveness and finance we will not lose our reward. *‘Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrong, and there is no favouritism’* (Colossians 3:23-25).

Remember we are not talking about salvation; we are speaking about our eternal reward. It is my belief that in heaven our **spirit rather than our body will be what is most prominent and visible.** (This does not mean we will not have a body, just that the physical will be less important than the spiritual.) What we are in Christ will be clearly seen, we will be transparent before God and each other. We will be forgiven, for the Judgement fell on Christ, but we will have

the rank or standing that exactly fits our walk and our works. Our battle scars and the victories we have won will be evident to all. Like Jesus we will bear the wounds of triumph.

**In training for reigning:** Jesus' promises of reigning alongside Him are only given to those who overcome. Eight times in the Revelation Jesus promises honour and glory to overcomers. *"To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God"* (Revelation 2:7 KJV).

*"He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death"* (Revelation 2:11 KJV).

*"To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna"* (Revelation 2:17 KJV).

*"He that overcomes, and keeps my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations"* (Revelation 2:26 KJV).

*"He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life"* (Revelation 3:5 KJV).

*"Him that overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of my God"* (Revelation 3:12 KJV).

*"To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne"* (Revelation 3:21 KJV).

*"He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son"* (Revelation 21:7 KJV).

If we are to inherit the reward God seeks to give us **what must we do?** If we would escape judgement then God has told us to judge ourselves. *'If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged'* (1Corinthians 11:31 NKJV). God's call is to face and judge our sins now, so that He will not have to judge them later. What we are when we step into heaven, we will be through all eternity. In order

to do this, we must go back to the Cross, we must face our sin and see ourselves as we really are. Then in repentance we must ask God to change us and remake us in the image of Christ, as the people He wants us to be; this is a prayer He is seeking to answer. *'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'* (1John 1:7-9 KJV). We are called to walk in the light of God's presence, with the Spirit of God and the Word of God for our guide. When we fall, we are called to come in confession and seek forgiveness. We cannot walk with God while we are walking in sin; repentance is the beginning of overcoming. Walking with the tender hand of the Holy Spirit on our conscience is the next step. Seeking His presence, as the first part of this book outlines, is the means by which we overcome sin and find our reward.

It does not matter how we look to other people, if our doctrine does not lead us to desire a deeper walk with Christ in love and humility then we have no reward. What is valued by people is of very little value in heaven. That is why we are told, *"Many who are first will be last, and the last first"* (Mark 10:31). What we do today has direct consequences in Eternity. How we build our lives upon the rock of Christ matters.

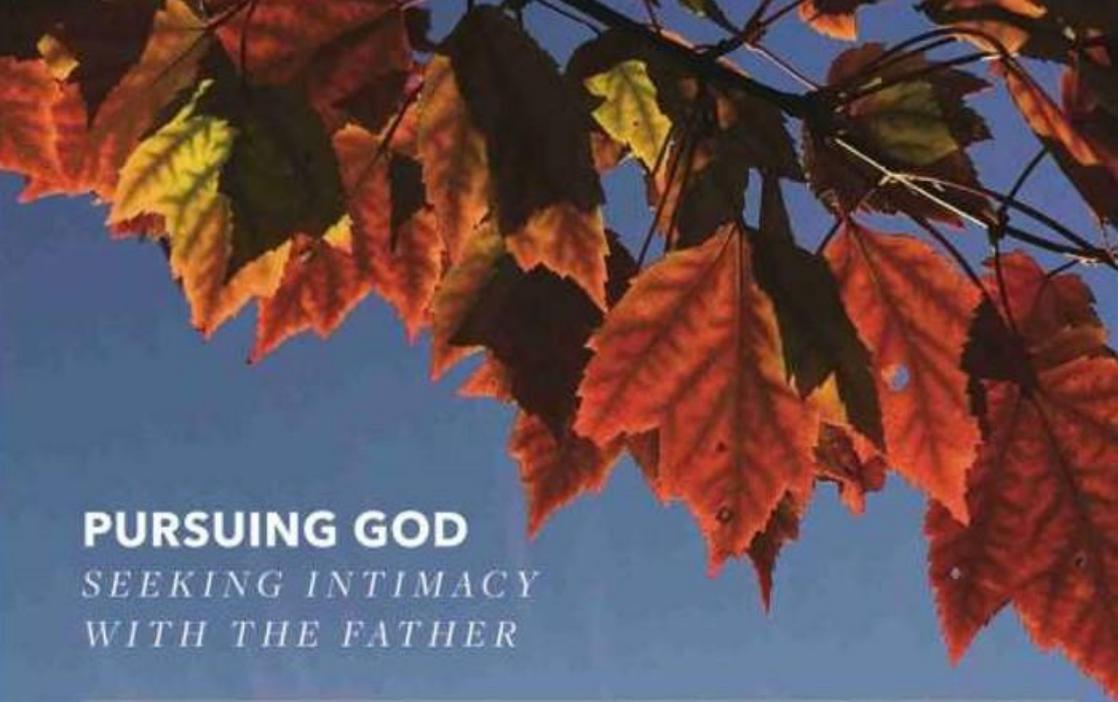
There is a judgement seat for Christians and in that day what we are will be seen, the *'day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of everyone's work. If what they have built survives, they will receive their reward. If it is burned up, they will suffer loss; the builder, however, will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames'* (1Corinthians 3:13-15).

Our reward in heaven depends on our faith, our obedience and our attitude today. By God's grace each of us can be an overcomer. For, *'We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due them for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad'* (2Corinthians 5:10).

**A Prayer:** Father, I understand that my sins cause pain to your heart. Sometimes I am so attached to my sin; teach me to judge my attitudes and actions so that you will not have to judge me. Show me how to walk in repentance and humility, and deepen my desire to know you. Make me a lover of God and a lover of your people. Grant that I may become an overcomer and teach me how to delight in your presence.

In Jesus' name. Amen.





## **PURSuing GOD**

*SEEKING INTIMACY  
WITH THE FATHER*

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Kevin came to know Christ in 1979, and initially trained for the Pentecostal Ministry. He studied at Mattersey Hall A.O.G. Bible College from 1981 to 1984, and served in Macclesfield and Ellesmere Port. He took his Bachelor's Degree at Hartley Victoria & Manchester University in 1995, while training for the Methodist Ministry. Taking a Master of Arts at Cliff College in 2007. Kevin is married to Anne-Marie, they have 5 children and 4 grandchildren. He has served the Methodist Church in Radcliffe, Jersey, Banks and Gornal and Sedgley. His main preaching ministry is in Bible exposition, and teaching, which he shares as a committed evangelical and charismatic.



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