

The background is a watercolor painting. At the top, the title is written in a white, cursive font. Below the title, there is a circular clock face with Roman numerals, rendered in black and white. The clock is positioned in the upper left quadrant. In the lower half of the image, two figures are depicted in a reddish-brown hue. The figure on the left is walking and carrying a long staff or branch over their shoulder. The figure on the right is walking and pushing a wheelbarrow. The overall background is a mix of soft, blended colors including purple, blue, green, and yellow.

We shall also Bear the Image of the Heavenly

Discovering the Salvation
Plan of God within Creation
and the Garden of Eden

Richard Flint

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We Shall Also Bear
the Image of the Heavenly

by
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The cover design is taken from an original
watercolour painting called by the
author.

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Chapter One

A Sanctified Creation: The New Creation Seeded in the Original

The development of the early spiritual history of humanity is captured in the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis. This first part of the Bible tends to be dismissed by many today, even among believers, as merely cultural folk tales emanating out of a simple and naïve society. A society that was trying to make sense of their existence as best it could within its limited level of scientific knowledge and understanding. However, we would want to challenge this prevailing idea of human cultural evolution. Indeed, we would want to challenge evolution in all its mistaken forms, and to recognise this part of the Bible as being formative and therefore should be regarded as important for understanding all that is to follow. After all, perhaps we do need reminding at this point, it is not what is the word of God but who is the Word of God.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word
was with God, and the Word was God.
The same was in the beginning with God.
All things were made by him; and without him
was not any thing made that was made.
In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

John 1:1-4

For my belief is that it is here, in what is commonly labelled as the primeval history section of the Bible, that we have the very foundations of spiritual truth concerning the Lord God's creative and salvific purposes for all mankind. Here we find the first iteration of the principles, themes, motifs, streams and types that comprise the soteriological purpose of the Lord God that we find more broadly developed within scripture, and that, ultimately, these all find their fulfilment in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Indeed, it is in Genesis 1-11 that we have the seed bed from which all else will grow. As we read in Paul's second letter written to his young protégé Timothy this unenviable truth begins here,

All scripture is given by inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for
correction, for instruction in righteousness:
That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly
furnished unto all good works.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

And if we were to follow the young earth hypothesis¹
these first eleven chapters also capture very succinctly for

us the first 2000 years of the earth's history following. The rest of the Old Testament providing the next 2000 years with its focus on the history of the Lord God's own special people, Israel. And finally the New Testament takes us from the first incarnation of the Son of God, through the history of the early church and in the final book, the Revelation of St. John, we are taken through the end times, the second incarnation of the son of God, His Millennial reign and the end of the old heaven and earth and the coming down of the New Jerusalem as the eternal bride and the establishment of the new heaven and the new earth.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem,
coming down from God out of heaven, prepared
as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying,
Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and
he will dwell with them, and they shall be his
people, and God himself shall be with them, and
be their God.

Revelation 21:2-3

Moving on, for our purposes we will be concentrating on the beginning of the beginning, Genesis chapters 1-3. It is here that we believe we will find the very purpose and intent of Father God for mankind expressed within this narrative. This is where we find His heart's desire to dwell in relationship with the man He has created. And to this end we will also discover that for any man or woman²who would aspire to tabernacle or dwell in relationship with Father God

they cannot stay the same. They would need to be changed, to be formed into His image, indeed, the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. The past has to go and the new needs to bear fruit in their heart. From the outset we discover that He is looking for relationship and a dwelling place within which to enjoy a relationship which would be conducted in His realm and on His terms, which is the realm of the spirit. This is the same heart's desire, or burden of the word, that we read here concerning His first love, Israel.

The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel,
saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the
heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth,
and formeth the spirit of man within him.

Zechariah 12:1

As we see here, this relationship that the Lord God is looking for goes beyond the individual to a people gathered together into an initial representative group of humanity, the children of Israel. Later, through the cross of Jesus Christ, the relationship will be able to return to the individual once more, as the cross does its work on the heart of mankind. Individuals who will then be gathered together to become the ekklesia or the church, as it became known. Potentially a wonderful a living community of that would be built upon self-less love, and which received a variety of descriptors in the letters of the apostle Paul such as: the body of Christ³, the temple of the Spirit⁴, the household of God⁵ or even the Israel of God⁶. Indeed, a gathering which would find commonality through the Spirit and who will then be prepared and made

ready for the ultimate expression of this relationship; the bride and her bridegroom. A foundational principle which is expressed clearly again by Paul,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

Ephesians 1:4-6

If we can stop here for a moment or two before moving on, we must not miss something that is obliquely expressed within a phrase used by Paul in this scripture. Notice the remarkable statement being made here by the apostle that we have been chosen in Him since before the foundation of the world⁷. This is wonderfully mysterious in itself, just imagine the conversation in the pre-creation hall of heaven when the list of spiritual blessings that are described by Paul here were being decided upon by the Godhead and the list of those to whom it would apply⁸. And moreover, your name was on it! However, there is more here for us, because the word translated foundation here actually carries a meaning in koine Greek, the original language in which this was written,

to inseminate. This was how the Greek word, *katabole*, was used in common parlance of the time. Literally, Paul was expressing the idea that the world was thrown down into place in the creation and that with this all these wonderful spiritual truths were seeded into the unfolding fabric of the created order. Paul says something else that is helpful here,

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse...

Romans 1:20

The invisible things of the Godhead, all His spiritual purposes and intentions are there to be seen within His creation if only we have the eyes to see. So, therefore, for us as we take our time to explore the physical elements of the creation narrative, we can expect to find the spiritual seed that has been released within it that will in due time bring about the incarnation of Christ, the cross and, as we read above, this includes you and I walking with the Lord as children of God. And to look forward for all that is to come,

...as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,
That he might present it to himself a glorious

church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Ephesians 5: 25b-27

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:2

And here, we have gone full circle; we are back at the beginning, as we will see when we enter the garden, with a man and a woman being brought together to potentially enjoy eternity with Father God.

Foundational Principles Seeded within Genesis 1

We therefore begin at the beginning of the beginning. Indeed, in turning to the first three verses in the Bible we can identify the wellspring for three important spiritual principles,

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light

Genesis 1:1-3

1) Time

In verse 1 we read the following:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Of what is this the beginning? Crucially, it is the beginning of the one linear thing that renders this beginning as understandable. It is the beginning of time itself. Only if you are living within a timed reality does the idea of a beginning of anything make sense.

This is the moment the clocks were started. Clocks plural, because significantly at this precise moment of the beginning of creation two different concepts of time have their origins. This temporal duality is expressed linguistically within both Biblical Hebrew and classical koine Greek⁹ within scripture. In both these languages there are different ways of describing and, therefore, of understanding time. In Hebrew, within which there are a greater variety of words that are used to describe time, we find that the chronological clock that provides literal time is expressed by the terms 'yom' or 'et'. Whereas, Hebrew words such as 'moad' and 'zeman' carry a different meaning, which is the more conceptual idea of an appointed time, place or season. Similarly, in the New Testament, within the koine Greek in which it is written, we have two main ways of describing time, *chronos* or *kairos*, and these are used fairly consistently. The first term *chronos* refers to the time bound by factual order in which things happen and it is from this term that we get the English term *chronology*,

which means the order in which things occur in literal time. However, when the term *kairos* is used, similar to *moad*, it refers to the idea of the right time for events to occur within the *chronos*. In Ecclesiastes 3, in what might be described as an ode to time itself, we find the following,

To everything there is a season (*zeman*), and a
time (*et*) to every purpose under the heaven
Ecclesiastes 3:1

Interestingly, in the Hebrew it is the word ‘season’ that is a translation of a Hebrew term for the more conceptual idea of the right time for something to happen, whilst the word ‘time’ is a more prosaic understanding of time as chronology, however, it is the reverse in the Greek translation of this verse in the Septuagint¹⁰ in which it reads as follows,

To everything there is a ‘*chronos*’, and a ‘*kairos*’
to every purpose under the heaven.

Either way, therefore, what this is saying is that every event has both a temporal and a spiritual reality and, therefore, both carry temporal and spiritual timing. Spiritually speaking this distinction is very important for us as it highlights the reality that as the chronological timetable of history has unfolded, alongside this another clock is also ticking, the God clock. Therefore, beyond mere chronology we are inevitably lead by this to the conclusion that all events need to be understood as if they are guided, determined within the context of God’s own time piece; *kairos* time. Indeed, this is the God given

measure of time within which the soteriological purposes of God are to be found within scripture and seeded within creation, such as is clearly expressed here by Paul,

For when we were yet without strength, in **due time** Christ died for the ungodly.

Romans 5:6

the 'due time' here is in kairos time, this is the word that is used here in the Greek. Jesus came and died for the sins of the world at a chronological time in human history, however, the timing that is significant for all of us is that it was also in God's kairos time. God chose in what year, on what day and at which hour His Son died on the cross for the world. It is all about His timing. Therefore, where and whenever we see within scripture a move of God by and through which He impacts the affairs of man, God is working to His own kairos clock. And significantly, we need to know that this is true for us today and that within each of our own lives as believers and disciples of Christ, He is still using this same time piece with regards to the unfolding of His prophetic timetable for the world and for our own lives. We were all born once chronologically, such as in 1959 for myself, however, we also need a date of new birth, a date that is given by the Lord God himself, according to His kairos, a time in which we are due, our due date, to meet our saviour Jesus Christ and His cross. For me this came nearly 12 years later.

In the beginning, both of the these two types of time were running concurrently. Indeed, they were ticking along nicely together in the Garden of Eden. Until that moment in

chronological time when the link was broken. This occurred at the Fall. At which point kairos parted company from chronos. From this moment on God would still intervene in the affairs of a fallen creation and when He did it is at this point that His kairos would once again reconnect with chronos, such as we have seen above, with the due time of the advent of Christ and the cross, an event in time which itself is prophetically foretold within these early chapters of Genesis,

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Genesis 3:15

The take away for all of us is that the creative work of the Lord God is time bound. We are told that the followers of Jesus are,

...chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

Ephesians 1:4-6

Therefore, from this scripture we can be wonderfully assured that the Lord God will be breaking into the earth's

chronological time line to claim a people for Himself. Further, this determinative choice will go beyond a beautiful moment of revelation of the efficacy of the cross for the individual; it also embraces the ongoing journey by which this individual might then follow Jesus to become a mature disciple. Indeed, an individual who will be characterised by their quality of integrity, holiness and love.¹¹ To this end they will also have a secured destination through His grace to find a home in the gathering of humanity that is 'the beloved', which is His bride, the true body of Christ.¹²

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also
which shall believe on me through their word;
That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in
me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in
us: that the world may believe that thou hast
sent me.

And the glory which thou gavest me I have
given them; that they may be one, even as we are
one:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be
made perfect in one; and that the world may
know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved
them, as thou hast loved me.

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast
given me, be with me where I am; that they may
behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for
thou lovedst me before the foundation of the
world.

John 17: 20-24

**Our time is in the Father's hands
and His clock is still ticking for each one of us-
it is never too late**

2) The Dwelling Place for Spiritual Life

In the second verse in Genesis 1 we find the next foundational spiritual concept where we read the following,

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Genesis 1:2

The picture we are given here is of the state of creation immediately prior to the beginning of the actual creative process. Here, we seem to be being shown an earth that has no recognisable form with everything lying in impenetrable darkness. The question that does require an answer here is, why was the Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters? Specifically, what are we being shown here? Could it be that He, the Spirit of the living God, was looking for a home, somewhere to potentially live in relationship with others?

Indeed, this is an idea that does seem to find expression within the Hebrew term that is translated 'moved upon' in this verse. In the Hebrew language the root of a word will carry a breadth of meaning which is often helpful for us to gain an understanding and spiritual insight into an underlying meaning of what that word might be saying at any particular point. The important kernel that is carried by this term is for

the Spirit to be moved with emotional feelings such as those of parental love, and, therefore, potentially we might see here the idea of a bird brooding over a clutch of eggs in a nest.

Developing this idea further, as the Spirit of God was moving over the embryonic creation, the feelings He carried for it were that of a protective parent. For Him, therefore, we might surmise that this creation was always designed to provide for Him the potential for a home, and a place for relationship. This was seeded within the very fabric of creation. After all, what is the time frame within which the apostle Paul uses when outlining the salvation purposes of the Lord for the believers in first century Asia Minor?

...he hath chosen us in him **before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love...
accepted in the beloved
Ephesians 1:4

Indeed, the witness of scripture does indeed provide us with a series of human groupings within which the Lord God's ultimate relational purposes are foretold. Starting in the garden of Eden we have the original created couple, moving on to the family of Noah. Beyond, this we meet the family of Abraham, the father of faith and then onto the chosen children of Israel walking to freedom from Egypt and towards the land of promise under the leadership of Moses. Each stage is redolent with symbolism that points to a gathered people, ultimately this will find its fulfilment in the bride of Christ, a people who will be indwelt by the

very presence of this same brooding Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who has at last found His eternal home and dwelling place. Him in us and we in Him.¹⁴ Indeed, from the outset, this is a creation that carries His familial imprint, indeed an imprint that presages the new creation whereby, as we will see in the next chapter, this will also find its fulfilment. To produce a special brood who have the potential and the wherewithal to even carry His very life; a life in the Spirit. After all, it is this same Spirit, the dove, who has been sent by the Father and through the Son into our hearts by whom we cry, Abba Father!

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ...

Romans 8:14-17a

Look at what we are heirs to,

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his

people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

Revelation 21:2-3

This is the wonderful offer that finds its inception in the first chapter of the Bible and its fulfilment within the last. However, now is the time that a response is required from anyone who would want to follow Jesus home to claim this inheritance. A response that is clearly delineated for us all in his second letter to the believers in Corinth,

...for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people¹³.

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

2 Corinthians 6: 16b-7:1

This phrase, I will be their God, and they shall be my people, that Paul uses here is one that is found significantly within the prophetic record of the Old Testament, specifically within the prophecies of first Jeremiah and then later from

the prophets Ezekiel and Zechariah. It will be interesting to look at these references to help gauge the profound nature of what the apostle Paul intends to communicate to us through his use of this particular phrase here.

And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.

Jeremiah 24:7

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:
Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:
But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; **and will be their God, and they shall be my people.**
Jeremiah 31:31-33

And they shall be my people, and I will be their God:

And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of

them, and of their children after them

Jeremiah 32:38-39

Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.

My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, **I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

Ezekiel 37:26-27

And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: **and they shall be my people, and I will be their God,** in truth and in righteousness.

Zechariah 8:8

The context for each and everyone of these Old Testament prophecies is the restoration of Israel both spiritually and geographically as the Lord God returns them to their land. For us, the interesting thing is that Paul, by the use of the phrase I will be their God, and they shall be my people in his letter to Gentile believers, is actually applying the fulfilment of these prophecies, at least in part, to the body of Christ. And moreover, Paul is applying the fulfilment of the prophecy to a group Gentiles who are gathering in Christ in the Greek city of Corinth. Why is he doing this?

In the prologue to John's gospel, when describing the incarnation of the Son of God, we read the following,

He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:11-13

The reason Paul, a Pharisee of the highest repute before falling from this particular donkey, is making the point he is here because Israel missed their Messiah when He came the first time. However, The Lord God is faithful, and His word is true and there will be a time for them to become part of the Israel of God¹⁵, when they will recognise Him who they have pierced¹⁶ as their Messiah and say Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord¹⁶. And Paul, in his comprehensive teaching on Israel that we find in his letter to the believers in Rome, does also remind us that the prophetic witness that we have noted concerning Israel still stands.

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

Romans 11:25-27

As we also read in scripture,

For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people:

But because the LORD loved you...

Deuteronomy 7:6-8a

It is here that we can recognise the heart of the brooding Spirit of God, motivated in all He does by love and commitment. There is unfinished business here.

3) Light

The third verse of the first book in the Bible introduces us to the third foundational spiritual truth where read the following:

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

Genesis 1:3

What, indeed, is this quality of light that was created on the first day of creation? After all, this cannot have been the physical light of the sun or the stars in the heavens for these were not created until the fourth day¹⁸. It is important that we allow scripture to provide its own commentary on what this might mean. In Job we read the following,

To bring back his soul from the pit, to be
enlightened with the light of the living
Job 33:30

The word translated 'enlightened' here is the same as the word used in Genesis 1 for 'light'. In this verse, it carries the meaning of the life force within a man. Therefore, we might be able to understand that in Genesis 1 the meaning of the term could be to the effect that at the outset of God's creative work he seeded the created space with the capacity for life to come into existence. However, perhaps this sounds a little too evolutionary and new agey for me.

Alternatively, in Psalm 18:28 we read the following,

For thou wilt light my candle: the LORD my
God will enlighten my darkness.

The meaning of the metaphorical language used here by David is that light can be likened to revelation from God; light is revelation, and indeed within the term enlightenment we also have expressed the same idea that to receive revelation can be likened to a light bulb or a candle being lit in our

minds or hearts. Therefore, this is also a wonderful possibility, that the 'light' that we find seeding the creative space on the first day is the capacity to receive God's inspired revelation. The same idea is expressed in Job 29:3,

When his candle shined upon my head, and
when by his light I walked through darkness...

Indeed, Jesus describes himself as the light of the world,

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am
the light of the world: he that followeth me shall
not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of
life.

John 8:12

And in **Matthew 5:14** true disciples are described similarly,

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on
an hill cannot be hid.

Therefore, if we were to accept this explanation, and we do, then the challenge for all of us is to find our own capacity to shine forth in a world of spiritual darkness with the revelation of Jesus also in our lives through the visible presence of the fruit of His Spirit in our lives. To find Jesus the light of life and to be set ablaze by Him

**We live in his perfect timing, indwelt by His Spirit;
We shine forth with His light.**

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world...

2 Corinthians 4:6,7; Philippians 2:15

We can therefore see that as we make our way slowly through these first few verses of scripture we are being furnished, if we endeavour to look into the depths of the inspired meaning, with the building blocks from which our very own spiritual life has been constructed.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

This Jesus Christ, who is the full revelation of this truth in human form, was given so that we can now have access to these truths for ourselves personally and potentially be a part of the end time gathering of the true body of Christ, the ekklesia. Walking in step within God's spiritual kairos time frame, that we might become a resting place or tabernacle for

God by His Spirit, sustained in this and prepared for this by the light of His revelation, the one Jesus Christ, who is the beginning and the end of all revelation,

At that time (kairos) Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

Matthew 11:25

**We need the light of His revelation,
to understand and to know that our time is in
His hands,
as He broods over our hearts,
to prepare a dwelling place for His presence,
and prepare us to take our place within the
bride,
for whom he longs to return**

Notes

1. the Young Earth Hypothesis is the belief that the Earth was created only a few thousand years ago, it adheres to what it understands as the chronological timings found within scripture.
2. The use of the term man here will represent both sides of the gender divide, as it is in effect a shortened form of the term 'mankind'.
3. See Romans 7:4; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 12:27; Ephesians 2:12.
4. See 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17, 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21.
5. See Ephesians 2:19.
6. See Galatians 6:16.
7. See below for a study of the use of this phrase more widely in scripture.
8. This is not the time nor the place to explore the concept of predestination.
9. Koine Greek (also known as modern, Alexandrian dialect, common Attic, Hellenistic or Biblical Greek) was the literary lingua franca of the first century world into which Jesus was sent.
10. The Septuagint was the authorised Greek translation of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. It was composed by seventy scholars hence the name in the 3rd century BC.
11. The phrase 'the adoption of children' that is used here should actually read 'the adoption of sons', for a full study of what it means to become a son of God see the next chapter.
12. The controversial word 'predestinated' is used here,

however, a discussion about election lies beyond our present purposes.

13. See John 15:4

14. Here, Paul is quoting from the Davidic Tabernacle prophecy found in Ezekiel, see Ezekiel 37: 24ff, demonstrating the continuity of this theme that can be found running throughout scripture. See the author's 'Back to the Future' series for a study of this theme.

15. Galatians 6:16

16. John 19:37

17. Matthew 23: 39b

18. There is a significant challenge to those who would try and argue for a blend between evolution and creation here, with the plant life created on day 3 and the cosmos created on day 4.

Chapter Two

The Sanctification of the Believer: Seeded in Genesis 1

We are continuing to explore the first chapter in the Bible, where we find the written account of the wonderful creative work of the Lord God, creating a whole universe and a world teeming with life in six days. There are questions we might want to ask at this point, such as whether there are any other symbolic spiritual pictures or types lying here waiting for fresh revelation by the Holy Spirit within this narrative? Indeed, is there a way to look at the creation as described here by Moses with fresh eyes? Might we even find a way to view this scriptural narrative as containing not just a description of how the physical universe was created, but also to see within this a majestic description of the new creation that was to come and even of the journey of the follower of Jesus Christ? A journey into the sanctified spiritual fruit filled life by which both man and woman might be formed by God to become the image of His son. To be prepared and made ready to take their place in the bride of Christ.

The good news is that the witness of scripture does seem to help us with these questions. For the exegetical context for us here is provided by the prophet Jeremiah, where we read the following,

I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form,
and void; and the heavens, and they had no
light.

Jeremiah 4:23

The vocabulary used here by the prophet is clearly redolent of Genesis 1. However, significantly for us he is not describing the creative work of the Lord God working to achieve His purposes within the physical realm. Here, the context is a spiritual one. These words are describing the spiritual state of the nation of Israel at the time of the prophet. We can see this by the preceding verses, where we read the following,

How long shall I see the standard, and hear the
sound of the trumpet?

For my people is foolish, they have not known
me; they are sottish children, and they have
none understanding: they are wise to do evil,
but to do good they have no knowledge.

Jeremiah 4:21-22

The people of God were in a state of spiritual back sliding, which the Holy Spirit, communicating through the prophet Jeremiah, describes as looking like the state of the

earth prior to the creative work of the Lord God. Indeed, perhaps we might reflect on our own situation and sadly agree that this a place that the 'church' today shares with ancient Israel.

Taking each in turn, this list offered by Jeremiah does not make comfortable reading when comparison is made with the state of the church, a subject that we will addressing in a later chapter.

The people were:

- Foolish
- Not walking in relationship
- Sottish (not Scottish) children¹
- Lacking understanding
- Wise to do evil
- Ignorant with regards to doing good

And again, the remedy might also be the same for us, can we hear the same prophetic call that is found earlier in the same chapter in Jeremiah?

Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart...

Jeremiah 4: 3b-4a

This is a spiritual statement and it is telling us that, spiritually speaking, the people of God at this time were without form, void and lacking light and in need of a new creation event for their hearts. This is important because it

informs us that the narrative of Genesis 1 can be understood spiritually as well as literally. However, it must be understood that by saying this I am in no way suggesting that it should not also be received as a literal description of the creative work of God. As with all scripture there are layers of meaning, and as with Jeremiah, it is also possible to read within the creation narrative of Genesis 1 underlying spiritual truth and meaning. Scripture, because it is God inspired, works on many different levels. Therefore, following the precedent we have identified in Jeremiah let us approach the first chapter of the Bible and its account of the creative work of God inquisitively. Let us look to see what spiritual truths we might unlock here as the Holy Spirit gives us fresh revelation concerning the Word within the words we find written here.

• **The Spirit in Creation**

Indeed, the first thing we do notice is that the Holy Spirit was very involved in all that was to occur here.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Genesis 1:1,2

Therefore, what we are presented with here in Genesis 1 can be understood as a situation also being played out in the spiritual realm. The physical creation carries an underpinning

spiritual reality. This is further emphasised within the text itself in the way the Holy Spirit is described as moving over the surface of the primordial waters, thereby, helping us understand that this is His realm; the spiritual realm over which the Holy Spirit hovers above and oversees. We find the same role for the Holy Spirit as described by Jesus when foretelling the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit or Comforter in John 16 when preparing the disciples for His imminent departure.

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment
John 16:7,8

In the Lord God's *kairos* time the Spirit will move as he will, after all how does Jesus describe the working of the Spirit when having His night time chat to the Nicodemus the pharisee?

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.
John 3:8

The Spirit is shed abroad in the hearts of those who come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. From here he will

brood over the formless void of the darkness of the human condition that is without God, which is the self-life. A condition described and warned against by the Apostle John in his first epistle, where we read the following,

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

1 John 2:15-17

There is nothing new here, for this is the same condition we see described by the prophet Jeremiah speaking to his own generation. The Spirit is charged to motivate those in whom He indwells to respond to the darkness in their own lives and to allow Father God to turn the darkness into light through His son, Jesus who is the light of the world. A position from which we are then better able to impact, through the light of the love at the heart of our being, the darkness in the lives of those around us. God is still speaking these same words, Let there be light. However, His voice is now carried in and through the light that emanates from out of our lived lives and there will only be light when Jesus is able to shine from out of our hearts.

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world

Philippians 2:15

One the other side of this spiritual interaction. We need to know that this can only ever be a work of God. It is the fruit of a work of grace in the life of a believer. It just requires a word from the Word and the light of revelation will come. For in Jesus this light of revelation was incarnational.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

And the light shineth in darkness; **and the darkness comprehended it not.**

John 1:1-5

Still, the key for each one of us is the need for a God given spark of revelation, as Jesus acknowledged himself,

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and **hast revealed them unto babes.**

Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and **he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.**

Matthew 11:25-27

But as many as received him, **to them gave he power to become the sons of God**, even to them that believe on his name

John 1:12

As does the apostle Paul, as can be seen emphatically stated here,

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that

the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

2 Corinthians 4:3-7

And this is all a work that is led, guided and activated by the Holy Spirit,

...but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Romans 8:13b-14

And moreover, scripturally speaking, the reference point for Paul in 2 Corinthians 4 is the original creation and he is actively using it to describe the new creation. Indeed, a new creation which also contains the same two formative elements that we see in the original creation narrative, namely a move of the Spirit and a word of revelation causing light to shine within an earthen vessel.

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

Genesis 1:4

• **Jesus is the light**

And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Matthew 3:17

Just as Father was pleased by the original light of His creation, so is He pleased with Jesus, the light of His new creation. Jesus is the Son of light with whom the Father is well pleased as he sees that He is good! Whenever the Father can see the light of His son shining within the heart and life of a disciple He is always well pleased. For as we have already identified,

For we are his workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus unto good works**, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

The gospel of John is also an important source for our understanding of Jesus as the true light that we have encountered in Genesis 1. Jesus is described here as the incarnate light of the world,

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

John 8:12

However, there is a time limit for He does tell us that, as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.² Does this mean that when Jesus left the world that his light went with Him? This is clearly not the case because a little later Jesus says the following,

Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me,
believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.
And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.
I am come a light into the world, that whosoever
believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

John 11:44-46

Wonderfully, as we return to Genesis 1 we will find that Jesus is using the language of the original creation to describe a fundamental purpose for His own incarnation.

• **Light and Darkness Divided**

I form the light, and create darkness: I make
peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these
things.

Isaiah 45:7

This is one of the most challenging verses in scripture. The Lord God, the only true holy one, is described here as creating evil. Indeed, this potentially opens up some difficult theological questions for us, fortunately this is not our concern at the moment. However, what we do need to understand here is that in order for the salvific purposes of God to be ultimately achieved, a spiritual and moral distinction had to be drawn within the creative order. A distinction that is captured by the metaphorical concepts of light and darkness. It is as though God, who we understand as omnipresent in the universe, seems to have had to create the darkness of evil within his own very being, obviously

without touching it Himself. Indeed, He did this in order that we could be faced with the choices that would define us for eternity.

Let us spend some time reflecting on this, from scripture we know that the Lord God's ultimate desire is to create peace with man, within man and between men, to create an eternal spiritual unity in Christ in order that we can dwell together for eternity.

...for to make in himself of twain one new man,
so making peace;
And that he might reconcile both unto God in
one body by the cross...

In whom ye also are builded together for an
habitation of God through the Spirit.

Ephesians 15a-16b,22

Therefore, peace...

i) with man

Therefore, being justified by faith, we have
peace with God through our Lord Jesus
Christ:

By whom also we have access by faith into this
grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of
the glory of God.

Romans 5:2

ii) within man

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto

you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.
Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be
afraid.

John 14: 27

iii) between men

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes
were far off are made nigh by the blood of
Christ.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one,
and hath broken down the middle wall of
partition between us;

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity,
even the law of commandments contained in
ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one
new man, so making peace.

Ephesians 2:13-15

This peace is found in His light as we are rescued out
of darkness,

For God, who commanded the light to shine
out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to
give the light of the knowledge of the glory of
God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 4: 6

Therefore, there will need to be a separation. God
cannot abide mixture.

And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean
Leviticus 10: 10

The light will need to be separated from the darkness in our lives; the holy from the profane, the spirit from the flesh. There is no place for spiritual mixture in the life of the follower of Jesus. This profound statement is made by Paul in his letter to the believers in Philippi which is hidden due to way the Greek has been translated,

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life...

Philippians 2:15,16a

The Greek word translated as 'harmless' actually carries this meaning of being unmixed, therefore, by definition, uncontaminated by the darkness of the world. Thereby allowing us to truly shine with his light in this increasingly crooked and perverse nation within which we find ourselves. The key for us, as indicated by Paul here, is to walk the transformational walk of a follower of Jesus and actively holding onto his every word, as the writer to the Hebrews informs us,

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing

even to the **dividing asunder of soul and spirit**, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Hebrews 4:12,13

We do need to realise that the dividing line between the dark and the light is within each of us. Indeed, this is the same division that we first encounter in Genesis 1 and foretells the ultimate division that will be realised by the word of God at work in the heart and life of a disciple of Christ. A disciple who, like the first man and woman stand naked before Him; we have nowhere to hide. This word, the word that is described here is the quick or alive word, alive and active in our hearts doing the crucial work of dividing the light from the darkness, the holy from the profane, the Spirit from the flesh. Indeed, a word that is full of spiritual power and very, very sharp. The word for power that is used here carries a meaning of something being effective, fit for purpose, it is the one thing that can actually achieve this thing. Indeed, the word of God is designed specifically for this very task. Surely this is why we find the division of light and darkness, right at the outset of the written word within the creation narrative. It is so important that this line is drawn in the heart of all those who walk the walk of a true disciple of the risen Christ. This word is Jesus!

This is the crucial division that is required to take place at the heart of the human condition. A separation that needs to

occur between the two competing drivers of our life, the soul and the spirit. As described by the writer to the Hebrews, the thoughts and intents of our hearts. The prophet Jeremiah has this to say about this very same thing,

The heart is deceitful above all things, and
desperately wicked: who can know it?

Jeremiah 17:9

However, the Lord God speaking through the prophet does not leave us in hopeless desperation, because He goes on to explain that,

I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins...

Jeremiah 17:10a.

If allowed He will test us, He will show us what are truly the drivers in our life and what are the reins that control our thoughts. Providing us with the WHYS. Why we feel the way we feel, why we think the way we think and therefore why we do the things we do in this life. He searches our hearts, this is not us navel gazing. He wants to take us to one side and spend time with us. He loves us too much to let us stay the same. As we share the deep, secret, hidden realities of our heart with Father, He will openly reward us with this separation between light and dark, the holy from the profane, the Spirit from the flesh. This is the time we spend with Him in the secret place of the closet, once we have closed the door to the world behind us³. Our reward is a life and heart within which a clear line has been drawn, the line between soul and

spirit, darkness and light. Sadly, this is the same line that was crossed, but in reverse, by Adam and Eve when they fell and were left to be sustained by the wrong tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. No longer operating out of the spirit but condemned to live out of the soul and the selfish flesh life. The good news is that we have received the way back to Father provided by the new Adam.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

1 Corinthians 15:22,45

• **The Dividing of the Waters**

And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

Genesis 1: 7

This is the second division within the creation narrative. The two types of water within creation are separated. In terms of the physical creation we can understand this as a description of the water held within the clouds and the waters that comprise the rivers, lakes and seas. However, it must be remembered that this was a world without rainfall so would there have been clouds in the sky at this time? And how do

we understand this firmament that stretched over the primal world as described in Genesis 1? Perhaps, therefore, although accepting this description of how the second day was created as a literal description of what occurred, might we also look for spiritual symbolism within what is being described here? Two types of water, one earthly under the firmament and one heavenly or spiritual above the firmament. In scripture water is spiritually symbolic of both the word of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit as the spiritual life within an individual.

Water as a symbol for spiritual life that emanates from the Lord God in scripture is described as living waters. We can find the use of this symbolism in Jeremiah 2:13 where we read the following,

For my people have committed two evils; they
have forsaken me the fountain of living waters,
and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns,
that can hold no water.

Jeremiah 2:13

Here, it is the Lord God who is describing Himself as the one and only fountain of living waters for His people⁴. The symbolic use of water in this way, describing it as water that is living, seems to suggest that we are dealing here with a quality of water that provides more than just physical refreshing and sustenance. Indeed, the Lord uses this same symbolism of Himself in John's Gospel. First of all, when speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob in John 4, where we read the following,

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

John 4:14

Returning to this theme with dramatic effect in the Temple on the last day of the feast of Tabernacles, as they were filling the laver with water that had just been drawn from the pool of Siloam, Jesus also proclaims,

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

John 7:37-39

Here, we are told specifically that the living water is actually the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the spirit of the believer following salvation. The cistern for the living waters is not some religious construct outside of us. The living water is a wonderful flood of the life of God from within. Indeed, in Revelation, right at the culmination of the scriptural record, we read the following words of the Lord

that resonate down the ages to every one of us with spiritual ears to hear what He is saying,

I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Revelation 22:16,17

Can we also find in scripture that the Word as water can be symbolically represented as having the capacity to spiritually cleanse an individual? Look at these words of Jesus speaking to his disciples in the upper room on the night before He died,

...now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

John 15:3

In Ephesians 5 Paul uses the same symbolism, here specifically describing the word as a type of spiritually sanctifying and cleansing water,

...even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the

washing of water by the word,
That he might present it to himself a glorious
church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such
thing; but that it should be holy and without
blemish.

Ephesians 5:25b-27

Therefore, can we acknowledge that scripture does seem to suggest that there are two types of water, one physical which sustains all physical life on earth and one spiritual which sustains us in the spiritual realm? Can we identify this symbolically as the division of the waters that we find in Genesis 1? We would suggest that we can answer both questions in the affirmative.

• **The Dividing of the Waters and the Land**

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven
be gathered together unto one
place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.
Genesis 1:9

There is another important division here the water under heaven, i.e. not the living water, the physical water of the world, is pulled back to reveal the dry land. This new pristine fertile soil, as the narrative moves on, is so receptive to the seeds of life that the Lord God is going to sow into it.

Is there a spiritual application that can be gleaned for us here? In type perhaps, the land can be understood in a similar way to the receptive soil we find in the parable of the

sower, indeed, a soil that Jesus actually likens to a good heart,

But that [which fell] on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

Luke 8:15

In this parable, we are taken through the different ways that the influence of the world can negatively affect the capacity for the soil of the heart to produce its fruit. And as we see in Genesis 1 this land which is revealed as the waters are withdrawn produces wonderful fruit when it receives the seed from the sower.

And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1: 12

For us, perhaps the soil of our own hearts might not be so receptive to the living seeds sown by Father and, as we will see in the next chapter, there is a work of soil preparation that is required in our hearts before we start to produce the fruitful harvest He desires for each one of us.

**Spiritually speaking when the conditions are right
then the fruit will come.**

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, **that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:**

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Isaiah 55:10,11

Sowing and reaping is a spiritual principle

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

Galatians 6:7,8

Therefore, first we need to give seed to the sower so that He can sow to the Spirit in our lives, how do we do this? There are a few scriptures that can help us answer this question. Jesus, himself, provides the model for this for each one of us by His life and provides us with the key when he says the following,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn [seed] of wheat fall into the ground and die,

it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

John 12:24,25

Just like with a seed, death is the way to life and fruitfulness for the follower of Jesus

Paul when writing to the church in Rome suggests the following,

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Romans 8:13,14

As we will see in the next chapter, it is all about over time, enduring the death of our old life and walking out into the newness of our new life in Christ⁵. So, let us allow scripture to speak for itself, and to help us to know why the waters have been gathered together to provide us with the dry land within our hearts,

...that we might be partakers of his holiness.
Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward

it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.⁶

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.⁷

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh...⁸

...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.⁹

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.¹⁰

...the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.¹¹

These things I command you, that ye love one another.¹²

But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.¹³

• **Two Lights**

And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night...

Genesis 1:16

There are also two lights to be found within the new creation. Interestingly, the two lights of both the original creation and the new creation function in a very similar way.

The two great lights as described in Genesis we know as the sun and the moon. The sun shines by day, and the creator has provided us with this nearby star within our own patch on the outer swirl of the Milky Way that is the perfect distance from us at all points of our yearly orbit to provide us with enough heat and light.

The second great light is the moon. What is important here is that the moon does not produce its own light, it reflects the light produced by the sun. This is what is visible to us during our night time when the sun is lighting and heating the other side of our planet.

Do you see where we are going with this? Within the

new creation there are also two lights.

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

John 9:5

We have a great light and He is Jesus.

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

John 9:4

Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.

John 11:9

When the light of Jesus shines in the world it is day. The challenge for us is to be vessels through which the light of the Lord can carry on shining in the darkness of this sin filled world. Like the moon we have no light within us, we can only ever reflect the light of the Son. This idea lies at the heart of the Lord's teaching, Indeed, it finds expression right at the beginning of the sermon on the mount,

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

Neither do men light a candle, and put it under

a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 5:14-16

He came to prepare a source of spiritual light within humanity that might continue to shine with his light until His return. An idea that is also clearly taught by Paul,

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world...

Philippians 2:15

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light

Ephesians 5:8

However, how does this light work. Is it simply switched on when we come to faith and all around us people are illuminated by the light of the Lord and are drawn toward it like the proverbial moths to a flame. For many, initially, it does seem like this, as we are swept up in the unspeakable joy of our salvation. Sadly, however, for most this will not last as we then begin to work out our own salvation and this may now come for some with fear and trembling,¹⁴ and as we meet the challenges in our own life of walking along

the narrow way¹⁵ of discipleship. We will explore this in greater depth in the next chapter, the light of Jesus will truly shine out of our hearts only when our hearts are made ready and fit for the Master's use.¹⁶ Ultimately, reassuringly our destination is secure in Him our true source of light.

And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 22:5

- **Life from Out of the Waters**

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life...

Genesis 1:20

Within the new creation where do we find water from which abundant life emerges?

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:4-5

The sacrament of full immersion baptism for the believer is a crucial part of an individual's conversion initiation through which they symbolically go under the water as if being buried and then are raised up out of the water to represent their resurrection to new life in Christ. This is a powerful moment for a believer through which, in faith, their old life is demonstrably left behind in the water and they are raised up to potentially walk a new path as a follower of Jesus. Out of this water, like in the original creation narrative, the new creature will be an individual who will be called to move in the Spirit and who now has true spiritual newness of life in which to walk.

• **The Creation of His Own Image**

We now come to the sixth day of creation¹⁷ where we find the creation of man and woman on the Earth, which is the culmination of the original creative purpose of the Lord God.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Genesis 1:21

It is on this day that we have the culmination of the creative work of the Almighty God, we have His completed work, it is finished. And what is the last act of creation? The creation of His own image on earth. Likewise, as we look forward to the incarnation of Jesus and the work of

the cross, what is the purpose of the new creation? Once again, we have it, the creation of his own image on earth, a work of wonderful spiritual creativity of which we are told that Jesus is both the author and the finisher¹⁸. Within the record of scripture what began in the physical realm has its fulfilment in the spiritual. Again, let us let scripture speak for itself,

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.

The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.

As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.

And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

1 Corinthians 15: 44-49

This was always the plan. It was always the Lord God's intention to find a means through which his nature and family likeness would find expression on earth in a people who are called by His name, His body, the ekklesia.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Romans 8:28,29

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:18

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:
For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:
And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.
And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.

Colossians 1:15-18

Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall

he find faith on the earth?

Luke 18: 8b

And, then, eternally on to the new earth, via the Millennial reign of Christ on the old, by the Bride.

Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

Revelation 20: 6

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

Revelation 21: 1-3

• **A Day for Resting**

As we step into the second chapter of the book of Genesis we enter the seventh day of creation, and we find that this

actually a day beyond the creation. Significantly for us, we do need to notice that the seventh day is the only one of the seven days of creation that is described as being ‘sanctified’ or set apart as being holy by the Lord God.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his workwhich God created and made.

Genesis 2:3

On this day the Lord God rested from His work of creation. However, as we shall see, this does not mean that He was putting His feet up. In Genesis 2 He moves into relational mode, as Father God comes alongside Adam, the first man, and walks with him in the garden.

Before joining them in the garden, it is important that we spend some time understanding for ourselves the spiritual significance of the concept of the ‘Father’s rest’ which we find described for the first time here. Indeed, as we read in the letter to the Hebrews, this is the crucial aspect of their relationship with the Lord God that the Hebrews, i.e. the children of Israel, had missed through their unbelief⁹. We are told that during their journey in the wilderness the children of Israel never entered ‘into’ the Father’s rest. And, that this was due to their lack of faith. The writer to the Hebrews goes on to warn the Jewish believers of his own day to whom he is writing that they must not make the same mistake.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the

living God.

But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;

While it is said, today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.

Hebrews 3:12-15

Take heed indeed, perhaps this is again a challenge to the church today, for ultimately what we learn here is that we truly enter into this rest only through faith in Jesus and by definition through His cross. The writer confirms this when he continues,

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.

And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest.

Hebrews 4:1-5

What we read here is truly profound! What we do need to understand is that just as the original creation culminated in a day of rest for Father God, the new creation creates the potential for an eternity of rest for those who would enter into it through faith in Christ. This secures for us a clear connection between the two creation events and helps us recognise the wonderful all encompassing work of love that Father God has achieved for us in His son, Jesus Christ.

Perhaps, at this point we do need to take some time confirming this point from the witness of scripture, focusing specifically on the phrase that we find given its first expression in the passage above, 'from the foundation of the world'. Indeed, it will be profitable to take a short journey through scripture stopping off where we find this phrase and exploring how much was in place spiritually speaking even before Father God began His creative work. Our first scriptural port of call is to the only occasion this phrase is used in the Old Testament, this is found in **Zechariah 12:1**, where we read the following,

The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel,
saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the
heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth,
and formeth the spirit of man within him.

For our purposes here, to make a connection between the

physical and spiritual creation narrative within scripture, the prophet Zechariah here has been very helpful. Making, as he does, this very connection himself. He begins this new series of profound prophetic utterances in chapter 12 by laying out the three foundational aspects of the creation, which he identifies as the initial stretching out of the cosmos, creating the physical earth and the forming man as the pinnacle of this creation due to the fact that he had the capacity to form a relationship with this creator because he has means within which this relationship can take place and this is a spirit.

As we move on to explore the use of the phrase ‘from the foundation of the world’ that we find in the New Testament, we first of all do need to understand something about the actual Greek word that is translated as ‘foundation’ here. The Greek word is ‘katabole’ and has a potential meaning to inseminate. Strong’s Greek lexicon actually defines this word in the following strong terms, ‘the injection or depositing of the virile semen in the womb’²⁰

It is interesting that this word is used here when there are other words that could have been used to describe a foundation²¹. By the use of this word to describe the first creation, we seem to be guided to understand that the creation was a when Father God seeded his creation in such a way that spiritual fruit would be borne in and through it. Within the physical the spiritual would come in due time, Father God’s kairos clock is still ticking.

With this in mind let us turn now to instances in the New Testament when the phrase ‘from the foundation of the world’ is used, beginning with a reference to Jesus’ own teaching ministry being a fulfilment of ancient prophecy,

All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret **from the foundation of the world.**

Matthew 13:34,35

With our new found revelation concerning how we might understand the use of the word ‘foundation’ in these New Testament verses, what does this particular verse tell us? It is informing us that within the original physical creation there had been a seeding of certain spiritual secrets, indeed, mysteries that would be revealed in due time, at the right time in terms of God’s kairos time piece.

We are told that Jesus came in kairos time²² and that He came bringing a radical re-evaluation of the prevailing spiritual truth and demonstrated this by His life and crucially by His death. This radically new message He brought was delivered within what theologians call kerygma, these were small self-contained teaching nuggets which we know as His parables. This was itself teaching which contained hidden truths which the listener was required to hear through ears that had the capacity to engage with the material and be personally convicted by it. As he spoke this challenge often went out from Him,

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Matthew 11:15

We also find a similar feature in the teaching of the Apostle Paul. He identifies what he describes as mysteries, i.e. hidden revelation, that through the coming of Christ and impact of the cross are now available to be understood. Within Paul's letters seven of these mysteries can be identified²³.

The same idea can also be found in the Old Testament as well,

And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?

And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

Daniel 12:8,9

In due time all will be revealed, and the seeds of light and revelation that were sown when the world was founded will bear their fruit in their time. Therefore, what are the other seeds of light that can be found in scripture through the use of the phrase 'from the foundation of the world?'

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you **from the foundation of the world...**

Matthew 25:34

- Here we have revelation of the millennial kingdom!

And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Revelation 13: 8

The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life **from the foundation of the world**, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

Revelation 17: 8

- Here we have revelation concerning the Lamb's book of life!

However, there is more. On three occasions the phrase changes, the light we are now receiving comes not from the foundation of the world, but from before it.

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were...
redeemed

...with the precious blood of Christ, as of a
lamb without blemish and without spot:

Who verily was foreordained **before the
foundation of the world**, but was manifest in
these last times for you...

1 Peter 1:18-20

In the apostle Peter's first epistle, we read that the very sacrifice of Christ as the perfect sacrificial lamb was foreordained before the foundation of the world. This is mind blowing! In the pre-creation heavenly court Father God planned for the crucifixion of His son.

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me **before the foundation of the world.**

John 17:22-24

Here, in the same pre-creation heavenly court, it was also decided that their would be group of humanity who would enjoy the same reality of unified loving perfection as the Godhead, amazing!

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:
According as he hath chosen us in him **before**

the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

Ephesians 1: 3-6

Moreover, look at this checklist of the pre-creation heavenly court plans revealed here,

- Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ
 - According to the choice of the Godhead
 - Chosen to be holy
 - Chosen to be without blame
 - Chosen to walk before Him in love
 - Chosen to be adopted into the family of the Godhead by Jesus **himself**
- > according to Jesus' will
> according to the glory of His grace
- Jesus made us accepted in the beloved

We are reminded here of Jesus' own words when talking to His Father concerning the seed of the seventh day rest that we have already encountered. Here He is saying so much more, however, as He is clearly summing up all of the above and reminding His Father of the pre-creation conversation they had had in the court of Heaven,

At that time (kairos) Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:25-30

We now have the spiritual context for these words of the Lord. We can now understand more concerning 'the rest' that is being offered. We enter the rest not by any effort or work from our side. We enter through receiving revelation, we are back to the light again, of our need of Jesus and His cross. By this we enter into Father's seventh day rest and begin to walk with Him through our own garden.

Indeed, as we move on to meet up with this first man, Adam, in the original garden. We need to understand that

Father God desires to walk with us in the garden of our heart. He desires to help us conform to the image of His Son, by being transformed into the same image step by step as we walk together with Him through the issues of our lives. To become part of His bride. He desires to speak creative words of love both to encourage and challenge us to change. By this His light is imparted, and our darkness is dispelled. And as the waters of the world fall away he sows seeds of resurrection life into the receptive soil of our hearts, which in due season will bear fruit in Him. And this was all planned in the pre-creation court of Heaven. Alleluia!

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2: 10

Amen

Notes

1. Sottish means stupid or foolish
2. John 9: 15
3. Matthew 6:6
4. See also Jeremiah 17: 13
5. See Romans 6: 4 and 7: 6
6. Hebrews 12:11
7. Ephesians 4: 22-24
8. Galatians 5: 16
9. Galatians 5: 22-25
10. John 15: 16
11. James 3: 17, 18
12. John 15: 17
13. Matthew 13: 8, 9
14. Philippians 2:12
15. Matthew 7:14
16. 2 Timothy 2:21
17. In the original Hebrew only the sixth and seventh days carry the definite article, therefore, we can understand them as the two most important of the seven days of creation.¹⁷
18. Hebrews 12: 2
19. See Hebrews 3:7-11, 19
20. See Strong's G2602
21. For example see Luke 14:29 where 'themelios' is used, as it is in the LXX translation of Zechariah 12:1.
22. See Romans 5: 6
23. 1. Mystery of the gospel (Eph 6:19; Col 2:2; Col 4:3);
2. Mystery of the deity of Jesus Christ (1 Tim 3:16);
3. Mystery of His will – the supremacy of Christ (Eph 1:9-10);

4. Mystery of Gentiles Believers/Israel (Rom 11:25; 16:25; Eph 3:3-10; Col 1:25-27);
5. Mystery of the relationship between the church and Christ (Eph 5:31-32);
6. Mystery of salvation's plan of a Believer's glory (1 Cor 15:51)
7. Mystery of Lawlessness (2 Thess 2:7)

Chapter 3

New Life in the Garden

We now turn to the developing creation narrative in Genesis and, specifically, to the experience of the first man in the garden that was east of Eden. This is where we find the specific detail by which the primal man, Adam, was formed into the *imago dei* (image of God), something that we explored briefly in the last chapter. As we will see, this was not merely a moment where Father God shows us his creative dexterity with clay. No, we do need to recognise that the important aspect of the man forming in the garden was related to the process by which he was formed not just as a physical man, but also emotionally and, crucially, spiritually as well. And here we will be able to identify the same key principles that sustain the spiritual relationship between the Lord God and His disciples today that we have already recognised.

Spiritual life is a relational life

As we move from the account of the creation in Genesis 1 to Genesis 2, a change in tone is noticeable within the writing of Moses. In Genesis 1 we are given the creative work of the transcendent God of the universe, for whom the name given in the Hebrew is Elohim. This is actually a proper noun in its plural form, within which the three persons of the Godhead are clearly expressed, a plurality we saw earlier,

And God said, Let us make man in our image,
after our likeness

Genesis 1:26a

In chapter two of Genesis we have a change of literary style, tone and a change in the name used of God. Here from verse three onwards the name used for God is the Lord God or Jehovah Elohim. This is the received name of God, the name revealed to both Abraham, Moses, as well as to Adam¹, revealed through the light of revelation received directly from the Lord God Himself.² This change of name is important because it helps us to recognise that the transcendent creator God is also immanent in relationship with his creation. If you listen carefully you can hear the flapping wings of the brooding Spirit still at work.

1) The Forming of Man

It is in verse seven that we first see the intimacy of the relationship between the Lord God and the man,

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Genesis 2:7

The image is of the transcendent God of all creation carefully fashioning in his hands a fragile ball of clay into the shape of a man and then lowering His head in order that He can then gently breathe His life into the tiny nostrils of this lifeless shape, and as a result the first man became a living soul. Spiritually speaking, today, nothing has changed, The Lord God still desires to hold our lifeless form in His hands and to then be able to breathe His Spirit into our hearts. Isn't this what we see Jesus doing with His disciples?

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost

John 20:21-22

Therefore, yet again as we saw so powerfully in the last chapter, we can identify important spiritual realities that will be fulfilled in Christ finding representation in symbol form within these early verses in the first book in the Bible. Indeed, spiritual realities that have been seeded from before the foundation of the world.

The Lord God has always been a man former.

The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.

Zechariah 12:1

Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

Isaiah 43:7

Out of the dust of the ground, the simple red earth, out of the clay he is able to fashion His own walking and talking self-image. In Hebrew the word translated as ‘image’ in Genesis 1 literally means shadow. This is interesting in terms of what we have explored above concerning being an expression of the light of the Lord, a shadow is only produced in the presence of a strong light.

**In the full light of the Son the shadow of his
image
is formed in us.**

And it is His shape, the shape of His nature, character, thoughts, words, actions and even His glory. This is the shape that he desires to be cast by his light in and through our lives. A wonderful process that can only find its completion in Christ,

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:18

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Romans 8: 28-29

My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you

Galatians 4:19

Christ will be formed in us, if we let Him.

This tells us that this was always the seeded plan. This was always His desire that we carry His image; His nature and His character into the issues of our own lives, in order that He might touch the lives of others through us. And as well as this, these same issues, with their trips and falls, might be the process by which His image is formed in us. As the apostle Paul says, all things, good, bad, happy, sad, work together with both us and Father to ultimately conform us to the image of His Son.

As with Adam, so with us. It is potentially the same today, the same for you and the same for me, the man forming programme of the Lord is still the overarching work that He desires to do in and for each one of us. This is His refining work, making us malleable in his hands so that His shape does steadily become our shape; His life, our life, His heart, our heart, His Spirit, our spirit and His character our character.

We are clay in His hands

But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

Isaiah 64:8

This is the path of a true disciple

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

2) Adam a Spiritual Man

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Genesis 2:7

Once again, as with Adam, so with us. We are more than just a clay pot, for we have received the very breath of God and as such we are now truly living beings with an eternal destiny. We hear echoes here of Paul's beautiful description of a believer's in dwelt reality,

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

2 Corinthians 4:6-7

The description of Adam as a living soul in Genesis 2 is also interesting because the word translated as 'soul' is given in its plural form here, which would indicate that like the Godhead we can understand that a man is also tripartite unity. Man is created body, soul and spirit. However, after the Fall, the spirit within all lays dead in sin.³ And it is this tripartite reality that Christ came to restore and to enliven by His Spirit.

And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.

The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.

1 Corinthians 15:45-47

What we can infer here is that with the pre-fallen Adam it was his spirit that was transcendent over his soul and body. Essentially, what we can recognise is that Adam before the fall was a spiritual man. We can make this assertion because through the witness of scripture we know that the Lord God doesn't change⁴ for He is the same, yesterday, today and forever⁵.

Therefore, if we are told in John 4:24 that, God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. It follows, therefore, that for Adam to have engaged relationally with the Lord God he must, by definition, have been a spiritual man and, ergo, it was because of this that he had the capacity to engage with God who is Spirit. However, crucially Adam also had a soul and he also had a body. This means that there was always the potential for it to all go wrong. The reason being that even for the first man there was a dichotomy at the heart of his being, a tension between the flesh and the spirit. A dichotomy which, to this day, lies at the heart of the problem for all of us who desire to walk with the Lord. Indeed, this is the very tension that the apostle Paul writes so frankly about in his letter to the church in Rome, exclaiming as he does,

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Romans 7:24

The key for Paul is to not beat yourself up, we are all work in progress, just keep on walking. After all, what encouragement the apostle Paul does give us all when he writes the following,

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-24

**Just keep walking, don't look back that's not the way
you're are going**

Why does he say this? He says this, because,

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Romans 8:1

**The key question is what or who are we walking
after, the flesh or the Spirit?**

At this point, I believe it will prove helpful to spend some time enjoying the warm waters of this perfect piece of Pauline prose that is Romans 8. After honestly sharing his own inner turmoil concerning the conflict between the flesh and the spirit in the previous chapter, in chapter 8 Paul is able to guide us to a wonderful understanding of the direction we all need to follow.

To follow Jesus we need to follow the Holy Spirit

The first point to be made here is that Paul's expectation is that we are able to walk. The good news for every one of us is that this is not determined by whether or not we even have legs. The walk he envisions for us is the journey of a follower of Jesus, our spiritual journey. Not a passive pew filling religious Sunday observancy, but the journey of someone who is living in and out of a relationship with the living God, such as we might recognise with Adam in the garden. Moreover, like Adam, someone who is sharing their life intimately with Father God. Indeed, sharing with Him both the highs and the lows. The good news is that Father has a special place prepared for each of us within which this relationship becomes established, blossoms and, ultimately, bears fruit; this is our closet. A place where we can stop the world and get off for a while and to interrogate our own lives with the one person who has all the answers and who has a perfect plan for our life, Father God.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray

to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father
which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 6:6

Do you have a closet? The Lord assumes that you do, as He suggests that you enter your closet. Your special space, whatever and wherever that might be. The important thing is what happens inside the closet not so much the location. I believe this is an important call that is going out today,

Use your closet!

Father is waiting. Perhaps we have all become a little prodigal in this area- therefore, come home to your closet, Father's arms are open wide. I believe a life lived out of the closet is the only life where we can come into our fulness and where we can truly live a life where we are walking after the spirit and therefore truly following the Lord.

For Paul, this is not just any kind of walk, for him the crucial element is that we are walking 'after the Spirit'. What does this phrase mean? The Greek participle translated 'after' has a wide usage and here it carries the meaning of 'in accordance or agreement with'. Therefore, we are called to walk on a daily basis a journey that is in accordance with the Spirit which will be a walk that enables Father God, by His Spirit, to achieve His purposes for both us and for those with whom we will have influence.

Perhaps we do need to understand what His purposes for both us and for those with whom we will have influence might be. Conveniently for us, Paul answers the first question

concerning God's purposes for us himself later in this same chapter when he writes the following,

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Romans 8:28-29

As we walk out from time spent in the closet with Father, stuff is going to happen, and it is so very vital for us to know, as Paul says here, that the stuff, the 'all things', has been put there for a purpose by Father. What does this mean? This means that we need to embrace whatever does happen and try to learn whatever lesson the stuff may teach us about the real us, who we really are and not just the 'us' we like to present to the world. Not the 'us' that we can control, but uncontrollable 'us' that lies just below the surface waiting for the surface to be scratched just enough that allows the real 'us' to come to the surface. This is usually not a pretty sight.

The good news is that we have not been left alone in this endeavour,

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world

cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

John 14:16-18

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Romans 8:13-14

The good news is also that the Spirit with whom we are in dwelt is an active part of the very Godhead that is at work in our own spirit to fulfil the will of Father God for us on a daily basis. However, the will of God is also that we are washed clean by the word of God who is Jesus-so that the whole Godhead is actively involved in this process with us!

The distinction that is drawn in Romans 8: 13 is between flesh and the Spirit. As we saw in the work of creation a division does need to be made here. This is the distinction that we will be well advised to make as well in terms of how we try and make progress on our spiritual journey. There are certain fallacies that it is easy to fall into. One is that we can live our lives through the church and perhaps we follow the liturgy, go into the confessional, or go forward for prayer at the end of a meeting, by which God will be satisfied and we feel we have done our duty. A more damaging fallacy is the one that would encourage us to strengthen our will and just

say no, when you come under temptation. To keep fighting the good fight with all your might. I am afraid this all is the flesh. This is religion.

It is obviously right for us to stand our ground when the enemy has a go and we are tempted in a particular area. Indeed, we have armour provided for this very purpose⁷. However, why are we tempted? Why has the enemy chosen that particular area of our life with which to tempt us to step out of the will of the Father and to step into sin? What does scripture say about this,

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am
tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted
with evil, neither tempteth he any man:
But every man is tempted, when he is drawn
away of his own lust, and enticed.
Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth
sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth
death.

James 1:13-15

We are tempted because we are vulnerable. We have an area in our life that is weak and where the world has some kind of hold on us. There might even be some addictive element to this as well. These are the areas where we are constantly being drawn away of [our] own lust, and enticed. Indeed, At times we might share the words uttered by the apostle Paul that we encountered above,

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me
from the body of this death?

Romans 7:24

Father God does not want our walk to be a constant battle of our will, this not our fight. In Christ we have entered His rest, come to me he says to the heavy laden⁸. Jesus has paid the price, the work of the cross is a finished work! However, the work of the cross needs to be applied. The closet and the body is the place for the work of the cross to be applied, and in the Spirit, and not in the flesh, we can find freedom, healing and heart restoration. We have the words of the Lord to help us here, before we hear again from the apostle Paul,

Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.

And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

John 8:34-36

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of

righteousness unto God.

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 6:11-14

Grace is the key, and His grace is sufficient⁹. For as we will see God loves us too much to let us stay the same. Father loves us too much for us to be left to struggle in our own strength to suppress whatever area of the world has its claws in us, no, He wants to so change us that the claws are removed and the world has no more claim on us.

Father wants to set us to be truly and fully free

However, we are not talking about such things as the deliverance ministry¹⁰ and inner healing here, we believe these practises are spiritually and scripturally problematic, simply said they are merely misguided short cuts for the work of grace in our lives. Father does not want to change what we do and what we think.

**He wants to change who we are.
Less of us and more of Jesus.**

We need to know that Father will reward us openly for the things that we share with Him in secret. Ultimately, as we walk this walk, our journey's end is secure in Christ, for within the closet we are transformed by Father God to be

conformed to the image of his Son, Jesus Christ. This will be a bespoke process because we are all unique.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

...he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.

Romans 8: 28-29b

Let us move now to explore the outworking of this in a little more depth.

Notes

1. It is interesting that Eve during her conversation with the serpent in Genesis 3 uses, as does the serpent, the impersonal Elohim form of the name of God.
2. Gen 12:1, 15:1, 2 and Exodus 3:14f
3. Ephesians 2:5
4. Malachi 3:6
5. Heb. 13:8
6. Ephesians 6:10ff
7. See later chapter
8. See Matthew 11:28
9. 2 Corinthians 12: 9
10. There is a place for deliverance, however, in some quarters today it is over used.

Chapter 4

The Garden of the Heart

It is important to recognise that in essence, within the garden narrative in Genesis, we see that in the beginning God has provided a place for the first man and Himself to enjoy a relationship. A dwelling place or tabernacle, a purpose built sanctuary within which a relationship could develop between Father God and the first man, where they were able to live, walk and talk together.

The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed.

Genesis 2:8

The garden was on the east side of the one land mass on the primal earth, in an area called Eden. In Hebrew the word translated as Eden literally means pleasure or delight. Therefore, this garden would have been a veritable paradise. A secure garden within which the Lord God and the first man could explore and develop their relationship.

**The Lord desires not to put us back in the garden
but to put the garden in us.
This garden is our heart**

Moreover, from this narrative we can recognise here a beautiful picture of how things might be for us. For by His Spirit we have within us, within our very being, the capacity to explore a wonderful garden of delights with our God and to enjoy its fruit and fruitfulness. Indeed, a garden does not stay the same, neither should we. Season by season new fruit is produced and old things die away. And it is by this, that potentially, we each have the opportunity of being formed day by day, season by season and year by year into His likeness and to learn how to listen and follow His voice, the voice of the gardener, in our lives.

And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

Isaiah 58:11

Or as we find this idea expressed within the New Testament,

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Hebrews 12:11

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

James 3:17,18

The problem for us is that when we come to Christ and His cross and accept his free gift of salvation we are often lead to believe that we have arrived. That this a place of our ultimate destiny, however, we do need to know that this just a beginning. I remember when I first rented my first allotment the joy of my new found vegetable growing potential was soon tempered by the work that had to be done to turn the rectangle of grass and weeds into anything like receptive soil. The weeds needed digging out at the roots.

Our heart is a garden that does require weeding

The prophet Jeremiah sums things up with regards to the condition of the average heart very well when he postulates the following truth,

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Jeremiah 17:9

But the good news is that He loves too much to leave us here,

I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins,
even to give every man according to his ways,
and according to the fruit of his doings.

Jeremiah 17:10

It's that word fruit again, it is all about the garden of our heart. Indeed, immediately preceding this the prophet echoes the psalmist¹ when he paints this picture replete with helpful garden based symbolism,

Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that
trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and
whose heart departeth from the LORD.
For he shall be like the heath in the desert,
and shall not see when good cometh; but shall
inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a
salt land and not inhabited.

Jeremiah 17:5-6

But

Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD,
and whose hope the LORD is.
For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters,
and that spreadeth out her roots by the river,
and shall not see when heat cometh, but her
leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in
the year of drought, neither shall cease from
yielding fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7-8

What is important to notice here is that, like above where we were exploring the Pauline teaching with regards to the Spirit and flesh dichotomy, we have exactly the same concepts at play here. To say that I am walking after the Spirit is the same as saying I am trusting the Lord with my spiritual journey. To trust in man and by definition to trust my own strength, or as the prophet puts it to 'maketh flesh his arm' is the same as walking after the flesh.

The consequences for both are the same, one brings life and fruitfulness and the other brings death and a desert. The key for both is the heart of the individual, and, significantly for us, Jeremiah makes the same symbolic connection that we have found in our reading of Genesis 2.

Our heart is a garden

It is interesting to note that the Godless heart, as described by the prophet, shall not see when good cometh. Such an individual is just so caught up in their own stuff, struggling to get by in their own strength, that they don't even notice God knocking at their door. Whereas, the God fearing shall not see when heat cometh. They don't even notice the change in the weather, the roots of their garden are sustained by a deeper source of living water and are free from reliance on the vagaries of the weather.

Therefore, we do need to ask the following question: what are the weeds that need to be dug out of our hearts? Indeed, the weeds that might our make our heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Our Lord, as he sits down with His disciples on that particular

hillside above the Sea of Galilee does have a few personal gardening tips as he begins to deliver what we know as the sermon on the mount.

If Jesus' teaching on that particular day had been a musical piece, such as an opera, the overture of this piece would be the initial, proverb like list of nine conditions of blessing that we find in Matthew 5.² As with an overture, all the best tunes of the main piece of music can be found here. The teaching that follows in the sermon on the mount is all about the need for heart transformation. What the Lord seems to be doing in the beatitudes is to map out the journey of heart transformation that a true follower of his would need to go through such that they are truly prepared to be fruitful in Him. Using our garden imagery, it is like a garden plan such as Charlie Dimmock or Alan Titchmarsh might draw up before wrecking someone's garden all for the benefit of TV. At the end of the process this TV garden will look something like the plan. At the end of our process, we will look something like Jesus and this is all for the blessing and glory of Father.

The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.

As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.

And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

1 Corinthians 15:47-49

For us the garden metaphor is a metaphorical picture of the transformation of the heart of a true follower of Jesus to move from earthy to a little more heavenly. Let us go through the stages.

1. Ground clearance:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3

As with all land that needs to be prepared for future growth and fertility the ground needs to be cleared of all unwanted weeds. This is because the weeds will take up the valuable growing space, crowding out the things that you want to growing here instead. Weeds are usually more vigorous than other plants, they can have deep and invasive root systems that make them very hard to control when established. They will use up the available nutrients in the soils as well as take their share of the available water in the soil. Some weeds can also release into the soil growth suppressants that will damage the vigour of the other plants around them, a little bit like chemical warfare.

All in all, it's a jungle out there, and the solution is to begin with a ruthless determination to clear the ground. As in the natural so in the spiritual. The good news for us, as we apply this to the garden of our heart, is that we do have our very own already applied systemic weed killer which is the cross. Jesus' death on the cross was a once and for all time finished work for every one of us who has come through it to

a saving knowledge of Christ. However, this weed killer does need to be applied to those areas of our heart that remain overgrown.

**The key is not about not doing,
but is all about not being!**

As Jesus takes His disciples through His teaching in the sermon on the mount He begins to point out the potentially problematic deep rooted weeds that will be detrimental to our new found heart's health and growth. He challenges our distorted emotional life that resorts too easily to anger and then even murder. Our distorted morality that casually leads us into adultery and then divorce. Our lack of integrity such that our word is no longer our bond. We too easily fall into judgement and gossip. However, these are not the roots, these are merely the flower, fruit and seed of the all-pervasive weed that has overgrown and strangled our heart which is the love and devotion to... ourselves.

All these sinful distortions that are highlighted by the Lord are simply the consequential outworking of a deceitful and wicked heart that has bought into the self-lie. Jesus' challenge to all who would follow Him remains,

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it:
but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.

Luke 9: 23-24

He means what he says and in His Kingdom, to be his follower within His Kingdom, there is no place for self. After all, look at the order here, let him:

- deny himself
- take up his cross daily
- follow me

And the good news, as we have seen, is that we are not on our own on this journey, for here we are back in Romans 8,

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Romans 8:13-14

To walk after the Spirit is to walk in partnership with Him to mortify the deeds of our flesh, as described by Paul here, we will be actively denying the motivation of our self-life, we will be pulling out this weed, in whatever form it infests our heart, by its selfish roots and depositing them on our cross that we conveniently have brought with us for this very purpose. In the closet asking Father to take them from us. The closet is our potting shed where we hand over our weeds. And, over time we will then be free to follow after our Lord and saviour, without the danger that our self-life will trip us up and lead us again down this fruitless cul de sac, or should I say weed covered vegetable patch, of selfish ambition.

However, before moving on it will be helpful if we spend some time answering the question we posed above and identifying the weeds that will require our attention if the garden is to be properly prepared for the new planting. To this end, we will simply be using the beatitudes that the Lord has given us and asking the question, what is the opposite of the quality described here. What is the opposite of mercy and meekness? What does it mean to be hungry for unrighteousness in our lives? What does an impure heart look like? And instead of peace-making where might this lead us?

**Cursed are those who perceive themselves to be rich
in spirit,
sadly they want for nothing, yet need so much.**

Let us take them in turn, starting with the opposite of recognising our true state of spiritual poverty before the Lord that we believe is the essence of the first beatitude. Too often today young converts are encouraged to spiritually run before they can even walk, and sadly they end up on their faces in the dirt of their former issues and lives. We do need to understand the need for all of us to start the journey with patiently walking the path that is set before each of us³ as we begin to follow after the Lord and to spend time with the Father in our potting shed or closet. To honestly and humbly come before Him and allow Him to help us truly know what is in our hearts and to get it sorted. This issue is actually addressed by Jesus in the last of His seven letters to the churches in Revelation when He says the following to the church at Laodicea,

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked...

Revelation 3:17

Jesus is challenging these believers to honestly recognise their true state before Him, which seems to be their lukewarmness and their self-reliance. Indeed, to recognise their true state of spiritual poverty, this the same poverty that the Lord describes in the beatitudes. And what is Jesus' solution?

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Revelation 3:18,19

The spiritual metaphors here are different, but the essential point is the same. Find the true riches that only come from the journey of a true disciple, with all its tests and proving, and thereby fill your heart with spiritually pure gold. Cover your spiritual nakedness with the robes of righteousness and let the Lord remove your spiritual blindness so that you might be able to see God and His true purposes for your lives.

And the bottom line here is to repent and let the Lord give you spiritual fervour for His calling once again.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Revelation 3:20

Open the door to your closet and let the Lord in to join you in fellowship and feed you with His goodness and loving kindness. And allow Father to begin to sort out your garden, particularly to start to do the weeding.

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Mark 3:10; Luke 3:9

It is interesting to note that this particular letter in Revelation includes in its heading a reference to the creation and the ongoing creative purposes of Father God⁴. And also, if the seven letters to the churches in Revelation are to be understood as being chronological, then this, the final letter, is actually being prophetically addressed to the end time church. Potentially, the church of today.

**Cursed are they that do not mourn,
for they have no need to be comforted.**

Mourning is the natural God given response for anyone encountering loss, and the intensity of our mourning is determined by the level of emotional attachment we might have to the person or thing we have lost. Therefore, if you do not mourn you either have not lost anything or at least anything that is important to you. Therefore, in spiritual terms if we do not experience mourning at the beginning of our walk with the Lord then sad to say something is not right. Simply said, we have not actually lost anything, nothing of our old life has actually died. We are still accommodating everything that was our old self and adjusting it to fit the new self. This is a hybrid existence and it will never work for us and more importantly for the Lord and Father. Look at what Paul says,

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

2 Corinthians 5:17

This is therefore a big 'if'. To truly be in Christ, we do need to fully embrace our new status as a new creature and actively allow Father by the Holy Spirit to kill off the old self and to then, as we are exploring here, to work with Him to enable the new self to come through to maturity and fruitfulness in Him. And within this process our mourning of this loss will be a clear indication that things are moving in the right direction, even though it might not feel like it at the time. The apostle James describes the same process as well, when writing the following,

God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

James 4:6b-10⁵

Welcome to the closet!

**Cursed are the proud,
for they shall be resisted by God**

The opposite of meekness is to be proud and this is clearly the all-pervasive weed that we need to rid from our garden.

And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass:

And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits.

Leviticus 26:19,20

Scripture has nothing good to say about pride and this passage helpfully joins us in using a garden metaphor to highlight the fact that the presence of pride in our hearts will severely limit our fruitfulness in Christ. There is no room for any boasting on our part,

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that
not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:
Not of works, lest any man should boast.
For we are his workmanship, created in Christ
Jesus unto good works, which God hath before
ordained that we should walk in them.
Ephesians 2:8-10

All we have and are in Christ is given, we are His workmanship and all glory goes to Him.

**Cursed are they which do hunger and thirst after
unrighteousness:
for they shall remain empty.**

The consequences for us if we get this wrong are considerable, as Paul outlines in his letter to the believers in Rome,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven
against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of
men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;
Because that which may be known of God is

manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

Romans 1:18,19

If we do not allow Father to help us dig out these deep rooted weeds of unrighteous behaviour which we perpetrate in word, thought and deed, then what do we expect Father's response to be? For us to maintain that we hold to the truth of our salvation in our lives and then carry on living just as before then I am afraid after a while Father will be angry. This is fundamentally disobedience and rebellion on our part and this is the stuff that really gets God's goat, remember Moses and the rock⁶, Uzzah and the ox cart⁷ or King Saul and the sacrifice⁸.

We also need to understand that this is not religion. It is not just about not doing this stuff, no, it goes deeper. We need to lose the hunger for it, to lose the taste. This is why the roots of this behaviour, of whatever it is, need fully pulling out. If you are wondering what we are talking about, here is a list,

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

Without understanding, covenant breakers,
without natural affection, implacable,
unmerciful:

Who knowing the judgment of God, that they
which commit such things are worthy of death,
not only do the same, but have pleasure in them
that do them.

Romans 1:28-32

These roots that burrow down deep into our souls have to be dug out and destroyed. The soil of our heart needs to be totally cleansed of these predilections that will lead us into unrighteousness and disobedience.

...for what fellowship hath righteousness with
unrighteousness? and what communion hath
light with darkness?

2 Corinthians 6:14b,c

Paul is using the language of the creation here, the good news is that darkness cannot destroy the light, but a tiny spark of light will destroy the darkness.

**Cursed are the merciless,
for they won't receive mercy**

If you are anything like me, and sadly you probably are, one of the most deep rooted weeds in our garden is a propensity to be negative about others. It is so easy to believe the worst and so hard to want to believe the best in others.

Again this is a heart issue. It may express itself through our thought life and the gossip we find ourselves engaging in, but for all of us the bottom line here will be pride, insecurity and a distorted hungry sense of self. By which and through which others are consumed, relationships ruined and churches are split. I would just like to take this opportunity to say 'Sorry'.

We will be addressing the solution below, but to preempt this, simply said we have to change the way we think about ourselves, to not take ourselves quite so seriously and to change the way we think about others by taking them more seriously in love.

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind...

Ephesians 4:23

**Cursed are the impure in heart,
for they will remain spiritually blind**

Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

Isaiah 6:10

This is actually a curse that was given through the prophet Isaiah to the people of Israel, however, it could easily apply to much of the church today. Unhealthy bloated hearts that cause us to be deaf and blind to the truth of the word.

The imagery here is of a heart that is so encased in fat that nothing can penetrate it.

**Cursed are the stress merchants, for they haven't
grown up**

Lastly, instead of arriving at the final beatitude to find ourselves peacemakers, without the ground clearance we will always be a slave to our self-life and the self-reliance that this will necessitate. This by definition will be stressful, exhausting and mean that we will never produce any fruit that hasn't already begun to turn bad. And, reminiscent of the children of a certain Homer Simpson, we will never grow up to any stage of maturity in Christ.

Perhaps now we are in a better place to recognise the importance of the ground clearance that is required before we go any further with the Lord. And the good news is that when we get this right look at the second part of the first beatitude, what do we read, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. What does this tell us? It tells us that we are on our way and our destiny is assured as we continue walking in this direction. Father now has access to the garden of our hearts and,

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ... Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.

Philippians 1:6; Hosea 10:12

Let us now approach Jesus' teaching concerning the remaining beatitudes from the other, more positive, direction, having explored the negative.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Matthew 5:4

In all deaths there is a loss. And if we are relationally attached to that which has died, then there will be a response to this, which we understand as mourning. A death leaves a space on the planet or in us where something or someone is no more and there is a pain attached to this, we have all been there.

However, in terms of what we are exploring here, the good news is that if you are mourning the loss of areas of your self-life then it must have died and Jesus says you will be supported through this transition. Again, the good news, there is now a space in you where this weed once grew and which now needs to be replanted by new plants that don't carry the self-gene. This process is wonderfully described for us by the apostle James,

God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.

Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

James 4:6b-10

And again from the second part of the beatitude, know that you will be comforted, and he shall lift you up. In the Greek it is the paraclete⁹ who is in you, the very same Holy Spirit after whom you are now walking¹⁰.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

Romans 8:28; John 14:18

2. **Planting up the garden:**

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:5

The first crop any spiritual gardener (is this getting a bit weird? Stay with it) wants in the garden of their heart is meekness. We mentioned the chemical warfare that can go on in a plot (garden, not conspiracy) earlier and with a good sowing of meekness in the soil of your heart you will feel the benefit. Meekness is the antidote to the influence of the self-

life. When you have meekness there is very little room for the selfish weeds to recolonise.

The meek have a healthy, balanced and assured sense of who they are, but this is not in themselves, but rather of themselves in relationship with the Lord. For the meek have a quality of quiet certainty, and a lack of vanity and self-importance. They have no need to argue their corner, they trust in and are subservient to the Lord, i.e. they walk after the Spirit and follow their Lord, and they let this life, His life in them, do their talking for them. Door mat or door keeper for the Lord, you choose, they already have and their life demonstrates the reality of this fact.

The second part of the beatitude 'for they shall inherit the earth' is an indication of the unshakeable perspective of where this blessing is leading the meek as this quality takes root in their lives. Simply said, we are blessed and we do not need to strive or impress anyone. Our blessing is a done deal in Christ. We merely need to rest in what has been done for us on the cross and to walk out in the certainty that our destiny is a secure one in Christ. As we have seen above, in Christ we are entering the Father's rest and meekness is the tangible fruit of this secure place out of which we are now called to live our lives. We have nothing to prove as we are being proved by Father. We are rooted and grounded in the love of the Lord¹¹.

This is our garden

That he would grant you, according to the riches
of his glory, to be strengthened with might by
his Spirit in the inner man;
That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;

that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,
May be able to comprehend with all saints
what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and
height;

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth
knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the
fulness of God.

Ephesians 3:16-19

Meekness features throughout the epistles in the New Testament within various lists¹² helping the body of Christ understand the Godly qualities Christ is looking to be built into the hearts of the members of this, His body. They are Godly on two counts: they are a restoration of His image lost at the fall and they are Father given. Meekness will begin to bear fruit in the life of a believer as they spend time with Father in His potting shed, the closet. This is where the garden development for each of us truly takes shape, a Christlike shape.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy
closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray
to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father
which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 6: 6

The closet is Father's potting shed.

There is a wonderful process at work here. As we spend time with Father, opening up our lives to him and with

him, he will begin to prepare the ground of our hearts to make it more receptive to His seeds of new life. Therefore, beyond the closet as we endeavour to walk after the Spirit and follow the Lord into the details of our lives, things and stuff (if I could get a bit technical here) will begin to happen to us. A mishap here, an unpleasant conversation there, we are cut up whilst driving, etc...the stuff of life. The purpose being, when these things do occur, is to stir us up, to break up the soil of our lives and to see what still lies lurking. He did the same for the children of Israel on their own wilderness trek,

And thou shalt remember all the way which
the LORD thy God led thee these forty
years in the wilderness, to humble thee,
and to prove thee, to know what was in
thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his
commandments, or no.

Deuteronomy 8:2

There is nothing new under the Son, Father, or by His Spirit, if we are willing they will show us the stuff that needs sorting. Indeed, the areas that require not just improvement, that would be religion, which is buffing up the old man and hoping nobody notices. No, there is a new man within and he is called Jesus. If this is done right, we will be humbled, tumbled, tested and proved so that we can see who we really are. Effective active faith filled, Spirit lead fasting plays a crucial role here as well; after all, what are we all like when hungry?

And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

Deuteronomy 8:3

Where have we heard some these words before? Remarkably, this also the journey taken by our Lord.¹³

The soil of our heart requires improvement. The hard, crusty surface needs to be broken up so that the seeds of new life that Father desires to sow into our hearts will find a connection within our soil and when watered by the word will germinate, grow and bear fruit in our lives. As with the natural processes, this is not usually instantaneous. Over time, when we face similar situations we, and those around us, will notice that there have been changes. We don't react so much as act, and if we do react it seems to come from a different place. The fruit is now a little sweeter and with a less bitter after taste.

Before moving on, I would like to share two further scriptures that will help us understand how important meekness is both for the individual believer and then also for healthy body life. Starting with our personal life,

But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of

a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of
God of great price.

1Peter 3:4

This is part of a description of true Godly feminine beauty written by the apostle Peter to challenge the prevailing value system of his time, perhaps of all time. However, this verse speaks to each and everyone of us, male or female. True beauty comes from the hidden safe place of an individual's heart. This is the incorruptible beauty of the spirit that has been transformed from a weed patch into a garden of delights, within which, most beautiful of all, are the flowers of meekness and a quiet but steadfast spirit. This is a garden that Father calls priceless, let us not forget the price His Son paid to enable this to happen.

And then secondly, concerning body life Paul challenges the believers of Galatia with these words,

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye
which are spiritual, restore such an one in the
spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou
also be tempted.

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the
law of Christ.

Galatians 6:1-2

Why do we need to work with Father to transform our overgrown selfish hearts? Simply said, so that when a need arises we have enough love to support a brother through their own issues. And importantly our issues will not get in the way. A spirit of meekness is the essential quality required to sustain

healthy body life. It doesn't judge because it understands that there go I except by the grace of God. And moreover, it provides self-less love enough to bear the weight of the burden, thereby lifting the weight off the shoulders of your brother enabling them to leave it at the cross and walk away in freedom and newness of life. And in so doing, we have fulfilled the only law that is important to us which is the law of Christ, which is to love one another as He has loved us.

...and thy Father which seeth in secret shall
reward thee openly

Matthew 6:6c

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst
after righteousness:
for they shall be filled.

Matthew 5:6

We do live in an extremely addictive society. Addictions such as alcohol, drugs, pornography, gambling, and let us not forget chocolate, probably challenge many who come to the saving knowledge of Christ and may even have proved to have been the catalyst for their salvation. However, moving beyond the specific to the general, the heart of fallen humanity is by its very nature a sponge ready and available to soak up whatever addiction flows its way. We are always hungry for something. Indeed, something, anything that might bring meaning to this sad existence of ours; the proverbial God shaped hole. However, if we can't find meaning and struggle to find God then we often choose to cover the pain with some form of addictive practise.

Back to the potting shed of the closet. Earlier we explored briefly the deep rooted weeds, they will fall into this category. An individual may require professional help with addiction issues to initially clear the ground, or they may not. His grace may be sufficient. Freedom in these areas can be achieved by Father Himself-after all He is God and He is still our creator. However this is achieved, it is really important that all the root systems of the particular addiction are pulled out and the soil of the heart is totally free of its affect. This will always be by His grace and through His mercy.

Moving on, the Lord, later in His teaching in the sermon on the mount, helps all of us to recognise the place we need to get to. A place where we have truly left the addictions of the world behind on the cross and now embrace a new capacity to share the Godly appetites in life. Here, we are now hungry for the things of God!

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?
(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:)
for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.
But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew 6: 31-33

This is the focus that we need to find, a hunger to please Father, to play our part in His purposes, a deep need for His

rule and reign in every area of our lives. To develop a hunger to serve God. To develop a hunger to see the hand of God at work through our lives. To develop a hunger to see others as Christ sees them and to believe¹⁴ the best for all we might encounter. To develop a hunger to become a sponge for righteousness as we see expressed here, let this be our thought life,

... whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Philippians 4:8

There is one final area where it will be good to develop a Godly hunger, in John 4 we read the following challenging words from the Lord,

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

John 4:34-35

The form of words ‘my meat’ that is used here is a little archaic, however, it is culturally significant, flowing, as it

does to us out of the original Aramaic, Jesus' lingua franca, into Koine Greek and onto the page via sixteenth century early modern English. The original meaning was that Jesus is saying here to His disciples, as they return from the local MacDonaldis, 'this is my kosher food', this is my spiritual diet. I have a hunger that you know nothing about!

What about us? This is the hunger Father desires for each of us to feel in the pit of our stomachs. A hunger just like His Son's- lift your heads and lift up your eyes from your navel gazing, look with my eyes and see what I can see! There is work to be done, a task to be completed. Importantly for us, these were Samaritan fields he was looking out on, this was a harvest for the world-channelling my inner Isley Brothers¹⁵ here. Particularly, as we look back two thousand years to when Jesus was speaking, we need to ask ourselves, what about now? I am no believer in an end time revival as such, but there is still a need for the God given task, the great commission, to be completed. There is still a prayer that requires praying in our closet,

Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;
Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.
Matthew 9:37-38

After all, isn't there one particular labourer who could be sent into the harvest field-me or you? On a regular basis we can bring our particular field before the Lord and there to release faith, hope and expectation for

those with whom we will interact and ask Father, mixing metaphors, that we might be an effective net to bring in a catch for the Lord. And as these days continue to darken, His light within, will shine out ever more brightly, let us not hide under a bushel.

...and thy Father which seeth in secret shall
reward thee openly
Matthew 6:6c

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain
mercy.
Matthew 5:7

Someone I know once made a chilling statement that I believe we all need to hear and then question ourselves concerning its veracity. For clarity, her comment isn't directed at a church, but at the church.

“I don't like the church because the people are so
judgemental.”

I will just leave this hanging.

Jesus focuses specifically on this area later within the teaching in this sermon when he says the following,

Judge not, that ye be not judged.
For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be
judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall

be measured to you again.

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

Matthew 7:1-5

We do need to take some time here, in order that we might understand a little more clearly what we might take into the potting shed of our closet to share with Father concerning the condition of our hearts.

The first line has been used to make the specious argument that by definition all judgement should be avoided due to its potential to trip up the individual doing the judging. This is to misunderstand what Jesus is actually challenging here. The issue is not making a negative judgement, but rather by judging you might prove yourself to be a hypocrite.

There is a strange truism that the thing we find most annoying in others is when we see ourselves and our own nature and behaviour on display in the other person, and this not in a good way. When someone else does the thing-that thing- we know we also have a propensity to do, we find it so easy to judge them for it. How dare they! We are challenged, our conscience is tweaked, so what do we do? We come over all self-righteous, go into self-denial mode and

judge. Hypocrite indeed.

Jesus says plainly here, sort yourself out in this area and then we can think about judging others. This is what we need to take into the closet, we need to be self-reflective, to be honest and recognise our own stuff and leave it with Father. And do you know what, you will suddenly one day realise, that person is still doing the same stuff, but I don't feel a need to react in judgement, instead I feel a need to pray for them. This is called in the trade, grace and mercy. This is how the grace and mercy of the Lord works. When you have removed the beam from your own eye you can then see clearly and who you see now is someone in need, as you are, of grace and mercy. You now even have love for that person instead of what probably came close to hatred before. All because you were undermined from within and now you aren't. Praise God!

Judgement, therefore, is not just acceptable, but actively encouraged. As long as it comes from the right place!

And this I pray, that your love may abound
yet more and more in knowledge and in all
judgment;
That ye may approve things that are excellent;
that ye may be sincere and without offence till
the day of Christ;
Being filled with the fruits of righteousness,
which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and
praise of God.

Philippians 1:9-11

Judgement here is described as an aspect of love, and the judgements that we are called to make are encouraging and positive. We are called to now see Christ in our brethren and not their failings in the flesh¹⁶. And by this our garden is bearing the fruit of righteousness that now falls from a new crop of mercy in our hearts. By which we are now actually partaking in the very nature of Father God,

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth...

Exodus 34:6

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Matthew 5:8

This is a very important moment for us, our garden is ready! The ground has been cleared of persistent weeds, the Godly plants of meekness, hunger and thirst for righteousness, and mercy have been planted and now the garden is bearing its fruit. The heart is now pure(ish)¹⁷ and fit for purpose. And what is this purpose? The Lord informs us that at this stage we will now have the capacity to see God. However, what might this mean for us? After all, isn't scripture clear on the danger of ever seeing God face to face?

Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

Exodus 33:20

I believe what the Lord is referring to here is for us to come into and to enjoy, on some level, His own experience of the Father. What I mean by this is described in the following verse from John's gospel,

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

John 5:19

If you think I am being a little blasphemous (can you be a little blasphemous?), elsewhere, Jesus also prophesies the following,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

John 14:12

What the Lord is telling His disciples here is that He is leaving them, and leaving them to continue His ministry and to do this they will need to do nothing of themselves, they will need to do ONLY what they **see** the Father doing. To, in effect and with a caveat to follow below, serve Father as He had served Father. However, to do this they will need to be able to see Father at work in the world around them and to do this they will need to have a pure heart.

Therefore, moving on, the key concern for anyone desiring to experience this level walk and to follow in the Lord's footsteps in this way is the quality of our garden. Do we have a purity of heart? If we do then this will be our daily reality because this is where our journey was always heading, as we have always been walking toward this point in our lives. How exciting this is! What potential each of us has, if we are only willing to spend time with Father in the potting shed of our closet.

After all, it is not, all about us, the world is also in desperate need, if only they would know it, to see reality of the outworking of this in the lives of the followers of Jesus within the body,

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

John 13: 34,35

We do need to sort our garden out.

3. Picking the fruit

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Matthew 5:9

For 'children' here read mature sons, in the Greek the word used here is more usually translated as son.

Not just children of God, but sons of God!

This does make a significant difference to our understanding of this, the final developmental beatitude. Similar to the last beatitude this one speaks to us concerning completion, a journey's end in terms of the process, but very much a new beginning in terms of its outworking. For there is an interesting study to be made concerning what scripture has to say about achieving this level of 'sonship' as a follower of Christ.

Let us start in the prologue of John's gospel, where it says the following,

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:12-13

This is an interesting phrase that is used here by the apostle John, *...to them gave he power to become the sons of God*, by this he doesn't seem to be talking about the moment of salvation through the cross. However, this is clearly the event from which this 'power' emanates. From the tenses used, those who have received Him have done so in the past, and they have also been born a child of God in the past, but now stand on the cusp of becoming the sons of God in the future.

We are all born as a spiritual child with the potential to grow into spiritual maturity in Christ.

Before moving on, it will be helpful to explore what John seems to be saying by the use of the word 'power' in this verse. In the koine Greek that was used to write the New Testament back in the day there are two different words that are translated as 'power'. One is 'dynamis', from which in English we have the words dynamic and dynamite, and it carries a meaning of the physical or spiritual power to make things happen. For example here,

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

Acts 6:8

The other word used to convey the idea of power in the New Testament is 'exousia'. This carries the meaning of executive power, or the authority to make things happen. For example here, where we find Jesus indicating that He is full control of the events that were awaiting Him when he arrived in Jerusalem

No man taketh... [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

John 10:18

In John 1 we are dealing with 'exousia'. Therefore, by the use of this word what is the author suggesting to us?

Anyone who has received Jesus, believed on His name and been born as a child of God has been given by the Lord executive power and authority to grow up in the faith and to become a mature son of God. It is tantamount to saying that we now have the spiritual right to become a mature son of God. Moving forward, therefore, what does this potentially mean for us? To answer this question let us review the scriptures that speak into this potentiality, starting with, and therefore returning to, Romans 8 and a verse of which we are already very familiar.

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Romans 8:14

This power that we have been given will be the power that underpins the journey we have already explored concerning dying to self, walking after the Spirit and following the Lord. This journey is the journey of a son of God. Paul continues to underline this point,

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ...

Romans 8:15-17a

Paul is able to describe where this journey might lead us,

That ye may be[come] blameless and harmless [unmixed], the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world

Philippians 2: 15

Again, we have the same power here to become blameless, unmixed and diluted by the world, to become the sons of God and as such we shine in the darkness of this world with the light of the Lord. And in the future, the sons of God will come into their inheritance ruling and reigning with Christ in the Millennial reign of Christ.

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

Romans 8:14

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we

know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

1 John 3:1-2

**Our sonship in God is our destiny:
A preparation for our future in Christ
and is therefore
of great consequence for each one of us!**

Let us turn our attention now to first part of this beatitude. What does it mean to be a peacemaker and what type of plant might we be planting in our garden that would produce this fruit? To answer this question we are going to unpick a particular verse in James, where he says the following,

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

James 3:17-18

I believe this verse provides for us a beautiful summation of where we have come to so far in our scriptural journey together. The use of term wisdom here is new for us, however, its usage here picks up an idea from the Old Testament that the guiding principle within all of us is our wisdom, and the key to life is to align our wisdom with the wisdom of God.

This idea is expressed in the following verse from the Psalms,
Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts:
and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to
know wisdom.

Psalms 51:6

Father God is the holder of all wisdom and He desires that we become wise with His wisdom as we spend time with Him. Indeed, this is the essential idea behind the early chapters of the book of Proverbs,

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore
get wisdom: and with all thy getting get
understanding.

Proverbs 4:7

Therefore, James, the brother of Jesus, who is steeped in knowledge of scripture, identifies this Godly wisdom, the wisdom that comes from above, and its acquisition, as the disciple's path to sanctification. And as we have seen with our own journey through the beatitudes, James is also using the language of the garden of the heart as he describes it as being redolent of fruit, the fruit of being in the right place with Father.

And moreover, the final aspect of this for us is that now the peace plant is in full bloom with seed heads forming; indeed these are the seeds that will be sown through us to world that so needs it in the field of our lives. But, what does it mean, what is this peace? Is it merely the absence of war?

I believe this peace, like wisdom, also needs to be

understood from an Hebrew perspective. Peace in Hebrew is the word shalom. Shalom carries a far more profound meaning than what we might understand by the term peace. For the Hebrew mindset the word carries a sense of completeness, and wholeness. Therefore, the peace offered here is the peace of the complete and finished work of the cross. The peace offered is to be made right, the offer is to make peace with God. To make peace with ourselves and to become whole. To stop the struggle and to surrender into His safe pair of arms, as we have seen, to enter into His rest.

A seed of peace is a seed that offers the chance of righteousness when it lands in the soil of a receptive heart. We have travelled a full circle here. For these are the seeds that will be sown by those who have made the journey through the beatitudes. Those who have spent time with Father in the potting shed of the closet, working with Him to clear the weeds and to replant our garden from His seed bank of meekness, Godly hunger, mercy, such that now the soil of our hearts is pure and the air around us is full of the sweet fragrance of peace.

Be ye therefore, followers of Christ, as dear children,
and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us,
and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God a sweet smelling savour.

Ephesians 5:1,2

Back to the first garden.

Notes

1. See Psalm 1
2. The first 7 describe the heart transformation, the last 2 describe the consequential backlash.
3. See Hebrews 12:1,2
4. See Revelation 3:14
5. See also the teaching in Hebrews 12
6. See Numbers 20
7. See 2 Samuel 6, and 2 Chronicles 13
8. See 1 Samuel 15
9. See John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7
10. See Romans 8:1,13-14
11. Ephesians 3:17
12. Galatians 5:23; Colossians 3:12; 1 Timothy 6:11
13. Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13
14. Matthew 28:19,20
15. The Isley Brothers were a seventies soul group who had a hit with a song called 'Harvest for the World'
16. See 2 Corinthians 5: 16ff
17. Do not forget Jeremiah, see 17:9

Chapter 5

Adam Taking Care of the Garden: the First Disciple

Adam was not merely placed in the garden to enjoy its fruit and pleasures. It was a place of work and, more importantly, a place for him to develop his relationship with the Lord God. And then moving forward, he was to take and then exercise his God given responsibility for the garden, in preparation for stepping out into the wider world. We have echoes here of what we have already explored concerning the process of our own journey into Jesus and becoming a son of God.

Then the Lord God took the man and put him
in the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it.

Genesis 2:15

For us, as followers of Jesus, Father has not placed us in the garden, no, He has placed the garden in us. The challenge for us now, like Adam, is to move on to dress it, protect it and to keep it fruitful.

The Hebrew here in Genesis 2 uses language that will later be employed within the context of the Temple and its worship. The word translated 'to dress' can mean 'service' and the word translated 'to keep' can also mean 'guard'; both words are used in this way later in scripture, such as in **Numbers 3:7**,

And **they shall keep his charge**, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, **to do the service** of the tabernacle.

Therefore, in the same way as followers of Jesus, we are charged to keep and do service in our own tabernacle. What does this mean for us? We are called to guard and to serve in the garden of our heart within us and beyond us to guard and serve the body of believers to whom we have been added. Indeed, in scripture we are called to guard or keep many things

...keep thyself pure.

1 Timothy 5:22c

...to keep himself unspotted from the world

James 1:27c

And Paul has this exhortation for Timothy,
Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou

hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.

2 Timothy 1:13-14

Indeed, Jesus does have much to say about the importance of each of us exercising our capacity to walk in obedience and to keep His word, particularly in the final piece of teaching that he gave His disciples on the night before He was betrayed, as they gathered together to share their last Passover meal.

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

John 15:10

Abiding in the vine

To help us understand a little more clearly the way forward, and how we might keep and guard our gardens, I would like to spend some time with Jesus and His disciples and join them in the upper room on the night before His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion as we have it described for us by the apostle John. The reason being, perhaps there is a particular way in which this extensive narrative requires to be read and understood. Conceivably, there might even be something here that we have missed? Scripture today is often used from the pulpit as a bit of a pick'n'mix¹. Those sharing

the word have an agenda and will find verses, in whatever version or paraphrase of the Bible that suits their purposes, that support what they want to say on that particular morning. However, this too easily takes us into the 'text without context leads to pretext' territory. Scripture is multi-layered and the actual context is crucial to our understanding the breadth, width and height of its meaning.

We must never forget that,

All scripture is given by inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for
correction, for instruction in righteousness:
That the man of God may be perfect, throughly
furnished unto all good works.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

And that, each of us are called to,

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a
workman that needeth not to be ashamed,
rightly dividing the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15

Therefore, as we approach this passage of scripture, John 13 -17, the context for it is very important for us. In order that we can better understand what Jesus is truly saying, let us lay aside what we think we know and take time to look at these familiar verses afresh as we map together the progression of Jesus' teaching here.

The first thing that needs to be recognised here is that the audience in the upper room that night are the disciples, Jesus has gathered His beloved around Him for the final time. These are a group of men he has spent the last three years walking the dusty highways and byways of northern Israel and who are described in the most intimate way when it says the following,

...having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end

John 13:1b

The first thing He does this evening is to wash their feet and to do this we are told that he disrobed. Thereby, making himself naked, fully exposed and vulnerable in the presence of this group of men and by this modelling a truly profound leadership style of servanthood².

As a result of which the disciples were now physically and sacramentally clean; prepared for the sacred meal that was to follow. And moreover, later in the upper room Jesus will describe His disciples in the following way,

Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

John 15:3

The significance of this description for us is twofold. The point being made here is that disciples were clean both for Levitical purposes, i.e. according to the law, having been physically washed by the Lord and also spiritually pure

through becoming living embodiments of the Lord's teaching. They are now prepared and ready for service and their ongoing ministry. Using our garden metaphor the soil of their hearts had been purified and sown with the Godly seeds we have explored above. And for these men the final moment of their preparation and release into the ongoing purposes of God in the wider world comes when, on the other side of the cross,

...said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.
And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost
John 20:21,22

The point I am trying to get to with this long introduction is that Jesus in the upper room on this night is delivering a message to those who are ready for the next step. They are mature, sons of God. However, as we are shown with the example of the apostle Peter and echoing the words of Paul, this will always be a journey. The disciples, however, I believe do represent those prepared and made ready to walk after the Spirit and to follow the Lord, those for whom this verse is now their reality,

Then answered Jesus and said unto them,
Verily, verily, I say unto you, The
Son can do nothing of himself, but what he
seeth the Father do: for what things soever he
doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.
John 5:19

Taking what is suggested by these two verses above, the disciples are now imbued with the God given shalom and are ready to walk out to make peace. They are pure in heart so that now they have a share in the capacity to see what the Father is doing and to walk in Jesus' footsteps to continue the mission. The have made their way through the beatitudes and the garden of their heart has been prepared to produce its fruit.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

John 14:12-13

What is Jesus actually saying here? Let us unpick it phrase by phrase,

He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also.

- If we have faith in Christ we will be able to do the works He does

and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

- Because Christ has gone to His Father we will do greater works than these

And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do

- But the reality is that it is Christ who is still doing the works in response to our requests

that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

- The Father continues to be glorified in the Son, the Son who continues to be expressed through the Spirit in us

Therefore, what this amounts to is...

...we are faith filled conduits for the ongoing work of Jesus.

The spiritual baton is being passed here. But the key to the work being fruitful will, and can only ever be, due to Jesus by His Spirit working through us, it will still be Jesus who sees what the Father is doing as He sits at the Father's right hand. This is why we must always be looking unto Jesus, who is the author and perfecter of our journey, the race we are called to run will always be in Him.³

How could we ever believe that it would be any other way. Just as the Son of God could do nothing of Himself, how much more are the sons of God under another code of limitation? However, the wonderful new reality for the disciples is expressed by the Lord in what He says next,

At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

John 14:20

We are now all in this together.

What a wonderful moment of revelation this is when you can feel so connected and at one with the Godhead.

At this moment within this passage of scripture there seems to be another change of gear. We notice this, as the Lord goes on to explain to his disciples, what will be the key for them, and for all, who would aspire to walk after the Spirit and to follow Jesus. This key is found expressed within the following equation,

if ye love me, keep my commandments

Again, to restate the premise being made here, this teaching is delivered here to a group of disciples who have been walking with their master for three years. Followers who have been prepared for this moment, when they would soon be on their own, well not quite on their own. The heat has now been turned up and for them to not just survive but to thrive. There will be a new challenge for them to embrace fully.- namely that of obedience. And not just any obedience,

...an obedience that is the fruit of love.

This is not religion or army life, this is obedience that flows from a well prepared garden and a meek heart that is full of self-less purity and a hunger to please Father.

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will

love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

John 14:23

This verse echoes what we have read above in verse 20, when someone walks in love and obedience in this way the whole Godhead will be knocking at their door, wanting them to put the kettle on.

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

John 15:10

This teaching keeps progressing and yet another new term has been introduced here by the Lord, to abide. As He continues to teach them, this is and forever will be the essential reality out of which they will now need to live, in order that, the fruit continues to fill their gardens. Again, can we hear the gentle wing beat of the dove. Indeed, we are actually back in the garden again here with Jesus' use of the following fruitful metaphor.

Back to the Garden, and it's all about the Vine.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

John 15:1

If Israel is an empty vine⁴ then Jesus is the true vine filled with the fruits of righteousness unto the glory and praise

of God.⁵ As a son of God, a mature follower of Jesus who is walking after the Spirit in obedience, we have to stay close. So close, in fact, that it is just like being physically connected.

Abide in me, and I in you.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

John 15:4-5

We can hear echoes of the call to only do what we see the Father do here, but we are not Jesus. He could do nothing except what He saw the Father doing, **we, however, can do nothing without Him**. Notice Jesus' actual words here, we abide in Him and He by His Spirit abides in us- it's a double abiding, how close is that?

This is the level of connectivity that we need to walk fruitfully. It is as though Jesus could operate on Wi-Fi mode with His Father, however, we need to be plugged in to Jesus to achieve the same level of fruitfulness. We need the direct life giving enrichment of the sap of the Lord through His Spirit to maintain our healthy level of fruitful endeavour in Him. Jesus continues,

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye

shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

John 15:7-8

The fruit will flow and the prayers will be answered as we live out of the vine, connected to the life source of the Lord and, thereby, to follow His commands and to keep His commandments.

I am the bread of life

I am reminded by this teaching in the upper room of another time when Jesus gives some very challenging teaching related to Him being the bread of life from John 6. We are told that Jesus is speaking on the sabbath in the synagogue in Capernaum. Prior to this, He has fed the five thousand on the far side of the lake of Galilee before walking part way across the lake, literally, returning with His, no doubt, shaken disciples to the town where He has based His ministry. We can imagine them thinking to themselves, 'did that really just happen or was it a dream?'. Here, we find Him being challenged about the mass feeding event that had just happened across the water. Jesus immediately focuses their thoughts away from the physical to the

spiritual reality of which the miraculous picnic had merely been a sign. He, Jesus, was and is all the spiritual sustenance anyone will ever need. As an event the feeding of the five thousand captured in the imagination of the those present the gift of manna that had fed the children of Israel as they had made their arduous way towards their promised land across the Wilderness of Sin during the exodus. And Jesus used this to develop his teaching that he in effect is the true manna, the bread of life for all mankind.

He says,

Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed⁶.

John 6:27

There is, therefore, a form of spiritual sustenance that comes from Jesus, who is the Son of man, that, if taken, will enable that person to endure to eternal life.

And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

John 6:35

Jesus identifies Himself here as the new manna and as such He is the bread of life; the spiritual food that will, when taken, satisfy every spiritual hunger or thirst.

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of

man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

John 6:53

Jesus states here that as the bread of life it is His own flesh and blood that is offered as this spiritual sustenance that will provide this spiritual life. This is obviously suggestive of the communion sacrament that will be part of the life of the body, however, might it be something more?

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood,
dwelleth in me, and I in him.

John 6:56

As we have seen in John 15 there is a dwelling aspect to this, Jesus seems to be offering here a constant life giving provision of spiritual sustenance, we are called to live in the flow of this, the bread of life. The clincher being that the Greek word translated 'to dwell' here is the same word that is translated 'to abide' in John 15. And Jesus goes on to say the following,

As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by
the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall
live by me.

John 6:57

Again, as we have seen in Jesus' teaching in the upper room, Jesus was able to be sustained through his Wi-Fi whereas we need to be hard wired. He had Father, we have the Lord through the vine and the bread of life. Does Jesus say anything different to His disciples in the upper room?

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

John 15:4,5

We will return to John 15 later as we move on to explore the corporate nature of life in the garden, where we will also need to learn how to share our journey with others. This is because we will require support to keep our gardens pristine and fruitful. We will see that the keeping and serving has an important corporate outworking within the body of Christ, as well providing for us an early prophetic nudge towards bridal expectations.

Notes

1. This reference dates me. Back in the day there was a high street store called Woolworths and they had a pick 'n' mix sweet section where you could fill a small bag with whatever sweets you wanted and that this was then weighed and you were charged accordingly. Woolworths closed its doors on the British high street for the final time in 2008.
2. See 'Taking the Form of a Servant' for a full scripturally based study on leadership within the body of Christ, by the same author.
3. See Hebrews 12:1-2
4. Hosea 10: 1
5. Philippians 1:11
6. This sealing seems to be related to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which He received following His water baptism, see 2 Corinthians 1: 22 and Ephesians 1:13.

Chapter 6

Company for the Journey: the First Bride and the Bridegroom

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him...

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

Genesis 2:18, 21-24

I may be overstretching the metaphor here, but I do believe that it is significant that the garden story ends with a bride being brought to a bridegroom, to use modern day matrimonial language. Indeed, its significance lies in the fact that the end of the story of the body of Christ ends in the same place. Paul encourages the body in first century Corinth, Ephesus and the wider Asia Minor to set their sights on this ultimate goal of the marital union between themselves as the bride and the Lord as the bridegroom, when he writes the following,

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ
also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the
washing of water by the word,
That he might present it to himself a glorious
church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any
such thing; but that it should be holy and
without blemish.

Ephesians 5:25-27

For I am jealous over you with godly
jealousy: for I have espoused you to one
husband, that I may present you as a chaste
virgin to Christ.

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent
beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your
minds should be corrupted from the
simplicity that is in Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:2,3

Once more, we see here the same process of sanctification that we have recognised and explored above, here it is given a matrimonial context and application. The ultimate reason for the work of cleaning up the garden of the hearts of the followers of Jesus is to prepare them to become part of the Father's end time purposes to present to his Son a beautiful wife, at the marriage feast of the Lamb,

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

Revelation 19:7-8

Notice the wording here, his wife hath made herself ready, this is our calling now to be led by Spirit to clean up our garden and to come in to our full potential in Christ. This will also be the bride with whom He will rule and reign in the millennium. It is for this purpose that we are to be washed clean by the water of the word, who is Christ. And it is for this purpose that at salvation we are added to others within 'the beloved' with whom we will form a part of the body of Christ,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:
According as he hath chosen us in him before

the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

Ephesians 1:3-6

The last point to be made here is that it is very significant for us that the woman or bride (for our purposes, in Greek there is no distinction) was created out of the sacrificed flesh of the man or bridegroom. Adam gave a rib, which was crafted into the most beautiful woman that has ever lived. Our bridegroom gave His life, which is being crafted even today into you and me, as He, over time, crafts His own beautiful bride, of whom we are called to be a part.

We are also part of the bride building process within the body as we are called to love and support one another to come into their own particular expression of fulness in Christ. Here are some scriptures that confirm this calling,

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:1-2

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ
Ephesians 4:3,13-15

Returning, therefore, briefly to the two characteristics of Adam's garden management regime, to dress/keep and serve, let us focus on the service element and apply it to life in the body.

In what way are we called to serve?

The quality of our service is defined by the apostle Paul when he writes the following,

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

Colossians 3: 23-24

We serve:

- Heartily
- As to the Lord
- Not as man pleasers
- We serve the risen Lord Jesus

Back to the garden and the vine. The challenge for us moving forward within body life is similar to the one that would have faced Adam on a daily basis,

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death

But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

Romans 6:4-5b;7:6

The challenge is to continue to serve in the newness of life and in the newness of the spirit, we therefore continue in the Spirit and do not fall back on our own understanding, otherwise known as the flesh and the law. In our service within the body, we need to be operating out of the vine. As Paul says we have been planted together and the Greek word translated 'planted' does fit in well with our garden metaphor,

it actually carries a meaning of being born together. Therefore, we are united by our new birth in Christ and out of this we are called into a newness of life, lived out of newness of spirit. Underpinning it all has to be love. As we return now to John 15, we find the Jesus reiterating the new covenant,

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

John 15:12-13

Therefore, what Jesus is moving on to do is to apply this new idea of the importance of living in and out of the vine through our abiding in Him and He in us, now within the context of body life.

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

John 15:14

What Jesus is saying here, if you live out of the vine and obey my command and live out of selfless agape love, one with another, then I will consider you to be my friends.

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

John 15:15-16

Again, with the proviso that you live out of the vine I will call you friends and enable you to walk the Father pleasing walk of fruitfulness that I have walked, BUT it has to come from me!

These things I command you, that ye love one another.

John 15:17

Yet again, Jesus hammers home the point, without obedience and love our branch of the vine will wither and die and end up on the fire².

The hallmarks of corporate life in the vine are obedience to Jesus and love one to another.

What about the second part of the Adamic equation, the call to guard or keep the garden? Paul is once again very helpful for us as he succinctly defines the ideal of body life and structure in the following passage of scripture. Sadly this is an ideal to which we are very far from achieving today, but there is always hope because Jesus is still the builder of **His** church.

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech
you that ye walk worthy of the vocation
wherewith ye are called,
With all lowliness and meekness, with
longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;
Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in
the bond of peace.

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are
called in one hope of your calling;
One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
One God and Father of all, who is above all, and
through all, and in you all.

Ephesians 4:1-6

As defined here by Paul, the essential thing that requires
being kept by each one of us is not just unity, no, this
is the unity of the Spirit. Notice that a capital 'S' is used
here. The unity of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the phrase 'of the
Spirit' takes us right back to the cross and its impact on the
life of anyone who travels that way.

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee,
Except a man be born of water and of the
Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of
God.

John 3:5

Our salvation, if it is real, is 'of the Spirit'. Jesus goes
on to inform Nicodemus, the high priest, that which is
born of the Spirit is spirit.³ Through coming to salvation

through the cross we now have the capacity to operate in the spiritual realm and as such we are now true worshippers of Father.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

John 4:23,24

Moving forward, being 'of the Spirit' will have implications concerning the essential quality of the life to be found in the body, such as is expressed, within the teaching that should be evidenced here, as Paul describes in this passage taken from his letter to the church in Corinth,

Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

For who hath known the mind of the Lord,

that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:13-16

**We are called to be spiritual in our teaching,
in our discernment and judgement
and in the way we even think!**

Therefore, in returning to Paul's teaching in his letter to the Ephesians, we find can only find true unity as we are unified in and through the Spirit that indwells each of us. And moreover, again from the apostle's teaching here, this unity itself is found in the bond of peace. In other words, our unity is found in the reality by which our heart and lives are bound, as we have seen, by the journey through the beatitudes into some semblance of Christlikeness. A journey that we have taken as we have walked after this self-same Spirit and through whom we do now walk in newness of life and in newness of spirit. This all wonderfully cyclical.

This is why unity, true unity, will never be found through the World Council of churches or through any other form of man made ecumenicalism. There is only unity in Christ.

Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord

In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:20b-22

The final point on this, our responsibility to maintain or keep the body healthy, is just that. It is our responsibility, each of us. The Greek word translated in Ephesians 4:2 as 'endeavouring' is a very active term that is full of positive energy to achieve the thing in question. This will be our heartfelt desire and our motivation if we are in the Spirit and bound by peace.

A garden, but not of this world.

To conclude and to verify the veracity of what we have been exploring in scripture, it is interesting how similar the final verses of John 15 are to the last Beatitude in Matthew 5, where we read the following,

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Matthew 5:10-11

In John 15 we move abruptly from hearing about Jesus' call for obedience to His commands to flow out our love for Him and one another in one verse to be faced with this in the next,

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

John 15:18

Having had the garden of our heart transformed from a jungle of weeds into a fruitful oasis we need to be ready for attack both from the devil, the world and also, sadly, from those in the church who will still be operating out of weed mode. Clearly, at this point we stand in a place of blessing and should recognise that any attack proves to us that we must be doing something right to stir up such vitriol. There will be adverse consequences for us to walk the narrow path, but in the words of Peter,

Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

John 6:68

Where else would we want to be? But this is the time to put on the armour! Let us end with the words of Jesus talking to His Father concerning you and me,

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be

made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

John 17:19-23

Are we ready and willing to allow the Lord God to form the man Jesus in our hearts?

**For the Father of delights
is looking to create a garden in our hearts
and a Bride within which we can dwell together in
the vine.**

And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.

The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.

As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.

And as we have borne the image of the earthy, **we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.**

1Corinthians 15:45-49

Amen

Notes

1. In later chapters we will be exploring the significance of Paul's teaching concerning the example of the beguiling of Eve for both individual disciple and the corporate body of the church as well.
2. See 1 Corinthians 3
3. John 3:6b

Chapter 7

A Snake in the Grass-Genesis 3

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast
of the field which the LORD God had made.
And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God
said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

Genesis 3:1

Suddenly, as we move into the third chapter of Genesis, we discover that there is another being in the garden who has the ear of the woman. A walking, talking serpent. There is no surprise recorded here from the woman's perspective and there are those who suggest that this is because, in the garden, all the creatures had the capacity for speech. I am not sure I would want to go that far, but what is recorded here is very matter of fact. A serpent, presumably carrying this name from the previous work of animal classification carried out by Adam in the previous chapter, sidles up to

Eve and has a word in her shell-like, and what then follows is not pretty.

In the previous chapter we have proposed that this story of the primal couple in the original garden of Eden can be understood as metaphorical picture of the spiritual life of a follower of Jesus. We have suggested that the follower of Jesus has their own heart shaped garden within which, beyond salvation, their ongoing relationship with Father God can be developed. Indeed, as we have expressed above, just as the Lord God formed man and placed him in a garden, we have a garden that is within us that is brought to life by the Spirit of God, which is our heart, and it is within this garden that the man Jesus might be formed, as we learn to walk in the cool of the evening with our Father God.

A walk that, like within the original garden, has limitations. We cannot go everywhere. We cannot do everything.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Matthew 7:13-14

As Jesus tells us, the gate into our garden is as wide as a cross,

And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and
come after me, cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:27

and, beyond it, the way to follow him into a fruitful life
in Him is a narrow one that is defined, as it was for Jesus
Himself, by obedience to Father.

Then answered Jesus and said unto them,
Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can
do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the
Father do: for what things soever he doeth,
these also doeth the Son likewise.

John 5:19

We saw this ourselves in a previous chapter when
we explored Jesus' teaching that He delivered to His
disciples in the upper room on the night He was
betrayed. For this we used the modern day example of
technological connectivity, recognising that, whereas
Jesus' relational connection to Father God could be
understood as using spiritual Wi-Fi, we, on the other
hand, require a wired connection through the vine and
through the body. And again, as we saw above the key
to our fruitfulness in Christ is a love fuelled walk of
obedience,

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I
command you.

John 15:14

Who is the snake?

And as we now arrive in Chapter 3 of Genesis, we will discover that to help us with this, yes I did say help, there is a snake in the grass at the bottom of our garden! However, before we explore the whys and wherefores of our very own experience of the snake, it will be helpful to spend some time establishing a scriptural context for what we are dealing with here.

The first thing that needs to be sorted out is the identity of the snake in the garden of Eden. How is this to be understood? Is it a manifestation of Satan or the Devil, or is the snake used merely as Satan's mouthpiece. It is hard to be definitive here. Scripture does specifically identify Satan as a serpent, we find this in two verses within Revelation,

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Revelation 12:9

and,

And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years...

Revelation 20:2

There is clearly an identification here in both verses with the imagery from the garden, however. Positionally, Satan, until

this moment in Revelation 12 when he is cast out of heaven, seems to have his abode somewhere within the heavenly realm. Therefore, since he is not in any sense omniscient and can only actually be in one place at one time, then there is some room for doubt that he is physically present in the garden. And moreover, the curse that is put on the serpent after it has beguiled Eve and caused Adam to trip up eternally, clearly applies to a creature rather than to Satan. The serpent loses its limbs and from that moment we have the snakes that we are all now familiar with; limbless and slithering along the ground. Therefore, the second option, that the snake was a mouthpiece for the purposes of the Devil is the more likely of the two.

What is interesting, however, is the way the Lord God, when cursing the serpent in Genesis 3, changes His focus mid curse. As we have said, the first part is addressed to the actual creature, the snake, however, the second part of the curse is addressed to a very different individual. No longer talking to the snake He is now addressing the serpent within the snake, Satan himself.

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Genesis 3:15

Here, in the first part of the curse, we seem to have echoes of the scripture we have cited above from Revelation 12, where the apostle John goes on to describe the profound end time events that involve another woman who is about to

produce a child who will undo all the spiritual damage that has been done here. This is not the subject of our current study, but in brief we can identify this woman from the symbolism at the beginning of the chapter as representing faithful Israel, the child she produces will be Jesus Christ and during the end time tribulation this woman, to the great chagrin of the snake, is protected by the Lord God and kept safe for the return of His Son. This part of the Revelation ends with these words,

And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 12:17

The wonderful news for all humanity, however, is that the second part of the curse is widely accepted as a prophecy concerning the triumph of the Cross of Jesus Christ. Where, from the seeming defeat, came the victory of all victories. Alleluia!

...Christ Jesus

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:
But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:
And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him,
and given him a name which is above every
name:

That at the name of Jesus every knee should
bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth,
and things under the earth;

And that every tongue should confess that Jesus
Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5b-11

Moving on, therefore, what is the spiritual underpinning and context that we would want to understand at this point concerning the presence of a snake in the grass of our garden? How do we read and understand the message to us within this narrative? To help us, we first need turn to the 1Corinthians 10:6, where we read the following phrase, *Now these things were our examples...* And the things he is referring to are specifically the events that occurred during the Exodus of the children of Israel as they were rescued from slavery in Egypt and wandered across the wilderness with the potential of a land that was flowing in milk and honey that lay before them. As the apostle Paul explains here to the believers in Corinth we have all the examples we need to help us navigate our way through our own worldly wilderness as people of faith looking toward our own land of promise in the Old Testament and specifically within the narrative of the Exodus¹. And moreover, for our purposes here, an important example can be found in Moses' explanation of the fundamental purpose of the children of Israel's desert trek.

**It is not what you do in the desert
but what the desert does in you!**

All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, **that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers.**

And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live

Deuteronomy 8:1-3

What Moses is saying here is that the heartfelt lessons that are learnt in the desert are the preparation for their life in their destination, the promised land. They were being made ready and prepared for the home to come. And sadly what do we read,

Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you:

Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and

all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

Numbers 14:28-30

Even, the author of these verses, Moses did not make it, only Joshua and Caleb crossed over the river Jordan from the vast body that had left Egypt some forty years before.

The journey, their journey and our journey, are all about the work of preparation that needs to be done in our hearts for what is to come. Ultimately, that we might be prepared and made ready to be part of the bride of the Lamb,

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, **and his wife hath made herself ready.**

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

Revelation 19: 7-8

Noticed the key words of Moses in Deuteronomy 8. They were to be humbled, tested or proved, physically stretched this way and that, brought to the end of themselves, why?

- to know what was in their heart
- to know whether they would keep his commandments,

First, it was to not just refine their hearts but, more so, and this is crucial to all that is to follow, it was for them to have a true understanding of the state of their own hearts before the Lord God and then as part of this process, to train them to walk in obedience to bring about change. It is the same with us. Each of us needs to truly know what is in our hearts. As we saw in the previous chapter, this is why we need to walk with Father through the Beatitudes and allow Him to do what only He can do to prepare the garden of our hearts to be fruitful in Him. And for this, at times, we will encounter the snake in our garden, this was literally true for the children of Israel².

The passage in Deuteronomy links us to another encounter with the snake, this time the conversation is with Jesus, and His temptation in the wilderness. This is an event in the life of the Lord that is recorded in all three synoptic gospels. It is an event that occurs right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, indeed, the forty days in the wilderness carry a direct echo of the children of Israel's own sojourn of forty years in a similar environment. A connection that is demonstrated by the Jesus' own use of the same scripture in Deuteronomy when rebuking the serpent.

Jesus victory in the desert over the tempter, by referencing Deuteronomy 8, has the effect of rewriting or 're-righting' a wrong. Whereas the Lord God's chosen people had largely failed their examination in the wilderness, His own begotten Son passes this test. And moreover, He passes not just by

getting the answers right to the questions posed of Him by Satan; this was not just about Jesus' Bible knowledge. This was all about Jesus' heartfelt knowledge of who He was and, more importantly, who His Father was, is and forever will be. The key to this victory being that the test had already been passed. The real examiner here was Father and not the 'snake'. And prior to anything that might have transpired in the desert, the test that He had already passed with, as they say, flying colours. For the test was in His heart. His answers came from a place of solid truth that lay at the centre of His being. With each answer Jesus was demonstrating to His accuser that He knew who He was and that no temptation would find any foothold with Him. Elsewhere, on His last night on earth, Jesus lets us in on the secret to his success among the rocks and dust of the desert, *for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me*³.

Jesus had been prepared by Father for what was to come, for Him this meant His earthly ministry and the cross. What about us? As we saw in the previous chapter we will also require our own preparation and for each of us our preparation is to become a fruitful follower of Jesus in whatever context the Lord has for us, and for all of us to be part of His Bride, the true body of Christ. However, as with Jesus this preparation WILL be tested, prodded and proved, and as with Jesus the Holy Spirit will lead us into some difficult places, but as with Jesus we need to know that in Him we can be more than overcomers in whatever and wherever we find ourselves-that is if the work **has** been done on and in our hearts! And as with Jesus, Father will use the accuser to challenge our preparation and what is really going

on in our hearts. So that we can truly see what is truly there and hopefully respond accordingly.

The apostle Peter has some important things to say specifically about this fundamental and crucial process when writing to the scattered believers across Asia Minor, modern day Turkey, and it will be useful to spend some time exploring his words.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:
Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

1 Peter 5:6-9

The snake is now a metaphorical lion, but his role is still the same. As he is described in Revelation, his God given task (although he clearly does not realise he is being used) is to be the accuser of the brethren. And we will see, when returning to Genesis 3, this has always been the case.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, and as we see here, the journey through the beatitudes begins with a revelation of our need for humility and finishes as a son of God, prepared and ready for deployment as a bridge of a

peace that is only to be found in the cross of Jesus Christ. As with the incarnation of the Lord, the timing is totally with Father and we are living here according to His *kairos*⁴ time piece. We are called to actively cast all our cares on Him. The imagery here is captured in Luke 19:35 by the account of the preparation the colt on which Jesus was enter Jerusalem for the final time. The people are described as casting their own garments, or literally their coverings. We here are encouraged to remove the things which have been covering our guilt, fears and shame and to cover Him with them. This is the literal meaning of propitiation. He has paid the price, He has called us to come to Him to bear the weight of our lives, so that we might live in a weightless freedom in Him⁵, however.

There is a snake in the grass, or as it is here a lion, waiting for a moment of weakness, a moment of insobriety, a moment where we have lost focus and concentration. Think of the nature documentaries where a pack of lions are stalking a herd of impala on the grasslands of the Masai Marah looking for the weak and the vulnerable to attack. The one that is too busy eating to notice that they are under imminent threat. The call for us is to be ever vigilant, because as we are being shown in scripture the Lord wants to test us, prod us and prove us and to do this He will use at times the enemy or adversary. At other times, He doesn't need to because we too easily will trip ourselves up.

However, we do need to know that we are not on our own, there is no partiality here, we are all on the same journey into Christ. The call here is to resist in faith, what does this mean for us? Jesus makes an interesting intervention here when he says the following whilst delivering the sermon on the mount,

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Matthew 5:38,39

On the face of it, there does seem to be a contradiction here. Peter is telling us to resist, but Jesus is saying don't resist. The issue here is the type of resistance. Within Jesus' teaching the context is whether someone resists physically to a physical assault upon their person. He is saying here, we should be made of better stuff, and when hit we need to have the capacity to so embrace the moment that we might even offer our other cheek to be slapped. Why is He saying this? The overarching principle that He is exploring in this section of the sermon is to do with the quality of love that we are able to respond with, even in situations where there is pain involved. The question He is asking is what is the highest form of love, even what is the form of love that His Father uses when dealing with us. The answer he provides is that to love does not get any higher or stronger than to be able to love your enemies. And moreover, this He describes as Godlike perfection⁶.

Therefore, when Peter suggest that we resist the accusations and temptations of the devil with faith, he is saying the same thing. We need to be able to step back from whatever situation we find ourselves and to see the bigger picture. To understand what is truly going on here and to choose to be true to ourselves. Indeed, to be true

to our new selves in Christ. To be true to the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, and not the old man which Paul describes as being, corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.⁷ To actively dial down the emotions and to choose to be the best of ourselves and not the worst, to assert faith to be meek and to choose to love. Easier, said than done you might counter. Absolutely, no one ever said this would be easy. Our calling is too high a calling to be achieved with ease. However, what a calling!

But the God of all grace, who hath called us
unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that
ye have suffered a while, make you perfect,
stablish, strengthen, settle you.

1 Peter 5:10,11

Here Peter steers us back to the journey, the process of sanctification, that we are called to actively participate in, the discipleship journey that lies beyond the cross. And moreover, as we have recognised the call to perfect love in the sermon on the mount; is Peter saying anything different here? The journey will enable each of us to find some semblance of this perfection for ourselves, as our spiritual lives are built upon the immovable foundation that is Jesus Christ.⁸ For this we each will have to suffer the attention of the snake, lion, even angel of light or however he might manifest himself to us with his accusations, lies and deception. Let us not be undermined, fooled and deceived!

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

1 Corinthians 10:12-13

For unless we do stand on solid ground, which is, our foundation in Christ, then when the storms come and the snake slithers towards us we are in danger of falling or being felled. Our faith at these times needs to be in the irreducible word of God and we do need to believe what it says and believe it is saying this to us and then, still in faith, look for the way through or the way out of the temptation. As is suggested here by the apostle, a common strategy of the enemy is to make us believe that we are in some way special. That our particular area of weakness is unique to us and therefore it is beyond the protective scope of Father. This is a lie that comes straight from the father of lies, who is often the snake in rational clothing. And as we shall see with the conversation between the first woman and the serpent, and in the words of the Evangelist, there is, indeed, nothing new under the sun⁹.

Notes

1. See 1 Corinthians 10:1-7
2. See Numbers 21:6ff, notice here that the fiery serpents were sent by the Lord God.
3. John 14:30b
4. See Chapter 1
5. See Matthew 11:28-30
6. See Matthew 5:48
7. See Ephesians 4:22-24
8. See 1 Corinthians 3:10,11
9. See Ecclesiastes 1:9

Chapter 8

The Beguiling of Eve

Perhaps it is timely, that we do return to the garden and to rejoin Eve and the snake. However, before we do return it is important that we establish in scripture why this narrative directly informs our own spiritual life and journey in Christ. The apostle Paul builds this bridge for us when he writes the following to the believers in Corinth,

Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me.
For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.
But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:1-3

Paul here reveals his depth of love for and commitment to these believers, even taking on the role of a spiritual father for them. Personally carrying a heartfelt responsibility for them to get this right, that they do become, by their quality of walk as followers of Jesus, accepted as part of the bride. Sadly, all the time they have breath, all the time that their minds can think thoughts. the snake, the same snake that was in the garden, waits in the grass for his opportunity to challenge this. Indeed, as Paul describes it here, an opportunity to corrupt their minds from the simplicity that is in Christ. And moreover, for Paul this would be tantamount for these precious believers in Corinth to loose their spiritual virginity in Christ; their fruit would be spoiled. Literally, from the Greek, their temple would be defiled.

And the method that is deployed here, as it was back in the original garden, is that the serpent through his subtility will try and beguile or deceive us. To achieve this Paul tells us here that the snake will try whatever means he can to get the desired result, which is our corruption. Therefore, in finally returning to Genesis, we can be open and expectant that this ancient narrative will continue to speak to us down the ages and hopefully help us to be more sober, vigilant and steadfast in our faith so that come the day we might be able to resist the snake.

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast
of the field which the LORD
God had made. And he said unto the woman,
Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree
of the garden?

Genesis 3:1

What we might notice first of all is that Eve and the serpent seem to already be in the middle of a conversation. We say this because the first word spoken by the serpent that is recorded here is 'yea'. And the word 'yea' is a sixteenth century English way of confirming what the other person in the conversation has just said. Today, we might say something like 'Yes, I agree with you' and then to go on to make our next point. Therefore, we do not know how the conversation between Eve and the snake started and we join it just as the snake has the woman cornered as he continues, by seemingly, repeating back to her, in excellent active listening mode¹, what she has just said. Eve here is being tested, prodded and probed with regards to her own grasp and understanding of the instructions that were delivered to Adam directly from God in the garden. When this occurred she had yet to be created, and the snake seems to know this. The snake here demonstrates from the outset that he has a real understanding of the woman and where she is in terms her level of understanding and what was in her heart with regards to what she was really desiring. He has found a way in!

She was not in the room when it happened. However, subsequently, had the instructions been given to her by God or the man at all, we don't know? And moreover, if she was told, did she fully grasp them? Perhaps she was distracted by how juicy the fruit looked as Adam tried to explain to her about their one 'no go' area in the garden, the one rule that they were not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that lay in the centre of the garden, simples. But...

And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:
But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

Genesis 3:2,3

The woman is drawn into probably repeating what she has already said, and then comes the miss-step. Eve goes beyond the original instructions saying, *neither shall ye touch it*, and by this the serpent knows that he has her. This tells him that her understanding is weak and her ground is shaky. What he next says illustrates clearly his subtility and ability to deceive. He does this by not just delivering an alternative fact, i.e. a lie, but such a lie that it gives the recipient just what they want to hear. This is music to Eve's ears.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:
For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

Genesis 3:4,5

At this very moment, all conspiracy theories are born, or at least we can recognise that the human capacity to embrace them has always been with us. The essential issue that is at stake here is: where is the truth, what is true? Who are we going to believe? Does Eve believe what God has said or does she prefer to believe the spin that the snake is trying to put on this truth?

The snake line is that:

- God is a liar, if you eat this delicious looking fruit that hangs there you will not die.
- God is a liar, He knows something that He is keeping you, He knows the 'truth' that if you eat this, doesn't the fruit look ever so tasty, three things will happen to you:
 1. You will be able to see things that you have never seen before, to have a new revelation of what life is all about or would be if only you could break free and go beyond the perceived restraints of your limited life in the garden.
 2. As such, you will then be a god in your own right
 3. And as a result, you will have a moral code that is not dependent on God, you can determine what is right and wrong all by yourself!

This is quite a line, but as we will see, this is still the line that is being used, even today. And because Eve did not have a sound heartfelt grasp of the actual truth, her ground was shaky, she believed the lie and the rest is history, so to speak. And moreover, what a sad history it turned out to be, ending as it does, spiritually speaking, at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Moving on, to see the impact of this conversation on Eve, it will prove helpful at this stage to juxtapose the two given descriptions of the trees in the garden in order that we might more easily see the changes that have occurred in the heart of Eve. Indeed, changes which smoothed the ground for her to believe the lie and to commit the first sin.

And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food;...	And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise,...
Genesis 2:9a	Genesis 3:6a

The first verse in Genesis 2 is a straight forward description of the original garden and the important trees within it. However, what we have in the second verse from Genesis 3 seems to be written from Eve's own perspective and provides us with her perception of the trees in this particular moment. At face value both verses seem to be saying pretty much the same thing even though the order is slightly different, however. If we dig a little and look at the original words that are being used here we will be able to recognise a significant shift.

In both, the trees are said to be good for food and the Hebrew is the same here for both as well. However, when we come to the next descriptor that the trees were pleasant, in the first verse it is to the sight, i.e. anyone would see that they looked pleasant, and in the second it is to Eve's eyes that the impression is specifically made, and here the Hebrew is interesting. In the first verse in Genesis 2 the Hebrew word that has been translated as pleasant means that the trees were pleasantly desirable, a delight to behold, carrying a sense of purity and beauty, however. In Genesis 3 where we have Eve's own perception described, the Hebrew word that is translated

as pleasant carries a meaning of lustful desire, something that is impure and full of greed.

Quite a change. And moreover, the second verse does actually go on to tell us the source of this lust or greed. We are told that for Eve, when she looked at the tree, what she saw was something that was to be desired to make her wise. And as we have seen above, she was now fully buying into the lies of the snake. This wisdom, for her, would have constituted the potential to enjoy a new revelation, to be a god and to live under her own moral code. This would have meant freedom. The result of which was that,

...she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

Genesis 3:6b

The role of her husband here is an interesting one. Was he there all along, listening in on the conversation? Or did he turn up at the end to witness the denouement? We are not told, but the witness of scripture is that his was the greater sin. Eve was fooled by the snake, no doubt due to her own fragilities, but knowingly Adam followed her into sin and into all that transpired from this for humanity. And it is the knowing sin of Adam that does hold all humanity in its grasp until Christ came.

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is

the figure of him that was to come.
But not as the offence, so also is the free gift.
For if through the offence of one many be dead,
much more the grace of God, and the gift by
grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath
abounded unto many.

Romans 5:14

For since by man came death, by man came also
the resurrection of the dead.
For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all
be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:21,22

A Change of Nature?

Before we move on to apply the principles we have been exploring above to our own context and life in Christ, it will be interesting to notice the effect that this sin had on the two human participants, Adam and Eve. Scripture goes on to tell us that,

And the eyes of them both were opened, and
they knew that they were naked.

Genesis 3:7

The snake was not telling all lies, the eyes of Adam and Eve were indeed opened, opened to their nakedness. Obviously we can understand this as a loss of their innocence, however, lying within the language used in this passage we might

be able to detect something else that had fundamentally changed for the primal couple. In the original Hebrew the word used to describe them as naked has the same three word root as the word used to describe the nature of the snake. The character of the snake is described as being subtle and the word used here is *ayrum*, whilst the word used for naked is also pronounced as *ayrum*, but in Hebrew it written slightly differently, however they both come from the same root word *aram*. Therefore, perhaps we might suggest here that by eating of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil Adam and Eve had even taken on something of the nature of the snake. And moreover, was this also part of what made them look and feel different?

What about us?

Following Jesus is essentially also about a change of nature, perhaps in the other direction. He needs to become more and more whilst we need to become less and less in our character and nature, as we saw in the last chapter. The apostle Paul expresses it in the following way,

Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:17,18

We are called to walk in such a way that allows Father to bring about a new creation or metamorphosis in our hearts that brings about this change of nature. We take on, by this, like in the original creation, something of the very image of the Lord God. However, there is a disrupter at work, there is a snake in the grass of our heart looking for an opportunity to bring us down. Clearly, we are saved and secure in our salvation, but this is only a beginning we do need to go on,

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine
of Christ,

let us go on unto perfection

Hebrews 6:1

The beguiling of you and me

And it is here that the snake, our adversary², the accuser of the brethren³, will try and do his work. Indeed, we do need to know that it is, as we have seen above, as a roaring lion⁴ that he will try to devour us spiritually, to knock us off the narrow way⁵, to stop us running our race, and cause us to be so distracted that we stop looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith⁶. He will try and halt us on our journey, to prevent the development of any fruit and to lay whatever false burden on us that we are stupid enough to accept. Therefore, how do we prevent any of this from happening?

Let us start with the example of Eve. What were the tactics used here by the snake and how can we guard against them? We do need to realise that, just like with Eve, the

snake will be able to talk in a language that each of us will all too easily understand. Remember the words of Paul above, lest by any means, the snake will be pushing and prodding looking for any weak spots in our armour, if indeed we had bothered to put our armour on⁷ in the first place.

The Conversation??

The snake drew the woman into a conversation. This is the first red flag. The enemy will try and draw us into a conversation, for us this will be a conversation with ourselves. The conversation will be in our heads, between our ears, our thought life is our battle ground.

The enemy will simply drop into our minds a thought that will nudge us towards a weak area in our lives. This will then elicit in our body an element of craving. We will then begin an internal dialogue...

But hold on... what is going on here?
STOP right there!

We do need to realise that we are dealing with someone here who wants to steal from us, kill us and destroy us.

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

James 1:14,15

Stop the internal chat!

We are tempted when there is a temptation. A conversation only starts because we are tempted. Someone with a betting problem will view a betting shop or on-line betting advertisements very differently from some who has no interest or weakness in this area. Therefore,

Do not give the snake the time of day!

Paul says,

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ

2 Corinthians 10:4,5

Unlike Eve, we need to quickly close down this process. We need to take control and in faith stand on the word. We need to demonstrate that we know who we are in Christ and that we are standing strong on the rock who is Christ. Do it just as Paul describes it-bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Just Do It!

**Assert the truth of the word in faith
and overcome the enemy's lies.**

Paul says,

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, this means,

you **are** a new creation **in Christ!**

The old **has** died

Behold,

All things have become new

Now, where did I put that suit of armour?

Notes

1. Active listening is a modern day counselling tool or technique where the words of a counselee are reflected back to them.
2. 1 Peter 5:8
3. Revelation 12:10
4. 1 Peter 5:8
5. Matthew 7:14
6. Hebrews 12:1,2
7. We will be exploring Paul's teaching on armour wearing in Ephesians 6 below

Chapter 9

Put on the Armour (You don't look good in a fig leaf)

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

Ephesians 6:10

Paul says finally, what is this the final part of? Clearly, this is the end of a letter, but, as Watchman Nee captured in the title of his classic book, Sit, Walk, Stand. Paul's letter to the believers in Ephesus and its environs can be summed up in just these three words.

Sit

Paul begins by establishing our secure foundation in Christ on which we can safely sit together as followers of

Jesus,

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

And hath raised us up together, and made us **sit** together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:...

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God

Ephesians 2:4-6,8

Walk

He then explores our ongoing walk as a follower of Jesus, below is a scriptural collage of the six occasions when the word walk is used in the letter,

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should **walk** in them.

... **walk** worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called...

...henceforth **walk** not as other Gentiles walk...

... **walk** in love, as Christ also hath loved us...

...**walk** as children of light...

See then that ye **walk** circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Ephesians 2:10, 4:1,4:17,5:2, 5:8, 5:15,16

Stand

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to **stand** against the wiles of the devil.

Ephesians 6:11

And here we are, finally exploring with Paul the need to stand, the final word of the three. And like the Roman soldiers of his day, Paul is encouraging us to actively prepare for any onslaught from the enemy by metaphorically choosing to wear our God given armour. However, Like real armour, it is only effective when we wear the whole armour, to miss a piece would clearly leave us vulnerable to attack. And in terms of us expecting an attack, Paul does not hold back here. We are in a war and, potentially, each of us will find ourselves in the line of fire. Some of the devil's fiery darts will even have our name on them.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Ephesians 6:12

However, let us not misunderstand what Paul is saying here. This will NOT involve at times a hand to hand struggle, or even some hot and sweaty down in the dust spiritual wrestling match¹. We need to know that the war has been won, any fighting is over because Jesus' victory is complete. The work of the cross is a finished work. When

Paul suggests that we are in a wrestling match, he means that when we are attacked he is identifying for us here who is attacking us, so that we know the direction from which it is coming. We do need to know that this is not our fight, the battle is the Lord's and He has already won the war. The verse clearly tells us that we are to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. He does not tell us to find some sort of inner will driven resolve.

...to stand. Stand therefore...

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand. Stand** therefore...

Ephesians 6:13,14a

The response that is required from us when the enemy's attention is on us is not to fight, as such, but TO STAND. Not to fight, but to stand our ground! Indeed, to rest in the victory of Christ! The apostle, by repeating himself in quick succession, as he does here, is making sure that we understand and are hearing what he is saying to us. And moreover, when he says in this verse, and having done all, he is not referencing to any fighting that might have brought us this point, no. This refers to the sitting and the walking with which he has filled the rest of the letter. Having prepared yourself by knowing in faith your foundation in Christ and enjoying the place of rest out of which you now live. And having learned how to walk a walk that is worthy of your

calling. Having nailed these two things, NOW you can stand strong in Christ, wearing the armour that He has provided for you.

However, like the real armour it will only be effective in protecting us if it is worn according to the makers instructions.

The Belt

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth,...

Ephesians 6:14a,b

Paul begins with truth. The reason being that before we begin to put on the various pieces of protective armour and take hold of the other pieces of essential equipment, everything that is worn below this needs to be secured and tied down. Basically we need a strong belt, to stop our breeches falling down and to hold everything else in place. And metaphorically, the only thing that will do this for us is the truth. Who is Jesus?

I am the way, the truth, and the life...²

Therefore, on reflection, is Jesus, by His truth, truly holding all things together? However, before we can answer this we might need to ascertain what this truth actually is? What is this, THE ultimate expression of truth that will hold everything together for us? Is it knowing all the right facts about Jesus? Is it about even having put to our memory every

word of scripture? Indeed, is it about head knowledge at all? The apostle John seems to suggest the answer to this question might lie elsewhere.

My little children, let us not love in word,
neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.
And hereby we know that we are of the truth,
and shall assure our hearts before him.

1 John 3:18,19

God is Love and the Love is the Belt

John seems to be telling us here that it is love that holds all things together for us. No surprises here as this has been our journey. A journey into love. At the heart of who we are in Christ is a relationship of reciprocated self-less agape love,

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but
that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the
propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to
love one another.

1 John 4:10,11

And like a belt that is fastened tightly around our lives,
love provides us with a secure destiny as well as secure
undergarments,

And we know that all things work together for
good to them that love God, to them who are

the called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

So secure that love acts as spiritual super glue,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Romans 8:35a

Love ticks all the boxes for us as it

... is the fulfilling of the law.

Romans 13:10b

Love is the key that unlocks the two greatest commandments of the old covenant for us,

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Matthew 12:30,31

And moreover, love enables us to fulfil the new covenant as well,

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye

also love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

John 13:34,35

And finally, our capacity to even love our enemies for Jesus is the seal of perfection,

Love your enemies...Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 5:44b,48

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

John 15:9,10

Loves binds Father to us through the love of Jesus

The Breastplate

...having on the breastplate of righteousness

Ephesians 6:13

As is often pointed out and to which we agree, it is the solid metal breastplate that covers and protects our heart. For our spiritual life our heart, as with our

physical existence, is absolutely crucial and most of our armour is given so that our heart might be protected from harm.

It is also significant that it is described here as the breast plate of righteousness. This is because only a godly lifestyle that produces the fruit of righteousness in whatever we say, do and most importantly think, will keep our heart soft, pure and healthy. Too easily, if we are not careful, our heart can begin to become ossified and corrupted.

Therefore, how do we effectively wear the breastplate?
Let us let scripture speak for itself,

Jesus says,

Stay hungry

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst
after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Matthew 5:6

Keep seeking

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his
righteousness; and all these things shall be
added unto you.

Matthew 6:33

Paul says,

Keep wearing

And that ye put on the new man, which after

God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Ephesians 4:24

Keep yielding

Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

Roman 6:13

....even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

Romans 6:19b

Keep living according to Kingdom values

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Romans 14:17

Keep in Christ

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption

1 Corinthians 1:30

Keep being filled

Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:11

James says,

Stay wise and be fruitful

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

James 3:17,18

To Stand, but NOT to Stand Still

Footwear

And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace

Ephesians 6:14

What we have on our feet is very important. The type of footwear we are wearing will determine where we can actually go; flip-flops might be good on the beach, but not much use when you want to climb a mountain. The shoes that Paul is

encouraging us to put on as part of our armour are a brand of shoe called the preparation of the gospel of peace. Clarks would have an interesting marketing job trying to sell these.

What does he mean by this phrase? Paul actually uses the same phrase in his letter to the Roman believers and it comes as a quotation from the Septuagint version of the Hebrew scriptures that were used at this time. He is quoting here from Isaiah 52, the reason being that in this part of the letter he is in the middle of important teaching concerning the Lord God's dealing with the children of Israel and His overall faithful plan for them.

How beautiful are the feet of them that preach
the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of
good things!

Romans 10:15b

The challenge described here is the need for the gentile church to actively reach out to the Jewish people with the gospel, to share the good news with them as a fulfilment of this prophecy in Isaiah.

From Ephesians the focus for us, however, is to not stand still. Like the Roman soldier before us, we have one direction of travel and that is moving forwards. Our standing, or spiritual status, is a faith filled attitude of our heart. We are called to be multi-tasking, come on men you know you can do it. To stand against the wiles of the devil in our heart, however, we are to continue to walk forward with the gospel of peace. To be ready and willing, on call, on duty, waiting expectantly for an opportunity to bear witness to the truth

we have within to whoever the Lord brings our way, and this even when under attack.

There is an interesting scripture in the apostle Peter's first letter which suggests such a scenario,

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake,
happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror,
neither be troubled;
But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and
be ready always to give an answer to every man
that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in
you with meekness and fear:
Having a good conscience; that, whereas they
speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may
be ashamed that falsely accuse your good
conversation in Christ.
For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye
suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

1 Peter 3:12-17

The gentile believers in Asia Minor in the first century are suffering at the hands of their Roman overlords and Peter is encouraging them to use their persecution as a chance for the gospel. To stand but to not stand still. To counter the questions that might be asked of them concerning their faith as an opportunity to tell the questioner all about Jesus. Therefore, they do need to make sure that they their feet are shod accordingly so that they are ready always to give an answer, however. There is also a warning here that their response does come from the right place, from a place of

purity of heart and an attitude of meekness and fearful love that would flow from this.

Be on the offensive, but not offensive!

The Shield

Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

Ephesians 6:15

As we move on to the next piece of military kit described by Paul, we are faced with an interesting question, why does he suggest that this, the shield of faith, is the most important element of the armour? Above all we are encouraged to lift our shield of faith. To find the answer to this question it is to the apostle Paul that we also have to turn.

Paul says,

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Romans 5:1,2

Our shield of faith is not a spiritualised hand held board made of wood, covered in animal hide and perhaps strengthened with a bit of metal here and there. A

cumbersome device that we have to use all our strength to hold up, hopefully in the right direction to catch whatever fiery arrows are coming towards us at speed. From the scripture above, we don't believe this is so. No, we stand in grace, and as such we are protected by faith. And we are not just protected by faith, if only we realised it, we are cocooned within it. Protected on all sides from attack. Let us explain.

Faith is our Protective Force Field, our very own Faith Dome

As Paul says here, we are justified by faith, which means we have peace with God. Let me repeat this for the *hear of harding*, we have peace with God. And therefore, if we are at peace with God then we need to know that no matter how hard the enemy tries, we are untouchable,

...wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the
fiery darts of the wicked

As long as we continue to stand in this place of faith and grace. This is the shield of faith. We have peace with God through our faith in His son, Jesus Christ, and this faith opens a door for us to stand in grace, His grace. And therefore, this is certainly a place for rejoicing.

It will be helpful if we unpack this a little more. When the enemy attacks us what is he trying to do? Essentially, he is trying to get to our hearts, to deceive, distort and disrupt our growth in Christ, even to draw us away from our first love and to sow seeds of potential corruption in our witness,

walk and fruitfulness. However, if we are standing strong behind our shield of faith and know that we are in His grace then nothing will land because, no matter what is thrown at us, our response will always be to turn to Father and not away from Him. There will be a strengthening and not a weakening of our relationship with the Lord. There will be a quenching of all the fiery darts, the fire will be instantly extinguished because there would be nothing flammable for them to land on, no dead wood.

If we would want to maintain that the apostle Paul is taking a more literal understanding of his shield metaphor then it may be helpful, having said what we have just said concerning our all enveloping protection of faith, to consider the way the Roman infantry soldier would have used his shield in a combat situation. Presumably, Paul would have been cognisant of this. Indeed, this might also be helpful for us to understand better the context within which our own shield of faith might be employed.



As illustrated here, the Roman soldiers formed what has become known as the 'tortoise' formation. As we can see in the illustration they used their shields to create a fairly impregnable moving force. And also in the illustration, it

shows the arrows that had been fired against it being rendered harmless.

For us, this provides us with an interesting visual aid to help us recognise the validity of the suggestion that our shield of faith does, indeed, provide with significant protection and cover, however. The key for this to work is that we are able work cooperatively with others, otherwise known as the body of Christ. Paul says,

I ... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,
With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.
Ephesians 4:1-6

The Roman army used this technique to good affect and it was very hard to break down. And like us it was deployed and was most effective as the army was moving forward in unison toward their common goal. Paul says,

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting

those things which are behind, and reaching
forth unto those things which are before,
I press toward the mark for the prize of the high
calling of God in Christ Jesus.
Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like
men, be strong.
Philippians 3:13,14; 1 Corinthians 16:13

The Helmet

And take the helmet of salvation...
Ephesians 6:16

The key to the next piece of Armour, is to realise which part of the body it is provided to protect. It is obviously an individual's head, more specifically the top of their skull where their brain is housed, however. For us, as with each piece of the armour, what is being protected here is not physical. Importantly, the helmet is actually given to us to protect the spiritual/psychological process that is going on between the ears of the person wearing it. What is this process? As the descriptor Paul has given this piece of the armour suggests, the process that is being protected by the helmet is the process of salvation. Process, you say, what process? When we come to the cross and say that Jesus is Lord we are saved, true, but...

But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting
on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an
helmet, the hope of salvation.
1 Thessalonians 5:8

For all of us the moment of salvation is only the beginning. There is always the now and not yet of our hope and calling in Christ. Look at the example of the apostle Peter, what a journey into salvation he had. Broken and on his knees before Jesus on two separate beaches³, struggling to get through the night on which Jesus was betrayed without denying his friend and master⁴. Imagine, how he felt as the cock crowed as the sun was rising on that dark day. Then, there was the cultural struggle he had with embracing the theological paradigm shift of the gospel crossing from the Jewish into the gentile world. Within all this his heart and mind had been severely exercised and through this process, over time, he was able to think differently. To change the way he thought about the Lord, Himself and His faith. It will be the same for us, we need to move on from our experience of the cross and to allow Father to bring us into the mind of Christ and to work out, between our ears, our salvation. A process that at times will bring us to a place, like with Peter, of fear and trembling⁵. Paul says,

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Romans 12:2

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;
And that ye put on the new man, which after
God is created righteousness and true holiness.

Ephesians 4:23,24

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

2 Thessalonians 2:13

Therefore, do not forget your helmet!

The Sword

...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God

Ephesians 6: 17

How indeed do we understand the last piece of our spiritual armour, the sword, notice it is not just any sword? We bare the sword of the spirit. It will be helpful to explore certain passages of scripture that will provide us with an underpinning scriptural context that we will need to more fully understand what the apostle is describing here.

...and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

Revelation 1:16b

In the apostle John's wonderful description of the transcendent appearance of Jesus Christ at the beginning of Revelation, Jesus is described as having a

two edged sword coming out of His mouth. Indeed, when He is later described as the triumphant, all conquering Christ it is this sword that does all the damage.

And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword,
that with it he should smite the nations...

Revelation 19:15

And the remnant were slain with the sword
of him that sat upon the horse,
which sword proceeded out of his mouth:
and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.

Revelation 19:21

In Revelation 2 it is this same sword that delivers the judgement to the church at Pergamum and would then be used against them.

Jesus says,

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos
write; These things saith he which hath the
sharp sword with two edges...

Repent; or else I will come unto thee
quickly, and will fight against them with
the sword of my mouth.

Revelation 2:12,16

**The two edged sword of the Spirit is the spoken
word of God**



And we need to know that this is powerful scriptural imagery is the same sword that we are charged with carrying? Our sword is also the Spirit of Christ who is the word of God. The image above shows again the Roman army's so called 'tortoise' formation, this time we are focusing in on the soldier who is situated on the front left corner of the phalanx. We can see here that both hands of the soldier would be being utilised in this formation, one holding shield, whilst the other carried a short sword. This sword is described as a stabbing sword, and was to be used in close combat with the enemy.

"I thought you said we were not to get involved in the fighting? You said that the war had been won and that we had to just stand in this victory?"

This is true, well remembered. Perhaps our position does need slightly tweaking here? The war is won, however, just like at the end of other physical conflicts like in the Great War, battles still continued and men died right up the final moment of the 11th hour of the 11th day at 11am on armistice day in 1918. Let us remind ourselves, therefore, where we started, back in the garden and the snake in the grass. We will have skirmishes with the enemy, after all remember what happened to Jesus?

Led, as He was, into the wilderness by the Spirit, after forty days, Jesus had his own skirmish with the snake. However, look at how he used His sword. His sword was his mouth and

out of his mouth came the word of God. Indeed, in each case it was the word of God that proved decisive. With each of the three temptations, Jesus was reliant on the unassailable truth of the word of God.

Stab...

But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Stab...

Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Stab...

Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.
Then the devil leaveth him

Matthew 4:4,7,10-11

In the Lukan version of the temptation narrative the departure of the snake is described slightly differently,

And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.

Luke 4:13

Even for Jesus the skirmishes had not ended here.

For us therefore, if the Word of God needed to use

the word of God as His stabbing sword, how much more do we! To this end we do need to read the word, and absorb the word so that when required it is available to us in our hearts and minds and we can use it stab the enemy as we come under assault.

The writer to the Hebrews helpfully describes what the word of God, which as we have seen is characterised in scripture as the very voice of Jesus, will achieve when it is wielded in faith. This will help us to understand more clearly what is happening when we are called to use it for ourselves.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

It is quick, which means that it is dynamically alive. It is described as being powerful, the power here, however, is not explosive but it carries a meaning in the Greek to get the job done. This reminds us of the words of the prophet Isaiah when describing the effective use and application of the spoken word of God.

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Isaiah 55:11

This is its power, as we saw with Jesus' own use of the word, it will achieve what it says it will achieve. It has effective stabbing power where the snake is concerned. We are told here that the sword of the word is also sharp, not just sharp however, but the sharpest sword in existence. Interestingly, the Greek suggests that this means a single blow will be enough, again this is what we witnessed with Jesus.

And it is here that we are shown its true purpose. It will be helpful to remember at this point the conversation between Eve and the snake in the garden. This two edged sharpest of sharp blades, like a surgeon's scalpel, will, when used correctly, divide between what is of the flesh or soulish and what is of the spirit.

When Eve was challenged by the snake to give an account of her understanding of the words of God in the garden she was too easily moved from the truth and then deceived to believe a soulish, selfish lie. She too easily moved out of the spirit and into the flesh. Indeed, this was the ultimate consequence of the fall that humanity was having to eat the fruit from the wrong tree. Banished from the garden they no longer had access to the tree of life, instead they had rely on their own distorted self-driven moral code, their source of knowledge and wisdom, would have been the tree of the knowledge of good and evil..

In Jesus there is a way back to the spirit and ultimately we will once again be eating fruit from the tree of life, the right tree, once more.

Blessed are they that do his commandments,
that they may have right to the

tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

Revelation 22:14

Now is the time for us to do His commandments. And an aspect of this is to wield the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God in faith such that the snake is given his slithering orders. The enemy will always be trying to draw us into the flesh and out of the spirit. However, by using the word of God appropriately, as we saw Jesus doing, the enemy will back off and we can walk on to perhaps stab another day.

And as we have been saying from the outset, the battle is over our heart and is waged between our ears, this is verified here by the writer to the Hebrews, *the word of God... is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*. And moreover, the other side of this scripture for us is that we also need to know that sometimes the word of God will stab us! It is all about knowing our own heart, as we saw with the children of Israel as they made their way through the wilderness. Any test, prod or proving will be to help us discern and know for ourselves what is really in our heart in a particular area; why? So that we can then take it back to Father and ask for whatever help we might need to sort things out. So that we can continue to enjoy the transformational journey of the cross.

There is one further point that does need to be made before we move on. The sword that we use to stab the enemy will only be effective if it is sharp, and moreover, the sword will only be sharp if the word it carries actually tallies with

the true state of the heart of the person who wields it. There does need to be a sound level of reality and integrity here. Otherwise the all so clever and subtle snake will see through us, as he seems to have done with Eve. The words themselves are just words unless they are underpinned by truth and faith, as they were with Jesus.

Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.

Psalm 26:2

Keep the Lines of Communication Open

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,
and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints

Ephesians 6:18

The instruction here from Paul to ‘pray... in the Spirit’ is found nowhere else in Scripture. However, the apostle does write about praying in the Spirit but using a different form of words elsewhere in his letters, and we should assume, therefore, that they are both referring to the same spiritual activity.

For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will

sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

1 Corinthians 14:14,15

The phrase Paul uses in this scripture is to pray with the spirit, notice the use of a lower case 's' here; we believe this needs to be challenged. In the first verse (verse 14 above) Paul clearly denotes that he is referring to the use of his own tongue or spiritual prayer language, which is the personal gift usually enjoyed by an individual who has received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We say this because the phrase he uses is '*my spirit prayeth*', however, in the next verse he purposely uses a different form of words, '*I will pray with the spirit*'. We believe the use of the definite article is important here and it's elevates the next word to the status of a proper noun. This is therefore not just referring to Paul's spirit but Paul's spirit that has been enlivened by the Holy Spirit, such that through his prayers and his singing here he is a vessel through which the voice of the Holy Spirit might be heard. Surely, this is what we still enjoy and witness when the body gathers today? In the next scripture we will discover what praying in or with the Spirit might entail in terms of its focus.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh

intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Romans 8:26,27

Therefore, what does this third scripture tell us about praying in or with the Spirit? Firstly, the Holy Spirit is a prayer guide. He gives direction as to what we should be praying about or for. Secondly, the suggestion here is that the Holy Spirit is Himself actively involved in the prayers and potentially is praying His prayers through us. It is as though what the apostle Paul is describing here is a level of prayer that is touching the very heart of God, with its mention of deep groanings that go beyond language. And as we saw above, this will be the same praying with the Spirit that saw Paul describing in 1 Corinthians 14, a praying beyond intelligible words.

However, the key to understanding the purpose of the prayer described here is in the fact that this prayer is the Spirit interceding for the saints through the saints, and moreover, they are praying into being the actual will of Father. And clearly, this is why Paul finishes his teaching on the spiritual armour by imploring the believers in Ephesus and beyond to be ready and willing to join the Godhead to stand in the gap for their brothers and sisters in all that they might be going through. We say the Godhead because having risen from the cross and ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of His Father, what has Jesus been doing since this time?

Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Romans 8:33-35

**There is a call for us to join heaven
interceding for the saints!⁶**

We believe that this will be an increasingly important part of the life of the body of Christ when it comes under the end time pressure of persecution, which is a different form of attack.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Matthew 5: 10-12

For as Jesus makes clear, as he concludes His teaching on the beatitudes (or how to be truly blessed in God's kingdom), an expected and direct result of you being a mature child of God is that you will suffer at the hands of both your own

brothers (Abel style⁷), the religious and the world.

This is where the intercession needs to hit the road, so to speak. A wonderful example of this call can be found in the Old Testament. Here we are going to join Nehemiah in conversation with his brother, Hanani, and other representatives who have travelled from Jerusalem to Shushan or Susa in Persia, where the Jewish nation had been exiled. The historical context for this conversation was the state of the city of Jerusalem at the time of the authorised return from exile under the Persian kings, first Cyrus and now his son Artaxerxes.

And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

Nehemiah 1:3

Some time ago the Lord showed me that this is an important prophetic picture of the state of the end time church. A church in desperate need for a rebuild, a church under extreme pressure, as it is described here in great affliction and reproach. There is a prevailing need for the spiritual walls and gates to be rebuild, such that we might find again the church structure that was originally intended. Indeed, a structure that we see in the book of Acts, a structure that was relational, Spirit filled and lead, powerful and holy, that shone with self-less love that was expressed through self-less acts. We are talking here about the bride, a

bride made ready for the return of her bridegroom,

...even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing...

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Ephesians 5:25b-27; 2 Corinthians 11:2,3

We have come full circle here as we are back in the garden with Eve, and perhaps this is also where the church today finds itself, corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ? This is the focus for our intercession!

Returning to the prophetic witness of Nehemiah and having heard of the parlous state of Jerusalem, we need to notice Nehemiah's response to the plight of his brothers in Jerusalem.

And it came to pass, when I heard these words,
that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain
days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of
heaven

Nehemiah 1:4

This is our intercession!

Amen

Notes

1. There is currently, within the charismatic wing of the church, a misunderstanding that is called spiritual warfare, believing that there are still spiritual battles to be waged by the church. We do not believe this is true or scriptural.
2. John 14:6b
3. See Luke 5:8 and John 21:17
4. See Matthew 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:61 and John 18:27.
5. See Philippians 2:12
6. I have written extensively about this in book 3 of my series 'Back to the Future; the Rebuilding of the Tabernacle of David', see chapter 2, A Place for a Whole Burnt Offering and the Appendix, 'The Intercession of Nehemiah'.
7. We will be moving on to explore the story of the first two brothers, Cain and Abel, in the next chapter.

Chapter 10

Another Jesus, A Warning to the Ages

Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me.

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

2 Corinthians 11:1-4

Having explored in previous chapters how the narrative of Genesis 3 might help us understand the spiritual reality

that we all will be impacted by the snake slithering through the grass of our lives and attempting to beguile us as he did Eve at various points in our personal walk of discipleship. We would want to turn our attention now to the impact that the snake will attempt to have on the corporate body of Christ, the church that Jesus is still building¹. For this is the audience that the apostle Paul was himself addressing in his letter cited above.

Paul is clearly concerned that there were already problems on the horizon with regards to what was being preached and taught within the church world of his time and more specifically in Corinth itself. As we saw in the previous chapter with Eve in the garden, the same snake seems to be whispering subtle lies into the ears of certain individuals and thereby encouraging them to preach and teach beyond the word of God. This is, as Paul describes here, being tantamount to actually preaching another Jesus and operating out of another spirit, thereby they were, in effect, delivering another false gospel. He also suggests here that the source for this deception lays at the door of the same serpent that we met in the garden. This is the same beguiling process that we saw in Genesis 3, but now another woman was being targeted and this woman was, is and will be, until the Lord returns, His bride.

The snake wants the whole church to be corrupted so that there is no one for Jesus to return for. We do need to realise how important it is that we do know what is at stake here. Look at the apostle's impassioned language that he uses, for I am jealous over you with godly jealousy. Indeed, the Greek word used here, from which we get the word zeal,

carries a meaning of heated passion. Moreover, he takes personal responsibility for both the matrimonial bond that has been forged between the believers in Corinth and the bridegroom, and even their state of virginal purity, spiritually speaking. It is a though he will be the doting father of the bride giving 'her' away when the time comes.

Therefore, understandably Paul is fearful. Indeed, a fear that the snake might undermine all of this, just as he did with the first bride, Eve. And moreover, that this corruption has already begun and the corruptors were already among them. By inference here he is imploring the Corinthians to wake up and to take some time to just listen to what some were preaching and teaching. There is, therefore, through this, a very real danger that the minds of many, if not all, would be corrupted to follow another Jesus, to believe another gospel and to fall prey to another spirit. Indeed, the very spirit of the snake that we encountered in the garden. And the final phrase of this scripture is chilling indeed, that ye might well bear with him. Who is the him here? Later in this chapter the apostle gives us the answer,

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers,
transforming themselves into the apostles of
Christ.

And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed
into an angel of light.

Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers
also be transformed as the ministers of
righteousness; whose end shall be according to
their works.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

Let us be under no illusions here, the him in question is Satan himself, that old serpent².

Therefore, moving forward, what do we need to learn from scripture here? What are the lessons for the church corporate to learn. What do we need to guard against within church world today? Essentially, we do need to be aware that there is a real threat if we do not heed Paul's words. As in Paul's day, there is teaching and preaching that is very questionable today. There is immense confusion concerning the end times themselves and indeed what scripture does teach about the return of the Lord. Can we look forward to an end time revival or an end time falling away? If we do not know where we are within God's timescale and purposes how can we truly be prepared for what is coming down the eschatological tracks towards us.

We are not sure that this is the place to spend time identifying what might be going wrong within church world at the moment. There are others who are very exercised about such things, for our purposes, however, what we do need to establish here at the outset is that what needs protecting is not any one denomination, the latest spiritual fad, that charismatic leader or this worship leading superstar. The apostle is clearly telling everyone either from his generation to our own and every believer in-between that it is the BRIDE of Christ that is in need of protecting, corporately nothing else matters to Father. And further, the threat is to her chastity. Jesus will only return for a chaste bride.

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy:
for I have espoused you to one husband, that I
may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:2

This is why we saw what we did, when we explored what we did in the earlier chapters. The Godhead loves us too much to let us stay the same, we do need to change. However, this means we need to be transformed into the image of the real Jesus, not another false Jesus. We need to be indwelt and led into our glorious sonship by the Holy Spirit, not another false spirit. This will only happen if we hear and respond to the real gospel, not another false gospel. Simple, as the annoying meerkat with the dodgy Russian accent from the TV advert says. Simple in Christ, it does not require any complicating by those who would want to push us beyond what the word actually says.

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:3

Sadly, if you look on Ebay at the moment there are plenty of second hand '*helmets of salvation*' on sale. It seems as though people do not know how to wear them. As we saw in the last chapter, they are to be worn to protect the wonderful process of mind transformation and renewal³ that Paul encourages us to engage with in order *that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God⁴* for our lives and the purposes of God for the church. Again sadly, this seems to be particularly true of those who lead and teach, hence we are all in danger of being beguiled, corrupted and,

ultimately, falling away. Without it we are so vulnerable.

The snake is subtle. What does this mean? He will use any means, and as we saw with Eve he knows how to get under our skin. It says here that Eve was actually beguiled by his subtility. For us, the snake, we are told here, will attempt to draw the church away from the simplicity that is in Christ. Beyond aspiring to become a beautiful and pure semblance of the bride, what does the simplicity that is in Christ mean for the church today and any day?

Being in Christ

To enjoy the provisions we need to meet the conditions

Pauls says,

Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is **in Christ Jesus**:

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God

Romans 3:22-25

Being 'in Christ' is a phrase that captures succinctly the full nine yards of our walk as a follower of Jesus. First of all, our state of being in Christ emanates from our coming to faith. From this passage it is interesting to note that we are not just in faith ourselves when we come to salvation at the cross, we are also benefitting from the faith of Jesus as well. By which we enjoy the now and not yet reality of the righteousness of God. At salvation this state of grace is assumed by us, and as we follow on as disciples we increasingly bear its fruit. Therefore, the apostle continues, being made righteous in Christ comes to us through the justification, redemption and propitiation that we received at the cross. Indeed, the cross carries a trinity of salvific blessings for all those who find it.

Justification

Being **in Christ** we are justified, this is a legal term. which means we have moved from the state of unrighteous or being unjust to being righteous or just due to the fact that we have now been declared without guilt and no previous sin can be held against us.

Redemption

Being **in Christ** we are also redeemed. This is the language of the slave market. Our price has been paid, we are no longer a slave of sin but have been bought out of that state and translated into a new state as a free individual in Christ.

Propitiation

A third wonderful consequence of coming to the cross

and being **in Christ** is that we enjoy the propitiation of our sin. Here Paul is using the sacerdotal language of the temple sacrificial system. Specifically, he is making an oblique reference to the blood that was sprinkled onto the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies once a year on Yom Kippur by the high priest. The sprinkled blood covered the sin of the nation for that year, however, for us in Christ Jesus the blood that was shed on the cross covers all our sin for all time. His is a complete and utter work of sin covering propitiation. The result of this wonderful reality leads us here to this statement from the apostle, notice again its conditionality,

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are **in Christ Jesus**, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit⁵

Romans 8:1

We are justified, redeemed and have had all our sin once and for all time covered by the blood of Jesus, now what? There is some walking to do. However, be careful which road you take. And it is at this point that some of the problems that we are encountering in church world might have their cause. We are very happy to be told that we no longer need to feel any condemnation, however. To truly be in Christ the rubber of our new life in Christ has to hit the road that he has laid out for us and this is not a road of our own choosing.

No, to enjoy this wonderful state of grace we do need to change direction. We can no longer get away with

following the well-trodden path of our old self-life, we need to catch a ride with the Spirit and let Him take us where we need to go in Christ. Remember where He took Jesus. I am not sure this message is often truly delivered today.

To be in Christ, as we have seen, we have been called to walk a path that will lead us onwards to become a mature child of God and for this things do need to not just change, but to die.

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Romans 8:13,14

If things in our life are getting in the way of us bearing righteous fruit then they need to no longer be things in our life. They need to go, they need, as is suggested here, to die. Sadly, as Paul points out here, if they don't then the spiritual consequences for us may be terminal instead.

**This is the simplicity of being in Christ,
to be on a journey into Christ**

For we are his workmanship, created **in Christ Jesus** unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

The good news for us is that at the heart of our being the power that is at work is the love of God and this means being in Christ means you and Father are inseparable. Again, however, notice the conditionality here, the inseparable love of God is enjoyed by those who are in Christ

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor
things present, nor things to come,
Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,
shall be able to separate us from the love of God,
which is **in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Romans 8:38,39

There is also an often missed conditionality to the next aspect of being in Christ that is found later in Paul's letter to the church in Rome, no not that church.

For as we have many members in one body, and
all members have not the same office:
So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and
every one members one of another.

Romans 12:4,5

We are one body in Christ. A simple statement you might think, but what lies behind this simplicity? To be truly, from God's perspective (and is there any other?) that is, in the body you do need to be in Christ. Don't you? How else can we understand what Paul is saying here? And as we have just established, to be in Christ is determined by the fact that

we have come to the cross and are enjoying its wonderful blessing of the 'now' assumed state of righteousness, delivered to us through the three pillars of justification, redemption and propitiation, however. What about the 'not yet' journey into the lived out righteousness of walking after the Spirit? Can we be disqualified from being in the body without the walk? The apostle's teaching within his letters does seem to suggest that works of sanctification do need to follow our faith and the apostle James is very strong on this point.

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so
faith without works is dead also.

James 2:26

Otherwise, as Paul says here,

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which
cause divisions and offences contrary to the
doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.
For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus
Christ, but their own belly; and by good words
and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the
simple.

Romans 12:17,18

The body, the true body, does need protecting. And this is why there is scriptural backing for church discipline to help achieve this⁶. Who we are, and what we have is so precious and so vulnerable. Schism, and the selfish ambition that weaponises it, sadly too often seem to be the order of

the day. Perhaps, there is a question that does need to be asked and I am not sure that at the moment there is an easy answer to be found. Where is the true 'in Christ' body to be found today? Where is the bride? Indeed, such a body that is described here by Paul,

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech
you that ye walk worthy of the vocation
wherewith ye are called,
With all lowliness and meekness, with
longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;
Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in
the bond of peace.
There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are
called in one hope of your calling;
One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
One God and Father of all, who is above all, and
through all, and in you all.

Ephesians 4:1-6

And moreover, such a body that was prayed for by the
Lord Himself,

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also
which shall believe on me through their word;
That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in
me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in
us: that the world may believe that thou hast
sent me.
And the glory which thou gavest me I have

given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

John 17:20-23

?

This question remains

In the next chapter, for those who still have ears to hear, we will continue to explore the beguiling of Eve and Paul's warning down the ages concerning the great falling away. The Bride is in danger and under threat, are we listening?

Notes

1. See Matthew 16:17,18, Jesus is not, as the Catholic church suggests, saying here that the church is built upon someone as fragile as the apostle Peter. The key to understanding this scripture is the fact that Peter had revelation from Father here to recognise Jesus as the son of God and it is this which is the key, core and foundation on which the church would be built.
2. See Revelation 12:9, and 20:2
3. See Ephesians 4:23
4. Romans 12:2c
5. Beware of the NIV translation of this verse, it omits the second half of the verse, thereby, losing the conditionality of Paul's statement in the first half of the verse
6. See Matthew 18:15-20

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Chapter 11

The Falling Away in the Fall

The end time falling away, or any falling away such as the one that was concerning Paul in Corinth in the first century, is an act of deception and as such we can expect it to have the same characteristics that we have already identified with Eve and the snake in the garden. These two scriptures prophetically anticipate what will be occurring in the end times to the church

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition

2 Thessalonians 2:3

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith,

giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines
of devils;

Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their
conscience seared with a hot iron

1 Timothy 4:1,2

The phrase giving heed to seducing spirits captures very neatly what we saw in the garden, with the woman being drawn into the seductive deceit of the snake. Tapping into her underlying weakness and making her an offer that she chose not to refuse. The Greek word translated here as giving heed carries a meaning of reeling a fish in once it has been caught on the line. This will be the same process that we saw in the garden, there really is nothing new under the sun, particularly when it comes to the stupidity of man.

For the time will come when they will not
endure sound doctrine; but after their
own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers,
having itching ears;
And they shall turn away their ears from the
truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

2 Timothy 4:3,4

The book of Jude

When the rocks are hidden we need a light house.

However, scripture does provide us with a timely response to what has happened, is happening and will

continue to happen until the Lord returns and we find this in the small book of Jude. As the half-brother of Jesus confronts similar problems in his own time. Let us, therefore, turn to the book of Jude and join the author as he contends for the faith,

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 3,4

Writing about forty years after the crucifixion of Jesus, with this letter we are moving into the second generation of believers in the church. Jude has realised that things had already started to go wrong and that some things were in need of being challenged and called out for what they were. The faith needed fighting for, because the snake was wriggling through the grass and had already captured the heart of those who were now doing his creeping for him, just as we saw with the original snake in the garden. There is nothing new here. And like Eve before them, individuals had been beguiled by snake and encouraged to listen to their own unresolved issues and sinful yearnings drawing them away

from the simplicity that is in Christ. To use the freedom of their state of grace to choose to open their hearts to spiritual deception and the moral bankruptcy that followed. Thereby no longer being in Christ they walked their own path and were dragging those they lead with them back towards the pit. The bride at this time has already lost her way, has lost her virginal purity and has been corrupted.

But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

Jude 10

However, these ungodly men are blind to what they were doing and what they were dealing with here, even with the clear examples they had from scripture. The Greek is actually stronger than how this has been translated, they are actually accused of blasphemy. And moreover, the corruption that is described here is the very same corruption that we have already encountered in **2 Corinthians 11:3**, we are back with Eve in the garden,

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Jude begins by pointing out that the scriptural record is full of those who have trodden a similar path. He identifies

three main areas where this has occurred, again using examples from the witness of scripture,

Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

Jude 11

Let us take each of these in turn,

• The Way of Cain

This takes us back to the world just beyond the Fall. Adam and Eve have been rejected and ejected from the garden and can never return. The earth and their lives are now cursed and they are having to make the best of it. Part of which is to begin to conceive children, the first being a male child that they call Cain and then presumably a year or so later Abel comes along, a second male child. As they grow the two lads take different paths. Cain becomes an arable farmer tilling the now reluctant soil. Abel becomes a shepherd. The story is found in Genesis 4.

We are then told that at some time into their working lives they are called to fulfil some form of religious sacrificial practise by making an offering to the Lord God from out of the fruit of their respective labour, unspecified arable produce from Cain and presumably lamb or sheep from Abel.

At this point we are told that the Lord God makes a judgement that Abel's offering was more acceptable than Cain's. This rejection causes such a problem for Cain that

he becomes very angry and ends up actually murdering his brother. What a family! No wonder things have gone so pear shaped for humanity if these were our forebears. If they were around today, they would be living on Albert Square¹.

People have often pondered about what was so problematic about Cain's offering that made Abel's, as described by the writer to the Hebrews, a more excellent sacrifice². However, in asking this question they are missing something very important that the scripture reveals here,

And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:

But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.

Genesis 4:4b-5b

The issue was not so much about the offering, the issue, as it always is, was about the person who was making the offering. Apart from their offerings, we are told that the Lord had respect for Abel and that he did not have respect for Cain as a man. Therefore, because the Lord God did not respect Cain then he could not respect his offering.

Religion tells us to just keep the rules and you will be OK. It is all about cause and effect, do this and this will happen. However, for God it is all about the person and the relationship He has with them.

And lo a voice from heaven, saying,

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Matthew 3:17

The sacrifice of Jesus is acceptable to God, because...He is His obedient son.

What about the sacrifice we are offering?

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you...

Matthew 7:22,23a

He wants to know us and for us to know Him through His son and by his Spirit. When the Lord God looks at our life and the sacrificial life that this engenders, there is only one man that he wants to see in us and that is His son. We might hopefully say for ourselves, the Lord God had respect for (insert name here) because He had respect for Jesus and His sacrifice. However, perhaps it is even more than this. The Lord God wants to be able to respect the quality of His son expressed in the quality of the life of the person, and to be able to recognise the quality of the heart transformation that has taken place. To be able to say to each one of us, this is my beloved mature son, in whom I am well pleased. In you I see my boy, Jesus.

He is my son because he carries my Son.

Sadly, today we are not being guided in this direction, instead, we have ended up too often here instead,

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men

Isaiah 29:13

It is all about the heart!

Moving on in the story, we now move into some very profound territory.

And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?

Genesis 4:5b,6

This is a good question. Why is Cain spitting dummies? Essentially he has been found out by the Lord. This will always be the reaction of someone when they have been found out, especially when they are in denial. I remember taking my driving tests, yes, tests plural. I eventually passed at the third attempt and each time I failed the first two tests my reaction was similar to this. It wasn't fair, I criticised the

examiner, the other road users, the course I was taken on. I was angry. However, on the third test I was really ready and I passed.

At this stage, in love the Lord God tries to reason with Cain.

If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?

Genesis 4:7a

Sort yourself out Cain, try again and we can all move on. But...

...and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.

Genesis 4:7b

If you don't sort yourself out, then there might be trouble ahead, as the song goes.

And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

Genesis 4:7c

Be careful Cain, have your folks told you about the snake? He fooled them, don't make the same mistake. You need to take control, don't let your emotions control you, or...

And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that

Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

Genesis 4:8

Right here at the beginning of the Bible story we have yet another narrative exploring the issue of sin. And moreover, clearly demonstrated in this narrative is the very same sin pathway that the apostle James outlines in his letter,

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

James 1:14,15

In this case the death was Abel's, lying bloodied in a field, murdered by his brother, who sadly was not able to take control. Within all of this, however, what is Jude referring to. What is the way of Cain? In part Jude describes it himself, as we have already seen,

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 4

In short, the way of Cain on one level is living the life

without the relationship. Fleshly adherents to the church structure and lifestyle. However, it will potentially also have deadly consequences for those who are around them. For when they are found out or shown up for what they are by the real thing, they, any way they can, will murder the truth to preserve their own lie.

Perhaps, we can identify this process described by the apostle Paul when writing to the church in Corinth. Indeed, Paul provides a helpful list of the issues he found in the church in Corinth that were leading people towards the same spiritual outcome that we have seen with Cain,

lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes,
backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults
2 Corinthians 12:20

Let us explore these issues so that we might understand where and how the church in Corinth were straying into ‘Cain’ territory and, hopefully, through this we might be more able to see for ourselves potential weaknesses and understand that there is a better way for us all, the way of love.

- The first term, debates, actually carries the meaning of a difference of opinion, a falling out.

- There was also jealousy, jealous is zealous gone bad. It is the same Greek term for both jealous and zealous. As we saw with Paul being zealous for the Corinthian believers to make it to virginal bridal status³. And at its root it means to boil over. Jealousy is very destructive, the green eyed monster, and it demonstrates an inherent insecurity in the

person involved.

- Outbursts of wrath are never good, the Greek term here is *thymos*, not *orge* which is the other word for wrath and usually related to God's wrath. This is the dark side of passion, again the blood is running hot and a negative anger is involved.

- Strifes, translated as selfish ambitions in the NKJV, are next, and this is related to someone using the church as a means by which they come to some level of prominence, we could possibly call this church based social climbing. The issue here is that the individual's motivation is distorted. Again, driven by insecurity.

- Backbiting might follow the previous issue, as an individual would put others down to further their own ends, this literally means evil speaking or gossip. This is definitely way of Cain territory.

- As is this, whisperings would be the means by which the backbiting would be achieved in the church, the term is actually related to the magical murmuring of a charmer of snakes, it is the voice of the snake again. This is the mechanism that would draw others into the strife and potentially cause a tear in the fabric of the church.

- And this, swellings is a description of what happens in the hearts of those caught up in these things, they become puffed up in the sense of their own importance, since judgement comes with self-pride as a freebie.

- These would then result in tumults, the Greek for which is actually defined as instability, a state of disorder, disturbance, and confusion. Sadly, at this stage something will have died.

It all begins with a falling out and the problem is, that because the hearts of those involved are largely unprocessed, the issues grow and then tragically eventually all concerned suffer the consequences. The distortion, the disruption and then the destruction always come from within the hearts of those involved. They may mean well at first, their intentions might be to serve the Lord and to serve the body, but lying lurking within them, and within us all, is the potential for a trip up, it is called the self-life. This is why the journey is crucial. It all has to be brought to the cross, and left there. Indeed, the cross that we find in the regular visit to the closet. The walk of true discipleship is so important, so that our hearts are actually prepared and we are, therefore, not so vulnerable to finding ourselves on the way to Cain. However, there will always be a risk.

• **The Error of Balaam**

This story is found in Numbers 22. And helpfully we do have a significant reference to it in the New Testament, to which we will turn shortly. Let us first of all acquaint ourselves afresh with this quite unusual tale of a foreign soothsayer and a talking donkey. And within it we find a lovely piece of scriptural humour.

Balaam was a Mesopotamian soothsayer from the town of Pethor on the banks of the Euphrates river. He was called upon by a Moabite king called Balak to use all his soothsaying power to curse the children of Israel as they made their way towards Moab. He was concerned that he would suffer the same fate as the Amorites who had just been severely beaten

in battle by them. The Moabites came to him because Balaam seems to have had a successful track record in the blessing and cursing business.

The upshot was, to cut a long story short, that every time Balaam tried to do the king's bidding and bring a curse against the children of Israel he was stopped by the Lord God. The story also tells us that each time Balaam's price went up, but to no avail. In the end, Balaam is recorded to have been killed himself by the Israelites⁴.

There are two memorable features of this tale. At one point, Balaam is stopped in his tracks when his donkey sees the Angel of the Lord standing in their way. Balaam keeps trying to force the donkey to walk on, eventually the donkey drops to ground spilling Balaam in the process. Suddenly the donkey is given the power of speech and in its frustration gives the soothsayer a mouthful, and here is the joke.

Donkey

And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine
ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I
was thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do
so unto thee?

Balaam

And he said, Nay.

Who's the ass now?

The second remarkable element is that Balaam is shown at one point to have great incite and understanding of, to him, this foreign god with whom he has been dealing.

Marvel at these words that come out of his mouth,

God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Numbers 23:19

Amen to that Balaam.

What is error of Balaam? To see God and your service to Him as your meal ticket. The apostle Peter describes those who would minister and serve in this way as earning the wages of unrighteousness. Let us read this challenging passage from Peter at length,

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you;

Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous

practices; cursed children:

Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.

2 Peter 2:1,13-16

Again, this speaks directly into Jude's concern about what was happening in the church, both then and for us in the here and now. So soon after the cross and yet things are already beginning to unravel. We have the same treacherous rocks waiting to sink the body of Christ, *spots⁵ they are and blemishes*, that we will see described by Jude. False prophets and teachers, little more than soothsayers, peddling their wares from church to church or on TV. Flying their Lear jets to wherever they can get the best pay day, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies.

This is quite a check list.

- who privily shall bring in damnable heresies
- denying the Lord that bought them
- as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time
- sporting themselves with their own deceivings
- while they feast with you
- Having eyes full of adultery
- that cannot cease from sin
- beguiling unstable souls (its back to Eve and the snake)
- an heart they have exercised with covetous practices

It all comes back to the heart, look at how they exercise their hearts, to make themselves financially rich but were sadly spiritually so poor. Therefore, the error of Balaam,

- who loved the wages of unrighteousness

• **The Gainsaying of Korah**

Gainsaying is an old fashioned way of stating that someone is in opposition to someone or something. In this story, that can be found in Numbers 16, a sub-tribe under the headship of a man called Korah or, in the literal meaning of his name, Baldy, and three Reubenites, Dathan, Abiram, and On, have taken exception to the leadership of Moses, as we see here.

And they gathered themselves together against
Moses and against Aaron,
and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you,
seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of
them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore
then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation
of the LORD?

Numbers 16:3

A little background information might be helpful at this stage. Korah was actually the great grandson of Levi, one of the twelve sons of Israel⁶. Indeed, Levi was the one son who did not receive an inheritance of land, but was given the responsibility for running the priesthood and the temple/

tabernacle worship and sacrifice. His grandfather was Kohath and his part of the family was given the responsibility for the transportation and installation of the holy elements of the sanctuary as the children of Israel made their way through the desert.

And the Kohathites set forward, bearing the sanctuary...

Numbers 10:21

They were even given special grace to handle the holy elements of the sanctuary without suffering the normal consequences, that is death⁷. Later, Korah's descendants are given authorship of some of the psalms⁸. So, Korah and his family had an important role to play within the sacred cultic life of the community.

However, even with carrying such responsibility within the nation we find Korah and his family not happy and wanting more. This frustration has even brought these protagonists to the point of questioning Moses' leadership credentials. The story does not end well for Korah and his family. By questioning the status quo here they were challenging the Lord God Himself, and this is never a good place in which to find yourself.

And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face

Numbers 16:4

Moses fell on his face. A little sideline here, more times than not, when you read the word worship in scripture, both

Old and New Testament, this is what is being referred to, someone with their face in the dust before the Lord, or a lord. Not singing slow songs in adoration of God. And this is what Moses is doing here. By which he is taking this situation into his closet and giving it to Father. Ultimately, the Lord God vindicates Moses and his leadership by opening up the ground and dragging these complainants straight down to Sheol.

So, what is the gainsaying of Korah and how might it manifest itself within the church in Jude's day and our own? Moses seems to hit this particular nail on its head when he states the following,

And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi
Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?

Numbers 16:8,9

These are powerful words directed towards Korah, *Seemeth it but a small thing unto you....* Has God not given you enough? Once again, the problem here for Korah et al all stems from unresolved issues of the heart. The word tells us that godliness with contentment is great gain⁹. We are called to operate out of His rest, not out of our own unmet selfish ambition. Indeed, Paul challenges this very thing

when describing the very mind of Christ in his letter to the believers in Philippi. We will take this passage in full and in an alternative translation that captures the Greek well here,

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

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 the likeness of men.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that

Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippi 2:1-11 (nkjv)

Enough said? Indeed, for us enough needs to be enough for now until the Lord moves us on in whatever direction He decides will be good for us and for everyone else. He is building His church and, as Paul says,

But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

1 Corinthians 12:18

Moving on, back to Jude,

Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

Jude 11

What is his assessment of the impact of three areas of spiritual decline? An impressive list of powerful metaphors is the answer.

- These are spots in your feasts of charity,
when they feast with you,
feeding themselves without fear:
- Clouds they are without water, carried about
of winds;
- Trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit,
twice dead, plucked up by the roots;
- Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their
own shame;

- Wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

Jude 12,13

The last four metaphors Jude uses here are self-explanatory, however, the first one, *spots*, does require a little explanation. The primary meaning for this term in Greek is a rock lying just under the surface of the waves that sailors ignore at their own peril. It is there waiting to cause ships to founder. Everything might seem fine on the surface, but...

Therefore, when the rocks are hidden this is when we need a lighthouse and the book of Jude is certainly that. He also offers us a glimpse of a love and faith filled response from those who have seen the light to those who are caught up in the darkness. Jude seems to be positioned in the lighthouse, such that he can direct us away from the problems, and from where he also describes a place of safety. A haven of truth, faith and most of all love, beyond the rocks.

The safe haven

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,
Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Jude 20,21

We would want to suggest that there is a need to ask serious questions concerning what the end time church might look like if it is to fulfil the Lord's purposes and to

become a semblance of the beautiful bride for whom He will be returning. Indeed, a gathering of humanity who will shine brightly in the ever approaching darkness. We believe a verse in Isaiah does carry for us an important message in this regard,

Thus saith the LORD, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all.

Isaiah 65:8

Beyond the religious hierarchy and man made structures that seem to sustain what passes for the church today in all its manifestations, we need to find a new yet old way of gathering¹⁰ within which the love agenda can be expressed and actively supported so that all will be built up in their most holy faith. Here the journey into blessing for everyone will be central, as the gardens of our hearts will be prepared and brought through to fruitfulness in Christ. This is the bride.

And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish.

But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved.

Luke 5:37-38

The rescue mission

And of some have compassion, making a difference:

And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Jude 22,23

Here, we are reminded of the call to pray for the saints which is part of our armour that we recognised in a previous chapter. As we saw above, there is a need for intercession, and there is a call to stand in the gap for our brothers and sisters. This reminds us of another gap in scripture, indeed, one that we came close to earlier when exploring the gainsaying of Korah. We are still in Numbers 16 and the fallout from the 250 or so rebellious people being swallowed by the earth and consumed by fire, a plague began to spread amongst the congregation of the children of Israel.

But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aarion, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD.

Numbers 16:41

There was an understandable disquiet in the camp as the rebellious deception had an impact beyond the original protagonists, as it did in the garden. We are told the whole people began to murmur and the Lord God moved quickly in judgement.

Moses' response was very different this time, he was moved quickly by mercy and compassion. Telling his brother, Aaron, to run to the altar in the tabernacle and fill a censer with burning coals. He then told him to, in effect, bring the altar to the people to make atonement and the impact of this is described succinctly yet very powerfully in scripture,

And he stood between the dead and the living;
and the plague was stayed.

Numbers 16:48

In these dark days of spiritual decline and deception, where do we need to be standing and what do we need to be carrying for our own brothers and sisters who are caught up in the chaos? Jude seems to be suggesting that there is a place in which we do need to be standing, encourages us to be so positioned that we are able to be pulling them out of the fire. Motivated by compassion to save those who are willing to be rescued.

What does this actually mean for us?

We believe that from a position of safety in whatever form of the safe haven we have been rescued we will then have a calling to stand in the gap for our brothers and sisters who are still caught up in deception. We will need to recognise that the established church will be a mission field within which we might be able to come alongside others and to be positioned ready for the moment they will be ready for extraction before they are fully consumed by the flames of judgement. In this way we will be part of this scriptural calling,

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying,
Come out of her, my people, that ye be not
partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of
her plagues.

Revelation 18:4

On a more uplifting note and to close, we do need to encourage one another, as Jude does here, that there is a wonderful hope.

Now unto him that is able to keep you from
falling, and to present you faultless before the
presence of his glory with exceeding joy,
To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and
majesty, dominion and power, both now and
ever. Amen.

Jude 24,25

Only He can keep us from falling.

And only He loves us enough to make sure we will make it faultless to the end. There is the same echo here from Paul,

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and
I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be
preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord
Jesus Christ.

Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

1 Thessalonians 5:23,24

Satan will always be trying to disrupt the purposes of God. This is his nature and why he was created in the first place. Sadly, for him, he is doing this in the misplaced hope that he can rewrite the future and avoid an eternity in the fiery pit of hell. This was true in the gardens of Eden and Gethsemane, this was even true in the Holocaust and this will also be true in the falling away, however. We have read the book and we know where this is all heading.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem,
coming down from God out of heaven, prepared
as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying,
Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and
he will dwell with them, and they shall be his
people, and God himself shall be with them, and
be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their
eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither
sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any
more pain: for the former things are passed away.
And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I
make all things new. And he said unto me, Write:
for these words are true and faithful.

Revelation 21:1-5

Therefore, in conclusion,

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy:
for I have espoused you to one husband, that I

may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ
But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent
beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds
should be corrupted from the simplicity that is
in Christ.

2 Corinthians 11: 2,3

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the
sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a
crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye
shine as lights in the world;
Holding forth the word of life...

Philippians 2:15,16a

Be prepared, not maybe.

For the time being, the snake is still in the grass.

However, be encouraged,

And as we have borne the image of the earthy,
we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

1 Corinthians 15:49

Amen

Notes

1. Albert Square is the setting for a popular British TV soap opera which seems to be all about family breakdown, highlighting as it does some of the worst aspects of the self life of British society during its time on our screens.
2. Hebrews 11:4
3. See 2 Corinthians 11:2
4. See Joshua 13:22
5. This the literal meaning of the Greek word used here.
6. See Exodus 6
7. Numbers 4:18,19
8. Psalms 42-48,84,85,87,88
9. 2 Timothy 6:6
10. The author has written extensively concerning this in his 'Back to the Future, Rebuilding the Tabernacle of David' series.

