Cities on Fire

Victor Hall & Murray Wylie

Cities on fire

Victor Hall, Murray Wylie - Brisbane Christian Fellowship BCF

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Section 1 - Introduction and Overview

From Antioch to Galatia, from Ephesus to Corinth, from Jerusalem to Rome, Paul and the apostles carried the gospel in weakness and power, in 'foolishness' and 'wisdom', persecuted but not destroyed, bearing in the body the dying as well as the living of Jesus. They first of all made disciples then returned to strengthen the disciples. They firstly founded them securely, then secondly urged them forward to completeness. They began by ministering enlightenment with confirming gifts, then they followed up with the message of entering the kingdom through tribulation. It is this two phase approach, with emphasis on the *second* aspect, that concerns us in this meditation.

In their mode of 'coming', they were gentle but bold (II Cor 10:1), caring but warning, receiving but rebuking; fully and personally involved, without taking offences personally; they were unjustly charged by others, without laying it *to* their charge; utterly committed to all, but standing free from all. Their message was transformation, not religious conformity. They spoke of a new kind of life, the life of Jesus, which could now be lived in the flesh, provided the fleshly, religious nature was put off. They taught the circumcision of the Spirit, not the circumcision of the flesh (i.e. real change of heart by the Spirit, not just outward appearance). They urged full appropriation of the 'so great salvation' and warned against 'crucifying Christ again'[1] (i.e. falling away, as if the cross was not adequate). They preached to Jew and Gentile alike, not alienating but rather *reconciling* them in one new creation, through the cross.

1 Based on Heb 6:6, this serious error of rejecting the process of the cross is discussed later in the paper

Cities on Fire

Centuries of exhaustive scholarship and insightful meditation have been invested in seeking to understand how the gospel and its apostles turned the world upside down and set cities on fire in a single generation. (Acts 17:6). Our targets in this study are just the same: the *gospel*, the *way* it was established, the *cities* in which it took hold, and the fires of *tribulation* through which it was established. Accordingly, we will refresh ourselves in the gospel message and its ministry, and consider again how these developed with such irresistible force across the cities of Asia Minor. Certainly, the hearers were powerfully delivered from darkness and baptised with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matt 3:11). And the cities were set ablaze with demonstration and conflict as the churches were established through fiery ordeal. Our particular focus here however, is the mode in which Paul ministered, and the development of the church through accepting weakness and tribulation.

The practical objective of our study is to grapple with the large *cultural shift* that the church *today* must make, if it is to become properly established as the light of the world in these dark days. The New Testament churches were established, and were *only* established, once they embraced tribulation – once they paid a price for the truth. The reasons for their affliction and persecution were not unique to that apostolic age, but were inherent in the very meaning of the cross! These were essential to the *life* of Christ being offered, and essential to the *way* in which the life was *produced* in the flesh, by the cross.

Overview

In re-looking at Paul's journeys and letters (Sections 3-7), we will observe that Paul's message and his ministry mode, became more sharply focussed as he visited, revisited and then wrote to the various cities. Our aim then will be to lift out high points and keynotes from Paul's letters, following the probable order in which he ministered and wrote. In so doing we will observe Paul's development toward his mature crystallisation of the message and ministry of the cross. The structure of Sections 3-7 will be to extract key points of focus from Galatians, Thessalonians and Corinthians, and then conclude with various high points from Romans, Philippians, Ephesians and Hebrews. As we draw out the key lessons from the apostles' practices, we will review the obvious and fundamental questions: how did they declare,

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demonstrate and minister the cross of Christ, such that the hearers joined them in the *processes* of the cross? What were the crucial points of their proclamation? How were the life and power of the gospel actually applied? And most critically, how did the apostles evoke the cornerstone responses – viz. *receiving* and *hearing*?

Expanding further on these questions: what was the essential *nature of the life* that the apostles were imparting – in practical terms? What was the nature of the *interaction* between the apostles and the hearers? How were the believers to enter into the gospel *process*? How did the apostles function as the true *circumcision*? How did they circumcise 'the flesh', without doing so in a way that was 'according *to* the flesh'? How were the believers to understand the all-important issues of *tribulation* and persecution?

Our two volume study 'Cities on Fire' aims to revise, revisit and revitalise these foundational elements:

- the essential elements of salvation – the keys that open the gates and release the prison doors,
- the need to understand salvation not as a linear, systematic theology, but as infinite integration – a four-square city with 12 gates, with 12 foundation stones, with a vast array of jewels, with a myriad of colours making up one pure, crystalline glory,
- the importance of receiving and hearing as crucial foundations of response; 'remember how you received and heard' (Rev 3:3),
- the need to hear what the Spirit is saying in the 'candlestick' (the local church) through the messengers of Christ – learning from the Biblical cities that failure to hear the Spirit, brought firm rebuke from Christ Himself,
- how the reconciling ministry operates through the apostles as a total package, not imputing trespasses (toward eternal exclusion), for through the cross, God has commuted our sentence to tribulation; this is now the context for the operation of the cross, by the power of God,
- how the hearers are drawn by the word of the cross into the processes of the cross for the purpose of bringing forth the new creation (II Cor 5:17),
- the apostles' mode of weakness in ministering the gospel process – their mode of 'coming' (e.g. simplicity, godly sincerity etc);
- how tribulation is essential to the cross; how the life given is both the dying *and* the living of Jesus;

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- partaking of weakness by the power of God,
- how appropriation actually works, and from there we need to develop an entire culture of appropriation as the church of the living God on earth,
- how transformation operates by invoking the power of God at the point of weakness,
- how imputation operates as a supernatural action of sons, bringing forth life out of death, and calling into existence things which are not (Rom 4),
- how to maintain believers in the crisis of salvation, keeping all the crucial elements above in balance,
- how we proceed to establish kingship (mature identity and corresponding accountability) and priesthood (relationship, community and the capacity to reconcile and resolve through the cross) as the goals of the Melchizedek Order;
- how the circumcision of the cross operates, as against the many false concepts of circumcision – how to circumcise the whole mode of relevance to and conformity with, the world;
- from here, a practical, pastoral model must emerge, one which describes, practically, how the flesh is dealt with - how we admonish one another, how we deal with (retain and remit) sin, how real change takes place, how each believer sends sin away and remits fallen culture,
- how to understand the apostles' warnings about not availing ourselves of the gospel process – even abusing the gospel process. (Heb 6:6; 10:29).

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Section 2 - The apostles' view of salvation

Let us sum up, in a brief and practical description, the way in which the apostles saw the gospel message and ministry.

The apostles' view of salvation was entirely related, not just to Christ, but to the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ was the means by which our salvation was effected. The cross was to be understood as a living dynamic of process, unto salvation, into which we could now enter. In particular, there were three evident dimensions of the cross.[2] First of all the cross was the interface between God's life and our death, His mercy and our sin; it was God's *breach* upon Himself by which His life was made available, and His breach upon us to give us this life. Secondly, the cross was an immanent, dynamic *process*, an ever-present operation through eternal spirit, that was able therefore to accomplish for each son what it accomplished for The Son. Thirdly, the cross in all its aspects, was powerful at the point of the '*word*' – the living, preached 'word of the cross'. It was the *word* that made a powerful breach upon the hearts of men. Wherever men accepted its word, they would first be brought to 'nothing'. (I Cor 1:19). Then as they accountably looked 'on Him Whom they had pierced', they would enter the processes of the cross, the travail of birth, and mourn in order to save sonship from death.[3]

Simply, the word of the cross had firstly to make a *breach* upon each individual. Then each believer was to enter its *processes*; and thirdly, each was to live by the *word* that would enliven and sustain these processes.

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2 Upon This Rock Volume 2.

3 The thought on saving sonship from death is taken from Heb 5:7, comparing our mourning to Christ's travail. See Cities on Fire, Vol 2, 'Travail to Redeem Sonship'.

The cross – active through the word

The apostles believed that all hearers could now be gathered into the immanent process of the cross. How? By receiving and hearing – hearing and receiving; by receiving the messenger and hearing his word. It was essential to receive the one that God sent[4]. This was and is vital to the gospel interaction. The effects of the cross were entirely dependent on this crucial interaction at the point of the word! The gospel was transacted at the point of the messenger's word. This word had to be heard and received. The word became the authority (Gr. exousia) and power (Gr. dunamis) to impute real death to sin, and real life towards God. This is most important! Within God's economy, the authority to impute[5], at the point of the word coming to our lives, is the turning point as regards power and transformation.

Let us examine this pivot point from another angle. We are told that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world.' (II Cor 5:19). The cross is first of all the Father's cross - the Father's weapon; just as Christ was the Father's Lamb. Therefore the cross is first of all an action of headship, belonging to the order of headship from the Father to Christ. The *points where we receive the word* from within this headship order, are the *points where the cross operates*. This is vital. There is no operation of the cross apart from this headship order by which the word proceeds 'from the mouth of God'. (Matt 4:4). As Jesus said (paraphrasing Jn 13:20): if you receive the one I send, you are receiving Me, and thus you are receiving the Father also.

It is the practical aspects of declaring and receiving the word - messengers to hearers, shepherds to sheep, husbands to wives etc – that are still an important challenge, if the gospel is to bring real change.

The 'word of the cross', according to Paul, is all-important to those who are being saved. The 'word of the cross' can be defined thus: the eternal dimension of the cross, manifested in specific redeeming and creating power toward *each individual*.[6]

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4 Firstly the Son Himself, and then whoever He sends, must be received. 20 'He who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." (Jn 13:20). In so doing, we receive the Father also.

5 On imputing or reckoning, see Vol 2, Section 2.

6 Redeeming and creating relate to the two foci of Abraham's faith – giving life to the dead, and calling into existence. Rom 4. These are the two actions of the imputing exercised by sons of God. See further in Vol 2, Section 2.

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Calling on the name of the Lord

The word of the cross is a word to me, to you, to each individual. It is also a word *of* 'me', or about 'me', a word concerning *my* name within the house of Yahweh.[7] Faith comes by hearing *this* word. (Rom 10:17). The word comes to address *me* by name, with a call *from* the name of the LORD, to know Him *by* name, to be *known* by name, and to submit to being *named* by Him through the cross.[8]

The cross is a full revelation of the Father as LORD, the Son as LORD, and the Holy Spirit as LORD. The cross is central to, and is the full expression of, the house of Yahweh.[9] The name 'Yahweh' conveys more than our English translation: 'Lord' (master). With the occurrence of Yahweh (Lord) we should always associate the sense of the 'name' and the One Who names all things. (See Vol. 2 as well as other studies on 'the name'.)[10]

Therefore, when I call on the name of the LORD, I am acknowledging Him by name, and also asking to be named by Him. (Rom 10:13). I am asking to participate in His cross, for the naming of my sonship. The first step then, before I can be joined to the Lord, is for a breach to made upon the kingdom of my 'name', my own 'lordship', my own control. Aroused from the darkness of non-accountability, I must now stand accountable for and to the cross. I must now call on the name of the LORD, take up the cross, and join the process of travail and mourning by which I may recover my predestined sonship. I now press toward what Paul calls, 'the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus' - the 'upward call' (NKJV), the 'homeward' call, so to speak. (Phil 3:14). This 'prize' is the maturity of my sonship, my full stature within the house of Yahweh.

God in Christ, reconciling the world

In the operation of the cross, Paul says that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has *committed to us* the word of reconciliation.' (II Cor 5:19). What

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7 'Yahweh' is an accepted rendition of the Hebrew name which is translated 'LORD' (in upper case) in the Old Testament. Using Yahweh here, instead of Lord, reminds us that Yahweh has a larger meaning that is conveyed by our word, 'Lord'.

8 See further in Vol. 2 in section entitled 'The key of the name'.

9 See earlier footnote on 'Yahweh'.

10 Upon This Rock, Vol. 2, Hall & Wylie, chapter 10: 'The name by which we are called'.

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the apostles understood from this was that the reconciling dimension of 'God in Christ' had been committed to them. This is quite startling.

Paul says that God was in Christ *reconciling* the world, not *imputing* trespasses to them. The focus of Yahweh was reconciling, *not* imputing trespasses. What does this mean? Let us explain it this way. God *did* want to impute (give substance) to death and sin, so that they could both be destroyed.[11] But He was not concerned with imputing trespasses '*to them*', i.e. loading them on *our* account. His purpose was reconciling not imputing trespasses. God's focus was commuting (shifting) man's sentence from certain eternal death to a reconciling operation. It is this reconciling operation that has been committed to 'us', i.e. to the church founded on the apostles and prophets.

This is highly important, because the church, accepting what Paul says about God not imputing trespasses, is *not* commissioned to 'run around' imputing trespasses to one and all. The church is to embody the reconciling operation.

The purpose of tribulation

Here now is a crucial point in terms of the administration of the gospel. The setting for this reconciling operation was the tribulation to which mankind has been subjected. Simply, mankind's sentence was commuted from eternal death, to tribulation. The whole creation, including mankind, was subjected to 'light and momentary affliction', to the 'sufferings of this present time', specifically so that these 'birth pangs' would bring forth sonship, full adoption and redemption. (II Cor 4:17; Rom 8:18-23). This is the foundation for understanding the whole subject of suffering - trial, testing, temptation and tribulation. This is also the foundation for understanding the entire gospel proposition.

From our very beginnings in God's purpose, we have been subjected to the *general* realm of mortality – 'futility', 'time and chance' – as well as to *specific* tribulations, necessities, weaknesses etc.[12] This was to be the context for the reconciling operation. Those who accepted the Father's hand in discipline, and who were willing to die with Christ, would be translated (commuted) and appointed to a realm of faith, where the

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11 On God's imputing of substance to sin and death, through the addition of law, see Vol 2, Section 2.

12 Eccles 1:2; 9:11. On 'time and chance', see Vol. 2: 'The key of faith'.

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cross, the weakness of God, would be the realm of *normal* Christian living. God was commuting, not imputing.

The normal Christian life

For those entering this reconciling context, the dying and living of Jesus would be the definition of the normal Christian life. In His predestination for each individual, God would set the limits of the dying and living. (This is why 'limits' were a large part of Paul's thinking; II Cor 10). It is enormously helpful to realise that the *dying* of the Lord Jesus, the sufferings of Christ in which we would share, and the ways in which His dying would *impact* upon us, were all part of our predestination. This is a completely different mindset from the religious attitude that views salvation as an escape to an ideal life.

The normal Christian life was *not* predestined to be an 'ideal' life in human terms. It was to involve living in the midst of the same elements of mortality - the 'rain' of time and chance – that would fall on both just and unjust. (Matt 5:45). Nevertheless, to those who received Christ, the authority of their sonship and the substance of their faith would enable each son to participate within the realm of time and chance, and produce godly character at each point of weakness and tribulation.

Through much tribulation

Paul did not tell the new churches that they would be blessed and prosperous, living ideal lives made available through the church and its leaders. He told them that 'through much affliction they must enter the kingdom'. (Acts 14:22). The cross and its processes, which were the 'weakness of God' made manifest in the flesh, would be their entire context for living. (I Cor 1:25). They would live in the cross. The operation of the cross, as it was for the son of God, would be the wisdom and power of God unto salvation. (I Cor 1:24).

Practically then, the apostles' gospel proclaimed that each and every believer was 'appointed' to tribulation. (I Thess 3:3). A cup full of the dying and living of Jesus was being offered to each believer. The communion cup was genuinely the cup of blessing (representing the blessing of Abraham – the life of God in the flesh, for each family). But it was also the cup of the sufferings of Christ which had to be 'filled up', in the flesh, by the participation of all believers. (I Pet 4:13). In this way, they would 'show forth' and demonstrate 'His death' until the conclusion of His reconciling work. (I Cor 11:26 AV).

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The church, the body of believers, did belong to the 'Great Shepherd and overseer' of souls. (I Pet 2:25). But it was not a social institution to deliver members from tribulation. Nor were its leaders kindly patriarchs or superior achievers, whose counsel should be sought in pursuit of the ideal life. They were not empowered to deliver saints from difficulty. They were guardians of the process of salvation, husbandmen of the elements of salvation, and watchmen over the flock against the false messengers and evil workers who would inevitably try to turn believers *from* the cross, back to fleshly religion.

Weakness - consolation

Partaking of weakness was designed to be the only context for partaking of consolation. Consolation, by definition, was to be found in the producing of character through the power of God. Hope did not leave believers ashamed, because the love (character) of God was indeed produced and shed abroad in their hearts. (Rom 5:5 AV). No matter what befell the dear Christian saints, at the very least, the fervent love of God, and the divine destiny of each individual, was produced in every situation.

The *cross* was declared to *be* 'the *weakness* of God'. (I Cor 1:25). The aim of the Holy Spirit therefore, was not just to provide an escape, or to console the feeble flesh, but rather guide each son to *touch* the cross, the weakness of God. In so doing, each son would produce a new synthesis of bios and zoe, an entirely new creation through the cross.

God's purpose for the 'flesh'

Explaining very simply: carnal, religious 'flesh' was to be cut off – circumcised; then God could manifest His life *in* the flesh, as a new creation. (Col 2:11). The flesh of Christ was the bread from heaven, the same bread given to us to eat - so that we may belong to the flesh of his body, which has now been glorified and received up in glory.[13] This is God's glorious purpose for created flesh. Flesh is not cast off and disposed of; rather mortal flesh is 'clothed *upon*' with immortality. (II Cor 5:4).

It is the 'flesh' of the carnal nature that must be cut off, for 'no flesh shall glory in His presence.' (I Cor 1:29). When Paul spoke of the 'flesh' that was an enmity with the Spirit, he was referring was an entire

[13] Jn 6:32; Eph 5:30; I Tim 3:16.

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institution functioning by religious law. 'So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.' (Rom 8:8). The 'flesh' was synonymous with the way of the world, having its origin from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The flesh could only produce death. (Rom 8:6).

The main point of the apostles' gospel therefore, was with the actual *mechanisms* (described as imputing, transforming, regeneration, recreation, new birth etc[14]) for converting 'bios' (Gr. for human life) into 'zoe' (Gr. for divine life: the life of Christ). Their governing rule therefore, was to maintain themselves as the true 'circumcision' who lived and functioned in the Spirit, not in the flesh, and who circumcised the flesh by the power of the sanctifying Holy Spirit. (Phil 3:3; Rom 2:29).

Kept by the power of God unto salvation

Peter said that we are 'kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (I Pet 1:5). In speaking of being 'kept by the power of God' unto salvation, he was giving a concise statement on the present state of believers. 'Beloved, now are we the sons ... but it does not yet appear what we shall be ...' (I Jn 3:2 AV), says the apostle John, referring to the same realm in which we are presently 'kept by the power of God'. Yes, we *are* sons, but 'it does not yet appear' – meaning we are not yet incarnate sons.[15] Like Job, we are convinced that 'in our flesh we shall see God' for ourselves. (Job 19:26). However, our present condition is on of 'weakness' in which we are 'kept by the power of God'.

In Paul's endeavour to instruct the believers on the normal Christian life, he reminded the Corinthians that 'Christ was crucified in weakness, yet lives by the power'. Then he went on to say, 'for we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God.' (II Cor 13:4).

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY?

Further on the 'apostles' view', let us try to understand how they understood salvation, in terms of the important steps and building blocks. A lot of theological debate has arisen, and quite some damage

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[14] These subjects are taken up in Vol 2, Section 2.

[15] Though we shall grow to like the Lord Jesus Christ, we are not yet walking the earth as replicated versions of Jesus – a presumptuous teaching that has led many into error. Rather, we are 'in the name', adopted into the one body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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has been done, by attempts to place the elements of salvation in a linear sequence – i.e. which step comes first? As we know, the entire Christian church is divided over the definitions of first principles such as faith and baptism. What element goes before what – conviction, repentance, faith, receiving Christ, the word, the leading of the Holy Spirit, etc? Perhaps the motivation behind all the definitions and divisions has been to 'get it right', or else to explain what's missing in the lives of some believers. However, linear thinking, leading on to systematic theology, has also created 'positionism' – i.e. we move from this step to that step, and now we have advanced to a further step; (and don't need to revisit the first steps). Clearly all this 'positional' thinking has warred against the 'present continuous' aspect of salvation. The truth is: we are *being* saved. 'The word of the cross is the power of God to those who are *being saved*.' (I Cor 1:18). The elements of salvation are renewed daily; we are continually opening our hearts for Christ to come in; we also 'take up the cross' and 'die daily'. (I Cor 15:31).

Of course we accept that repentance must precede baptism, or else baptism has no meaning. Equally we do not yet have faith as the substance of the hope if we have not been born from above. So there are specific steps by which we are inducted into Christ. However, our point here is that we have observed how quickly death settles in when we begin to say that we repented on a particular day, or were saved on a specific date. These crises of commitment and salvation are essential, but to live and walk in the cross, we must maintain ourselves in these crises daily. This doesn't mean that we lack assurance – quite the opposite, in fact. We are always living and moving, with assurance, through the gates of salvation.

The city of salvation

The preoccupation with theology and definition has led to a *systematic* approach to salvation - a systematic theology. Instead we should view salvation as an infinite integration – the way John described it in the book of Revelation: a multi-faceted dimension of light as is symbolised by the four-square city of God (Rev 21:10-27), with 12 gates (12 pearls) and 12 foundation stones, representing the infinite, variegated wisdom and power of the cross. From each direction, looking at this spiritual city, one can see a different jewel, a different colour. There are different gates through which to make a

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constant entry, different pearls of salvation to appreciate – repentance, forgiveness, life, sonship, faith, hope and love etc.

In his first epistle, John is describing a similar multi-faceted dimension of salvation when he describes the elements of water, blood and Spirit which bear witness to (and effect the work of) the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The beauty of salvation is that all these cleansing agents are flowing in the city of salvation, where the Father's use of water, blood and Spirit is diverse from the Son's use of water, blood and Spirit. The river flowing from the city of God in John's vision, is thoroughly effective for cleansing. Our concern here, is to understand the circumcision of the Spirit that opens the door, by the word, to this entirely glorious and effective operation of salvation.

A city of jewels

Let us understand then, that it is vain to argue the sequence and importance of prevenient grace, conviction, Lordship, repentance, faith, new birth, etc. Instead, we should see salvation as a city with 12 bejewelled gates, an integrated whole, a city of jewels, with each jewel as a foundation in itself. Each pearl (of wisdom) is a gate, and each gate is a pearl. There are many gates of salvation, for salvation is an abundant entry. (II Pet 1:11). Our life is to be lived as a constant entry, a constant 'birth', a persistent response to His Lordship, a daily appropriation of His grace and blessing.

'Therefore, brethren, be even more *diligent* to make your *call and election* sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an *entrance* will be supplied to you *abundantly* into the everlasting *kingdom* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For this reason I will not be negligent to *remind* you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (II Pet 1:10-12).

12 gates – 12 jewels

We are always and ever going on 'unto perfection', as God permits and enables the process. (Heb 6:1-3). We should not be concerned about the minimum for entry into the kingdom. For there is an abundant entry, by all 12 gates; (12 being the number always associated with divine order and complete appropriation[16]). There are 12

[16] Cf. the 12 loaves of 'shewbread' on the table in Moses tabernacle with the 12 apostles who were responsible to minister the bread of life, of appropriation.

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foundation stones, and we may be become established on all 12 of these jewels. Paul and the apostles (belonging to the order of 12) knew that their apostolic administration carried within its power and compass these 12 gates and 12 foundations. They were the gates, and they were the foundation.[17]

Each and every precept can be likened to a precious jewel of the city of salvation. And each and every element is in itself a salvation experience. Of course, the glorious truth is that we ourselves, and all those who receive Him, are to become the jewels of that city, since it's not a city of theology or knowledge, but a city of people, all clothed in God's glory. He is making up 'His jewels'. (Mal 3:17). Each one who hears His word is a jewel of predestination to whom the word of light is being ministered.

This is how we are to regard and 'know' others – not according to the flesh, but knowing one another in the Spirit, in relation to the precious *word* that is being ministered to each individual life. The 'entrance' of this word give light, and His glory shining within, makes each one a precious jewel. (Ps 119:130; Jas 1:17). Believers must constantly 'lift up their heads, open up their gates and lift up their doors, and the king of glory' shall come in'. (Ps 24:7). As we grant Him entry every time He knocks, 'Christ in us' is the hope of glory, the hope of being a jewel in this glorious city. (Rev 3:20; Col 1:27).

Receiving and hearing

How vital it is then to receive His word, for in receiving His word, we are receiving Him. 'But as many as *received* Him, *to them* He gave the right to become children of God.' (John 1:12). The receiving and hearing of the apostles' word - 'not as the word of *men* but as the word of *God*' - enabled the receiving of the kingdom. (I Thess 2:13). The good reception and abundant access that the hearers gave to the apostles, enabled an abundant entry to the city of salvation. These were the keys to the whole gospel process. The hearers opened the [12] gates of their own hearts to the word of God. 'What *manner of entry* we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.' (I Thess 1:9).

The apostles brought the word, diligently and without restraint. They warned and admonished; they laboured night and day; they

[17] Note: the names of the 12 apostles are written on the foundation stones. (Rev 21:14)

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repeated the admonitions; they wrote 'large letters'; they found no rest until they heard of the entry of their brethren into the processes of the cross.[18]

Maintaining all the elements of salvation

Salvation is not a 'position'. It is a constant crisis of appropriation. All the elements that we would consider to the most basic – conviction, calling on the name of the Lord, receiving Christ, repentance, born of water and Spirit (Jn 3:5), sonship, faith, mourning, 'believing and confessing', (Rom 10:9), forgiveness of sin, walking in the light, submission to relational order, dying and living – all of these must be maintained in balance as a complete package, as an infinite integration. Again, John sums up the salvation process as involving water, blood and Spirit', and says that by these we have the witness of eternal life in ourselves; we can know we have eternal life, now! (I Jn 5:13).

The preaching of the gospel must maintain the balance and the crisis of all these elements. The messengers must maintain the church in the whole process of salvation, constantly reviving the crisis by which believers are retained in this process. Practically, we observe that the Holy Spirit leads us in this regard, for the exhortations we hear within the church are constantly shifting the focus from 'goodness' to 'severity', from mercy to judgement, from faith to repentance, from hearing to doing, etc. (Rom 11:22). Yes, we must know Him as 'Lord, Lord', but we must also 'do … the things which He says.' (Lk 6:46). We can not say that we 'know Him' if we do not 'keep His commandments'. (I Jn 2:4). If we claim that Christ dwells within, we *must continue* to receive Him and hear His voice, lest we become like the church of Laodicea where Christ had once again to stand at the door and knock to be re-admitted to His own church.

The death of 'positionism'

As difficult as it is, we must give up the 'positional' understanding that comes so naturally to our religious nature. Otherwise the vibrant salvation process stalls, and we find that after many years of Christian living, we are still not fundamentally 'saved' or 'born'. We may believe we are, but our inner legalism, bearing the fruit of bitterness and anger,

[18] Gal 6:11; I Thess 3:1; II Cor 7.

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together with our inability to show the Spirit of Christ in basic issues of life, betray our unchanged condition.

Unfortunately, the centuries of evangelical church history, theology and even hymn writing, have tended to accentuate the pull within our religious natures toward positionism. Even in situations (or writings) where the real life of the gospel *is* proclaimed, where the need to 'go on' in the process *is* urged, Christians never fully give up the idea of a secure position. To one degree or other, many still base our perceptions and thinking on the fact that they *are* 'saved' or 'born again', with the result that the fear of the Lord - a genuine awe of the goodness and severity of God - is never demonstrated.

Process of salvation – unto perfection

We cannot be double-minded about this fact, even if we have been so in the past. Finally, the only position that the Christian can claim is to be 'in the cross', for this is the meaning of being 'in Christ', or 'in the name'. It is to this reality that the true apostles of Christ are always endeavouring to open the door - the dying and living of Jesus. Too often in the past, we have preached salvation, and then afterwards, urged believers to the imperative of going on to perfection. Perhaps we ought rather to call hearers into the process of salvation – which is 'unto perfection'.

This is a complete change of emphasis and of culture, in our ministry of the gospel. In the first case, hearers (and leaders) may settle where they will, enjoying a socio-religious lifestyle, with no cross and no buying of the truth. In the second case, those who receive the seed (cf. the sower parable) must sow, must steward, and must participate in their destiny, through the cross, dealing with issues of wayside, stony and thorny ground, in a constant living experience of salvation. The truth is: there is no salvation unless we are stewarding the seed and proceeding on to perfection.

We realise of course, that the New Testament apostles faced the same challenge, constantly warning the believers about going back, falling away, and rebuilding the things that had been destroyed. (Gal 2:18). It is in this connection that we should look again at the two phase process of their establishing of the gospel. Once having founded hearers in the gospel, upon hearing of their 'faith and love', the apostles' entire task was to urge them to a full appropriation, a full

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substantiation (cf. imputation – see Vol. 2), a complete apprehension of 'that for which they were apprehended'. (Eph 1:15; Phil 3:12).

From city to city, from letter to letter, a clear pattern emerges. It was essential that the churches should become established through tribulation, knowing the dying and living of Jesus, partaking of weakness by the power of God. If they were not, the processes of the cross of Christ would be thwarted, the life would diminish, and the light would fade. To accomplish this end, the apostles came in weakness, with no 'bodily presence', and adopted a mode that was completely consistent with the cross. (II Cor 10:10). Their hearts remained 'wide open', and in this way the apostles carried the cross in themselves as the doorway to the city of jewels, the holy ground, the city of light and glory, with every individual stone glorious in inheritance. (II Cor 6:11).

Observations from Paul's three journeys

This is the mode that becomes increasingly focussed across Paul's missionary journeys. Certainly his letters show that he became increasingly concise in his rendition of the gospel proposition. But he also became increasingly resolved in himself toward the elements of the cross – weakness, consolation, tribulation – by which the power of God would establish the churches. Each of his letters carried this same gospel 'package', albeit each letter attended to specific questions and contentions (as well as invoking specific warnings about local matters). All the critical elements of the process of salvation were reviewed and harmonised within each letter.

Some churches (e.g. Thessalonica) seem to have adopted the whole gospel proposition more adequately from the beginning. Others (e.g. Corinth) seem to have lacked the virtue and solidarity produced by tribulation – a lack taken up by Paul in his second letter. We will observe in the following sections, that the later letters, from 2nd Corinthians onwards, give a very clear and integrated focus on the 'tribulation' (weakness) element of the cross.

Our aim, stated once again, will be to understand with Paul, this mode of 'weakness', by which the gospel genuinely becomes the power of God unto salvation. We will overview and extract highlights from a number of the epistles, approaching them in the probable order in which they were written: *Galatians* (giving us a focus on the issue of circumcision, i.e. flesh versus Spirit); *Thessalonians* (a focus on a young

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church that accepted the whole proposition); *Corinthians* (showing how the 2nd letter seeks to establish a divided church), *Romans* (the most complete statement of the gospel), *Philippians* (a prison epistles with succinct highlights), *Hebrews* (with a focus on the effective process, in the true temple, that is now available, and which must not be abused or refused).

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Section 3 - Galatia

For the purpose of this present exercise, we shall accept the common theory that the Galatian epistle was the first to be written, and that its timing fell somewhere in proximity to the events surrounding the Jerusalem council (over the issue of circumcision and law keeping; Acts 15). Certainly, the heart of the epistle aligns itself very closely with those matters. Note the following Scriptures from the epistle to the Galatians.

'Before certain men came from James, he [Peter] would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. (Gal 2:12)

'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.' (5:6)

'And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offence of the cross has ceased.' (5:11)

'For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. (5:17).

'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.' (6:15)

The presenting issue of the Galatian letter is the contention between flesh and Spirit, hence the central dialogue on Isaac and Ishmael, Sarah and Hagar, the two mountains, the two Jerusalems (the one that 'now is' and the one from above), and the two[19] circumcisions. The contention was between those wanting to make a 'good showing in the flesh', who compelled others to be circumcised, to avoid suffering 'persecution' for the 'cross of Christ'. (Gal 6:12). Why would accepting circumcision have preserved someone from persecution for the cross of Christ? This requires careful thought. Obviously, those who accepted

[19] We say 'two' circumcisions, because Paul was contending for the true circumcising work of the cross (the circumcision of the heart), over against the circumcision in the flesh.

the 'cross' as their true circumcision, were an offence, and they suffered persecution. Why? Because the point of offence in Paul's gospel, was that the 'cross' was the only true form of circumcision. The cross effected a circumcision of the heart, a true circumcision that was in the *Spirit*, and not in the *flesh*. (Phil 3:3). With this one teaching, Paul invalidated the whole exercise of 'good showing in the flesh', and declared that all this religious 'flesh', all this polished 'bios', had itself to be circumcised – crucified. He said that we were to be 'crucified' (circumcised) 'to the [religious] world', and the world to us. There was no way of avoiding the conflict that the gospel brought.

THE GOSPEL BRINGS CONFLICT

There is no way around it. We must accept that the coming of Christ's life, in itself, brings conflict. The flesh wars against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary to one another. (Gal 5:17). The word of the gospel *has* come to bring peace, but first it brings conflict. 'Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did *not* come to bring *peace* but a *sword*.' (Mat 10:34). However, the Scripture also speaks of Christ bringing peace. 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *peace*, goodwill toward men!' (Lk 2:14). 'For He Himself *is our peace*, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation.' (Eph 2:14).

We accept that there is a paradox: Christ *did* indeed come to bring peace and goodwill. But He cannot do so unless He brings the sword of conflict, the cross of circumcision, to cut off our own way and reconcile us to our predestined course. To bring peace, the gospel must bring a sword. The flesh has to be circumcised, for there is enmity between flesh and Spirit, between the Lordship of Yahweh and the individual 'lordship' of our own kingdoms; between the 'name' by which we are called, and the name we have determined for ourselves.

Christ comes with mercy *and* truth, 'goodness *and* severity', life and judgement: 'Who will render to each one according to his deeds: *eternal life* to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory ... but to those who are self-seeking ... *tribulation and anguish* on every soul of man who does evil.' (Rom 11:22; 2:6-9).

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The seed of the kingdom sown amidst conflict

Similarly, Jesus' foremost parable teaches that there would be *conflict* wherever the seed of the kingdom is sown. 'The kingdom of heaven is *like* ....', and so proceeds the parable of the three kinds of ground. (Matt 13). It is a certainty; it is a foundation, that wherever the kingdom of heaven is established, there will be 'tribulation because of the word'. (Matt 13:21). There will be conflict with birds, stones and thorns.

The issue of 'culture'

These Biblical principles have a very practical outworking. The symbols of seed, ground and fruit are simply a parable regarding our cultivation, or culture – as if we are tilling a portion of the holy land allotted to us.

When the seed of God's life comes, there is a clash of culture. The life of Christ clashes with the familiar cultures of our 'ground' – with the familiar 'birds', the entrenched stones of law, and the fleshly fruit we have brought forth.

God wants to bring peace to our families, but because we were 'alienated from the life of God', He must first destroy the enmity. 'And you, who once were alienated and *enemies* in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has *reconciled*.' (Col 1:21).

Conflict regarding culture

So there are two completely different cultures – the flesh and the Spirit, the world and the kingdom. Our struggles are not with doctrine, per se, but with changing of culture – the way we live, the fruit we bear, our ways, our deeds, the attitudes we hold, the lifestyles we cultivate in our homes - respect and worship versus conquering and self-centredness; harmony and resolution versus tension and bitterness etc. (Eph 4:25; Jas 3:5-6). This is where we need circumcision. We must put the deeds of the flesh to death. (Rom 8:!3). However, we soon discover that we want to be 'saved', but we don't want to be different. We vigorously avoid conflict, and live religiously, choosing right over wrong.

We have imbibed the 'tree' (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) and are addicted to it. Our self-made religion of right and wrong soon conflicts with the life of Christ within us. Whereupon we would rather define our own forms of circumcision, rather than cutting off the

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flesh. Salvation, however, by definition, is to be 'changed', from bios to zoe, from flesh to Spirit. We are only being saved as we are being returned to God's original predestination.

Therefore, we have to choose the way of the cross – the way of circumcision. To live as Christians, we have to take up the cross daily and 'die with Him'. We have to eagerly embrace the word of change. To be saved is to be changed. The cancer of our sin has to be put to death. We cannot entertain or occupy ourselves with religion like a hobby. The cross must become our life.

CONTEMPORARY GALATIA

Here in our contemporary situation, so like Galatia, the issue of flesh and spirit, and of the need for circumcision is identical. We should desire to cut off the flesh and live in the Spirit – i.e. to submit to circumcision of the heart, which is effected by the cross of Christ.

But in Galatia, there was another form of circumcision being proposed – the literal circumcision carried through from the Old covenant. Paul taught that the cross of Christ (the cutting off of His 'flesh' in relation to sin) fulfilled and replaced this former practice. (Col 2:11).

The contention over circumcision was a major issue in the New Testament, as highlighted by the fact that even the apostle Peter was confused over the issue. (Gal 2:11). With this in mind, our aim is to interpret this issue of two different circumcisions into our own contemporary setting. In what ways are our challenges the same as those of the Galatian situation?

First of all we can see that in our modern situation, the outward appearances of religious circumcision have become even more profound; e.g. cathedral elegance, ecclesiastical garb, moralistic issues, good 'religious' presentations etc.

True circumcision

Our basic considerations will be these: to what modes of religious 'flesh' are we to be circumcised (crucified), and how is this circumcision effected?

At the simplest level, we know that the physical circumcision did not achieve the actual crucifying of the fleshly nature. God wants the true circumcision of the heart, and off the ears. 'You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as

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your fathers did, so do you.' (Acts 7:51). As Paul said, ' For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.' (Rom 2:28). The offence of the cross message, was that all the physical appearances of denial, cutting and ascetic living that gave a 'good showing', were worthless. (Gal 6:12). These were not the marks of circumcision. Indeed these elements themselves needed to be circumcised. The flesh could not change the flesh. Only the cross properly applied could achieve change. As Paul said, 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.' (Gal 6:15).

How do we draw believers away from good religious presentations, into the birth canal of the cross through which the new creation is brought forth? In our section on the book of Hebrews (Section 7), we shall show that creating our *own religious process* (circumcision) is tantamount to 'crucifying Him to ourselves'. (Heb 6:6). This is a keynote statement within the study. We must choose the process that is invoked by the word of the cross that proceeds from the mouth of God (within headship order) – not that process that we choose and create for ourselves as an alternative.

Very simply, the cross *is* the circumcision of Christ. The cross is meant to produce change in individuals' lives. The question we must answer is: how does this change come about by the circumcision of the cross?

Four applications of the circumcision issue

Practically there are four considerations, all based on the issue of producing *change in behaviour*. We are interested in this subject because change must occur. There is to be a true circumcision that *does* produce a change.

The first application of this issue is that true circumcision is of the heart; i.e. there is to be a genuine 'cutting off' through the word of God which 'pierces' (cf. piercing with the 'cut' of circumcision) to the dividing of soul and spirit. (Heb 4:12). How is this to be implemented?

Secondly, and allied to the first, those who *do* know how to circumcise and be circumcised, are described as '*the circumcision*, who worship God in the Spirit of God and have no confidence in the flesh'. How is it that we live and behave as the true circumcision, having no obligation to, or confidence in, the flesh? This is most important if we

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are to minister the cross toward others, for we are not obligated to keeping the flesh alive.

Thirdly, there is a mode of legalistic imposition, which could be compared, using Paul's terms, to 'mutilation'. (Phil 3). Those of the 'mutilation' (then and now) could be described as those who impose legalistic pressure, including discrimination, condemnation, and even abuse (cf military training), to produce behavioural conformity. Clearly, it is quite possible for Christian leaders to adopt this erroneous mode. Paul warned Christians to beware of such, and wished that this group could be 'cut off' themselves. (Gal 5:12).

Fourthly, and perhaps most significantly, there is a large issue of 'outward appearance' – appearing to be exercising distinction (circumcision) by a personal preoccupation with good and evil. This was the central issue of the New Testament. There were those who took pride in their fleshly show of religion, reinterpreting the gospel to their own forms of 'cutting'. They could not be 'cut' with the true circumcision of the cross, they *could not hear the apostolic word*, since they were preoccupied with being the source of their own salvation, by making their *own religious distinctions*.

Our full attention must be given to understanding this entire culture that is preoccupied with religious dutiful exercise, and which prevents the real circumcision from taking place. There is a prevailing attitude in hearers that can never receive, hear or obey anything from outside. These only ever serve their fleshly obligations from within, i.e. either within themselves, or within their circles of association. Obviously, this disposition is fallen, having its source in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Missing the point!

What is that causes us to miss the point? Why do we fail to circumcise the flesh that is only producing death! Two problems that confront the church can be identified here – and these are illustrated in the two verses following. The first is the loss of the big picture because of the obsession with small precise distinctions (circumcisions): note the verse below from Matt 23. The second is the great lengths to which human souls will go to prove their own righteousness, thus utterly precluding the word of God and excluding themselves from the process of salvation; note the other verse below.

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'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay *tithe* of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the *weightier* matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.' (Mat 23:23).

'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you *travel land and sea* to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. (Mat 23:15).

Our lesson from the first of these is to compare precise religious legalism with the real (weighty) issues of living life as real people in a real world – where the sacred and the secular realms are so divorced, that religious duty produces alienation from reality. Jesus enjoined the harmony of bios and zoe, of the natural and spiritual worlds, when He said, 'These you ought to have done' without forgetting the other issues. This disposition is common in the church today. The real and weighty matters of accountable living - matters of natural justice, social mercy and relational faith, which fulfil the law – are overlooked in the pursuit of religious duty.

Our observation from the second Scripture highlights the same blindness, but is illustrated with the opposite weighting of the balance. The Pharisees epitomised the religious attitude which would go to great lengths for a purely useless result. How often we see this, both in Christian counsellors as well as with those counselled. Huge attention and effort are devoted to non-issues, while the *real conditions that need to change* are ignored. Thankfully, there are hearers will go to great lengths to courageously confront the issues of reality; sadly others will go to great lengths to avoid them.

The rebellious heart has an amazing ability to produce extensive religious activity that avoids the real issues and measurements of accountable living - the matters of justice, mercy and faith. This is why the subject of circumcision is vital to our considerations. If change is to be produced, we must discern and circumcise the real issues, not be distracted and deceived by the volumes of presenting issues.

How is adjustment effected?

Why is so little adjustment found, for example in relational behaviour? Because true circumcision is not occurring. And there are only three reasons for this (compare points above). First of all, in the negative case, it may be that messengers of the word are merely teachers of the law – mutilators who strive for outward results but effect no real

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change. Secondly, it may be that circumcision is not being offered because the teachers do not understand how to behave as 'the circumcision'. Finally however, if circumcision *is* being offered, perhaps the process is being manipulated - handled deceitfully – by the constant presentation of confessions and professions that give the outward appearance that change is taking place. In this case, clever adaptation, rather than real circumcision, is the actual result.

There are teachers who try 'in the flesh' to produce change, and no change is produced. On the other side, there are hearers who are offered genuine circumcision, but who manipulate the process by 'using' the situation to profess their own measurements of their own righteousness.

Crucified to the religious world

Taking Paul's concluding point in Gal 6:14, if the gospel process is to be effective, we must begin by being crucified (circumcised) to the world and the world to us. What then is the 'world'?

The 'world' of which Paul speaks in Galatians chapter six, (note the content of the earlier five chapters) is the religious *world* that presents itself *in the church*, not the ungodly world. Paul was writing to the church (and about the 'world' inside the church), not to the church within the world. The 'world' is the mode and culture that is present *in the church*, in our very midst, that always gives the outward appearance of conforming to righteousness. But there has been no 'cut' of circumcision. The basic culture never changes.

The hallmark of the 'world' is simple to identify – there is no actual *application* to the cross. Remember Jesus did say, '*Take* up *your* cross'! (Matt 16:24). '*You*' must take up *your* cross. Each of us must take it up. We must choose to take it up. We are to take it up with dignity, for it will not be forced upon us. Commonly however, there is simply a lack of application. There is no specific response to the specific word that is brought; there is no genuine repentance, no genuine 'mourning', no 'carefulness', no genuine remission of fallen ways, no change of culture. (II Cor 7:7,11). When the word of circumcision is declared, parallel assumptions are made that preclude the effectiveness of the word itself. The word is *not seen as a 'mirror'* into which one looks. (Jas 1:23). The word is seen *as a confirmation* that the religious standards and distinctions (circumcisions) that one practices are parallel and equal to

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what is being declared. The definitive worldly attitude is that 'religion is how I see it ... and it will be well with me!'

Key pastoral tenet

There is no more important pastoral tenet than this. The religious, uncircumcised individual is entirely preoccupied with his own capacity to be good or evil, to be successful or unsuccessful, to perform well or badly, and is obsessed with *his duty to be the one* who determines the difference and makes the distinction (circumcision) between these opposing forces. His 'circumcision' in that sense is defined as 'whatever he thinks'. This is the Paul's 'wretched man', who cannot do what he wills. (Rom 7:21,24). He sees himself as making clear, circumcising decisions. He believes he is circumcised in every possible way. But he has no power over the flesh.

This is what prevents so many well-meaning Christians from giving, loving, rejoicing, succeeding and inheriting the life of God - always seeing themselves as victims who cannot, for reasons beyond their apprehension, realise the goals that the Scriptures are proclaiming. These same ones then obligate the church to 'keep trying', keep serving them, counselling them and carrying their accountability. They become frustrated and unfulfilled, living their lives in a tense drama of superiority and inferiority. They often believe that church leaders *are* fulfilled, while they are not, and that they are being discriminated against, or prevented from serving and being fulfilled as they would wish.

On a massive scale, this uncircumcised attitude has led the church, wholesale, into the motions of sin, striving to service these ideals, at the same time incapable of cutting off this entirely worldly dimension of carnal living.

This is where the Galatian parallel is so helpful. We can begin to picture what Paul was up against – a whole mindset of fleshly, sophisticated circumcision – endless, religious conversations between thinkers all utterly preoccupied with their own capacity to discern good and evil. And all with no receiving, no hearing, and no simplicity at the actual points where the word of the cross was coming to them. They were beguiled away from the simplicity of Christ. (II Cor 11:3). As proof of this point, consider how seldom we hear from some adherents, any reflection as to what God is actually saying to *them* about their *own* sin and accountability. They have tongues that will 'set on fire the

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course of nature', but never take accountability for their own actions. (Jas 3:6). In such cases, we conclude that the cross of Christ, removing all our rights and claims to just deserts, is yet to make a breach. For as yet, there is nothing alive, nothing is 'born' through the cross of Christ.

The church – a reason to exist

In simple terms, the church exists to minister this cross of circumcision and produce change. The more so this is true of the renewal movement of which many of us are a part. For the whole reason these movements exist is for the revitalised message of 'going on to perfection' (more so than for any praiseworthy doctrines on the Holy Spirit, the 'name' or eschatology). Therefore it is even the more urgent to understand how to actually 'go on', how to 'speak the truth in love', 'how to admonish one another' (Eph 4:15; Rom 15:14) – not just bringing a word to one another, but invoking a program for real change, for retaining and remitting sin[20]. (Jn 20:23). All leaders of God's people, like Paul, must determine to be 'too weak' for the mutilating approach to producing change. (II Cor 11:21). On the other side, many are trying hard to make cultural change, but keep 'falling flat'. Others have given a good appearance and assumed that circumcision has taken place, but the culture of actual behaviour remains the same. So how does change take place?

With the best will in the world, we cannot 'do it' for others, and we must not adopt the patriarchal mode, particularly if we are leaders, of affirming others or absolving them. What kind of action, transaction and responses *do* produce change? How do we function in the circumcision of the Spirit? How do we avoid the motions of sin? Certainly the whole approach that trades in the motions of sin must be put to death. The key, we are learning, lies in drawing back from idealism, 'good ideas', and assessive mutilation, to a 'weak' approach.

What we are learning?

The pastoral mode of 'weakness' is the answer we are seeking. It is only by functioning in the weakness of God that we are functioning in the cross. There is a mode to be learned that first of all *functions* in weakness and then draws *others* into this context of travail and

[20] On remission of sin, and the meaning of 'retaining' the process for effective removal of sin, see Upon This Rock, Vol 1, Chapter 2, 'Adoption and Remission'.

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weakness in the cross. Certainly we have already concluded that if we cannot achieve this, we cannot achieve anything at all.

We are realising that once we put off all coercion (akin to mutilation) and partake of weakness by the power of God, as an entire mode, we can in fact participate in a strength, power and effectiveness that we have never seen heretofore. Once we know we are not circumcising in the flesh, we can in fact be *more* courageous than we would otherwise have been. We are able to implore and plead as co-workers with Christ. We are able to warn, exhort and even rebuke, all from the position of weakness. For our weakness is this – we have been brought to nothing by the work of the cross, and we are nothing without the power of God. And we only lay hold of this power at the points where we touch weakness and transform it into character by the power of God.

This is what it means to function as the new creation, having received the ministry of reconciliation as part of our mandate as the new creation. Our definition is that 'zoe' (Christ's life) supersedes 'bios' (biological life) as we transform weakness into character by the power of God.[21] Our testimony is that we are learning how the (zoe) life of Christ is lived, in the normal functions of life, from day to day. We are learning how to live out a life that comes from the headship of the Father, the adoptive life of the Son and which is led by the Spirit – in contrast to merely living as 'bios being religious'.

We are learning, by taking up the dimensions of the cross daily, to maintain ourselves in a personal revival, in the 'crisis' of salvation, balancing all the elements of salvation. We are increasingly entering the holy land of our own identity and relational destiny. We are able to meet one another in the dimension of the new creature, having no discourse, relationship, obligation, confidence in the flesh.

Key point overall!

We are learning to accept that there is an appointment with tribulation from which we cannot be delivered, and from which the church cannot deliver us either. We are understanding the daily program of reformation that God has inscribed in the seed, the *program of tribulation* by which we are shifted from the lameness and malformation of our conception in sin, to the regeneration of every

[21] On 'bios' and 'zoe', see Volume 2, Section 1.

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individual. We are not therefore pressured by idealism to deliver others from their inescapable trials; rather we support them with fellow-feeling as fellow pilgrims in the body of Christ. We are delivered from legalistic assessments and judgements to which we so easily fall victim, choosing instead the 'weak' position of servanthood and prayerful intercession.

Our sole resort is to the secret place of prayer, believing that our 'hope' for others will not be 'disappointed', but that a word will proceed to them that activates salvation through the cross. (Rom 5:5). Where the Spirit gives a word to those who are accountable to shepherd the sheep, they should be willing and free to speak in Christ, without bowing to the demand or threat to prove that Christ speaks in them. (II Cor 13:3). We accept that the New Covenant 'finds fault' with the Old (i.e. with flesh in failing to fulfil the law). Likewise, the ministers of the New Covenant must also 'find fault' - in the sense of challenging those impotencies that are no longer necessary, since we have entered the new covenant. (Heb 8:8). However, all servants of the Lord have to beware of 'judging others' while doing the 'same things'. (Rom 2:1). Instead, they are gentle to all, patient, and weak in Christ. (II Tim 2:24). Remembering the 'beam and mote' warning of Jesus', they must constantly attend to their own adjustments, and move humbly and cautiously toward the faults of others. (Lk 6:41; Matt 7:1-6).

A shift of culture

Concluding on our Galatians perspective, our aim must surely be to see the entire culture of the church shift from flesh to spirit. This means that all our traditional and fundamental modes of functioning, as well as all our religious cultures have to be circumcised. The cross must bring these cultures to nothing. Then there can be a renewing of our minds – a complete retraining of our cultural mindsets, a purifying of our modes of operation – obedience instead of sophistication, sanctified relationship in place of social 'pecking orders', understanding instead of presumption, living in one Spirit rather than parallel manoeuvring, shepherding from weakness instead of the pride and nobility of clergy positions.

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Section 4 - Thessalonica

The letters of Thessalonians, thought to have been written to the church from Corinth during the 2nd journey, are a glorious and positive affirmation of the relationship between the apostles and hearers of the gospel. (1:6-9). Again, all the elements of salvation are affirmed, as are the responses of the believers to these essential jewels. Not only have the hearers received the messengers and their word and been greatly illuminated (as per the first phase of establishment), but the church has accepted what they were 'told before' (3:4) viz. that they were 'appointed' to afflictions and tribulations. (3:3). Paul's passionate burden in the first letter is to describe his joy in hearing that they have endured and been established in character through tribulation (cf. Rom 5:3-5), and not been tempted to failure (3:5).

A brief walk through some highlights from both letters serves to strengthen the key considerations in our study – notably the effectiveness of the apostles' word in causing the hearers to take hold of 'eternal consolation' and become established through tribulation. (II Thess 2:16)

The linking of destinies

We give thanks ... remembering ... *knowing*, beloved brethren, your *election* by God.' (1:3-4). The 'knowing' of their 'election' – Paul makes a comment here that we could easily pass over. However the remainder of the letter shows this to be a headline in Paul's thinking. He relates to them as he does because he knows their election. They have accepted their calling, and now the apostles have a special insight into the eternal identity, destiny and 'eternal consolation' of each of these dear saints. (II Thess 2:16). Furthermore, their destiny is linked with his own. They are eternally linked. Paul's only 'hope, joy, glory or crown of rejoicing' lies in the saints realising this election. (2:19-20)

Paul, Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy all believed that these saints would and could run their course, despite the threat of persecution and affliction. They had brought the gospel in the apostolic mode of gentleness (weakness) and 'power'. (2:7; 1:5) The very purpose of the ministry gifts and power of Christ were to sustain the saints toward this election. Their destinies were linked, now the apostles were locked in fellow-intercession, in a fellowship of His sufferings as the context for their salvation. The saints were Paul's glory and joy; his hope and crown of rejoicing. More than this they were life to Him (3:8). Night and day he interceded (3:9), desirous of perfecting their faith, hoping to establish their hearts blameless in holiness. This apostolic mode is our challenge today.

What kind of men – followers of us

In line with our meditation, we note Paul's comment about 'what kind of men' they were for the sake of the hearers. (1:5). They came in a mode that rightly called for the hearers to become 'followers of us and of the Lord'. (1:6). Here declared is the vital gospel transaction – the receiving of the messenger. The believers became followers of them and of the Lord. What an amazing statement! If we lay aside for one moment the accepted church tradition of people having pastors, sheep having shepherds, we may muse for a moment on what a startling and holy thing it is, that for some there is a destiny and an access related to that destiny, to be actively involved in the destinies of others. Obviously, this is what led Paul to the kind of intercession and 'hope' that he describes. He was never disappointed with regard to his hopes, for the love of God was constantly shed abroad. (Rom 5:5).

What manner of entry

The response of the Thessalonians become more startling. Paul relates that the 'manner of entry' they received as messengers, had itself been reported abroad. (1:9). How strongly this links with our meditation on the gates and doors of salvation. The apostles (the order of 12) were the gates through which those with a co-destiny in Christ could boldly come. On the other hand, the hearers opened *their* 'gates' and 'doors' so that the 'King of glory' and of salvation could march in triumphantly. (Ps 24:7-9). What a glorious picture.

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Holding them to their predestination

Now the crowning task that lay ahead for the apostles was to labour (travail) in parenthood (cf. the images of motherhood and fatherhood 2:7,11) so that the saints might not be 'shaken' (3:3) by the tribulation that was *essential* to being made complete in their election.

Two phases of establishment

The pattern emerges, as will be seen in proceeding through the other cities, that there are two phases of establishment in the gospel. The first phase, so well reported at Thessalonica, is the receiving and hearing of the word of the cross brought by the messengers. The gospel was effectively transacted because of this response to the word. The word was confirmed in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much blessed 'assurance'. (1:5). Paul had taught them, 'told them before', that tribulation *because of the word* would follow (cf. Matt 13:21), for 'through much tribulation' they must enter the kingdom which they had received as a seed with much rejoicing; (again, cf. stony ground; Matt 13). First of all they have received the *word* of the gospel; now they must endure *tribulation because of* the word – i.e. the word of their individual and corporate destiny in Christ. Herein lies the paradox.

Now as he writes his letter, he openly relates his trial of patience in wondering whether they will endure this *essential gospel process*. Of course, by the time he writes, he has despatched Timothy from Athens, who has returned with good news of their faith through affliction.

II Thessalonians - patience and faith

The second letter merely reinforces our observations from the first letter. The two phase establishment of the church, their 'patience and faith in all [their] persecutions and tribulations' is now something in which the apostles 'boast' (1:4). Furthermore, their acceptance and endurance of the 'righteous judgement of God' that are essential to the cross and to the gospel, now provide the basis for the judgement and vengeance that are meted upon the disobedient. (1:5-8).

The word having free course

II Thess 3:1-6. As the second letter concludes, Paul asks them to pray that this word that establishes the gospel, this messenger-

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receiving dynamic that was so effective in Thessalonica, will have 'free course'. 'Not all' hearers, says Paul, 'have faith'; meaning that not all receive and hear the word of faith as these believers did. (cf Rom 10:17).

CONTEMPORARY THESSALONICA

How many examples and admonitions to our contemporary church are contained in the Thessalonian letters – both in relation to the establishment mode of the apostles, and the responses of the Christians.

As for the apostles' ministry mode, their destinies were co-joined with the saints. Furthermore, destiny itself for the apostles lay in receiving a revelation concerning the election of others, leading them in pursuit of it, and maintaining close care through affliction lest they come short of it. Clearly, this is the quality and qualification that God is now asking from His servants everywhere.

Life itself (I Thess 3:8) lay in intercession for the saints - dying with Christ in a parental travail, and yet living with Him as others stood fast in the Lord.

Surely this was the irresistible dimension that flowed like a river of fire across the apostles' world, bringing life to the hearers, and at the same time crushing the head of Satan.

The basis and motivation for their intercession was their co-destiny in the election of God. This was the mode in which they sought for and delivered the precious words of the cross, those specific jewels by which to establish and complete the destiny of the saints.

How different this is from the ministry mode that has developed in our day, one that consists in an impotent preaching of the gospel accompanied by patriarchal care – and all without the sense of co-destiny established through the fires of tribulation.

The true circumcision

Paul is here demonstrating the dimension that he later calls 'the circumcision' - the fellowship of those who 'worship God in the spirit of God', in the realm of eternal spirit, the house of Yahweh. (Phil 3:3). This is powerful dimension. For those described as 'the circumcision', dwell 'in the name', and through eternal Spirit, they participate in

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God's self-disclosure, in the revelation of His name and in His naming of all those who have a call and election to dwell on holy ground.

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Section 5 – Corinth – 1st Letter

So much could be said about the growth, struggles and establishment of the city of Corinth. From the outset, let us state that our determination is the make a comparison of 1st and 2nd Corinthians, interwoven with our '2 phase establishment' discussion. In this comparison, it will be instructive to show that in the first phase in Corinth, the word of the cross accompanied by confirming signs, was most effective. (I Cor 1:6-7; II Cor 12:12). However, in the history of Corinth, this dimension on its own became overrun by 'charismatic' dissipation and division, and the effect of the cross began to be annulled. (I Cor 1:17). It took a further letter (between the two remaining epistles) and a painful visit[22] to arrest the ear of the church – before finally, after further deep waters of his own (II Cor 1:8-10 see later in notes), Paul delivered to them a most passionate treatise on what we are calling the 2nd phase of establishment: i.e. the weakness of God, the tribulation and consolation without which they could not be established.

It is Paul's wrestle to establish the Corinthian church, understood across the two epistles, together with the obvious difference of tone in the 2nd epistle, that demands our attention.

MEDITATION ON THE CROSS AND THE GOSPEL

Given that Paul opens the first letter with such vigorous restatement of the preaching of the cross, we are assured that this was the dimension in which he had earlier (on his 2nd journey) sought to establish the church at Corinth. Now for the second time, this time by letter, he expounds that the cross must make an utter breach upon the wisdom and strength of flesh, in order to call, choose and establish believers in the cross as the weakness of God. (1:18-30). We shall take

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time to meditate on the significance of the cross as Paul was declaring it.

The cross brings to nothing!

Doubtless when Paul declares that the cross must 'destroy the wisdom the wise' and 'bring [everything] to nothing', he has the prophetic Scriptures from Isaiah 27-29 in mind. 'Therefore by *this* [referring to Israel's 'sending away' into captivity 27:7] the iniquity of Jacob will be covered; and this is all the fruit of taking away his sin: when he makes all the stones of the altar like chalk stones that are beaten to dust, wooden images and incense altars shall not stand. (Isa 27:9). The cross, says Paul to the Corinthians with this prophetic background music in his mind, must bring the strength and 'glory' of 'flesh' to nothing, so that we may be born 'of Him', and so that He becomes everything 'for us' – everything we are – so that all our glory is in the Lord. (I Cor 1:28-31).

The cross and the travail of birth

Paul understood that the cross, the weakness of God, was the context of travail and *birth* that we must enter, whereby the new creation would be brought forth. To be 'born again' was not a positional experience; it was a total lifetime experience in the cross.[23]

Right from the Garden of Eden, from the very beginning of man's journey in weakness, he was told (as per God's word to the woman), 'In sorrow (travail) … you will bring forth' (Gen 3:16) – words which were prophetic of the way in which *all new life* would be brought forth. For God Himself, the cross was the womb of birth, where in weakness He brought forth the new creation, the Son of God in the flesh, as the Head of a body that included us all. (See Isa 53:10-11 on 'seed' and labour'). The whole process of salvation, of our spiritual birth, must take place in the cross – declared by Paul to be the 'weakness of God'.

All natural birth requires travail, and these birth pangs persist as a preordained and essential process leading to joy in conception and abundant entry into life. In the natural process, many valuable and irreplaceable elements of development fall into place as a result of the travail. In the same way, the 'zoe' life that we receive from Christ

[23] Of course this experience of birth and life in the cross has a beginning point, of which we testify that we were 'born again'. However, professing a position quickly denies the total expereince and empties the cross of its power.

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must pass through the 'birth canal' of the cross, the pathway of constriction, trial and suffering.

The gospel proposition

This is the proposition of the cross that the church as a whole must accept. The church in Corinth had to learn that charismatic gifts and revival joy, genuine as these were, could not deliver them from the pain of travail, and could not produce a mature church. With persistent apostolic fatherhood and authority, Paul endeavoured to teach the Corinthian church this vital lesson in order to see them established.

This establishment through tribulation, Paul sought to teach them, this constriction within themselves, as if in the travail of birth, was completely essential. (II Cor 6:12). Likewise for us, we may have initial life within the womb of our formation, but the limitation of the cross, the constriction of spiritual birth is essential. The character of God cannot be produced in any other way. Charismatic gifts, impartations through the laying on of hands, were not given to produce character. Their purpose was to sustain believers upon the pathway of election in the cross, not deliver them from it. (As Corinth proved, undue focus on the gifts only led to divisive pride.) As for character however, there is no other way for it to develop than by birth through the cross. Once character has developed, it is then that supernatural healing can be anticipated.

The cross and the house of Yahweh

The cross is the doorway to the house of Yahweh.[24] It is by the word of the cross that the intentions of the house of Yahweh toward me are made known. The life that God has for me to live is made known to me at the point of the cross. First of all, the word of the cross must pierce and make a breach upon me. Then I can receive His life. I can take up the cross and enter its processive travail by which new life is brought to birth. This is what the 3 day and 3 night operation signifies to us – the entire operation of the cross from Gethsemane travail to resurrection birth. When we speak of 'taking up the cross', it helps our understanding if we think of taking up the '3 day and 3 night operation' as an entire way of life.

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[24] Refer back to Section 2, 'Calling on the name of the Lord'.

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THE CROSS AND THE NAME OF THE LORD

The cross is the meeting point between ourselves and the name of the LORD. It states the gap between us, and also the breach that must be made if we are to be reconciled. It is a complete statement of God and a complete statement of each one of us. It is a wholly dignifying statement of the gap for which we are each accountable. This is what it means to be accountable for the cross, to 'mourn' our 'piercing' of Him, and to mourn the lost destiny of our sonship. (Zech 12:10; Jn 19:37).

When we meet Him in the cross, we are meeting the fullest expression of Yahweh as Father, Son and Spirit - their overall operation through eternal spirit touching all that is flesh. From our viewpoint, Their cross was and is manifest only in the flesh of Christ. It is at the point of breach upon *my* flesh, where I allow God in, that the operations of Yahweh become real and effective in me. There is a breaking in, a breaking through, a breach, a cut, a piercing.

Accountable for the cross

At the moment the cross is made known to us, we each one know that we are accountable for what the eternal God sought, for what He sought to accomplish in each of us specifically, through the travail of His soul, by His offering through eternal spirit in time. (Heb 9:14). From henceforth, the cross is always active in my realm - where I am, where I live and suffer. It is the work of God, through eternal spirit, still functioning by the power of God, now extended to me, to gather me into its operation and result. Now, I 'look upon Him' Whom I have 'pierced' as a continual experience. I am accountable to participate in the operations of the cross for the redemption of my sonship. I have not been redeemed to a position. I have been purchased back into the operation of the cross for the full recovery of my sonship. Like the Son Himself, I now cry out 'with strong crying and tears to Him who is able to save [my sonship] from death.' (Heb 5:7). And as a priest within His Melchizedek Order, I too am heard! (On this theme of saving sonship from death, see Section 5).

The name of our Lord Jesus Christ

'Now I plead with you, brethren, *by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions

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among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement.' (1 Cor 1:10). We have established in other writings[25] that an understanding of the theme of the 'name' is crucial. Just briefly, the theme of the name brings into view the matters of knowing God by name, being known by name, and being named by God according to the Father's predestination. We know that we have been named in Christ as adopted sons. Through baptism into the Lord Jesus Christ, we receive an invocation of the corporate name, as well as being named individually as members in particular.[26] Now that we abide and 'do everything in the name', we know who we are, because we have come to know Who *He* is. (Col 3:17). We come into a new way of being and relating. We are named, we abide within our limits, we are delivered from the ambition to compete for acceptance within a 'pecking order', for 'it is known' who we are. (Eccles 6:10).

According to Paul, it is also possible to be 'perfectly joined' without divisions 'in the name', because in effect, Christ becomes a cornerstone who joins us stone to stone and provides the perfect bond while *we* are yet imperfect. (I Cor 1:10).

Identity and authority in the body of Christ, should only ever come from the reality of 'who we are'. Unfortunately, there are many believers who seek to name themselves in relation to authority and ministry. This motivation had its origin at the tower of Babel when men desired to make themselves a 'name'. (Gen 11:4). Naming ourselves by misappropriation of the identity and power given by God, is the principle of Babylon – leading to the final great consortium of falsity referred to in the book of Revelation. (Rev 17:5). This is beyond the compass of this study. However, what is relevant here is that once the Corinthians refused the cross, they no longer dwelt together 'in the name'. And equally, once they began to 'name' themselves and grasp various names as leaders of schisms ('I am of Paul' etc), the power of the cross was voided. In the end, there are only two types of structure and authority in the church as large – the true order based in the name where all function and authority is God-given, God-named and God-owned; or alternatively papal or denominational hierarchy based on apostolic succession or democratic appointment. And once Christians begin to name themselves, their

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25 Upon This Rock, Vol 2, Chapter 10 'The Name by which we are called'.

26 Jas 2:7; I Cor 12:11.

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projections prevent true meeting 'in the name', their partiality produces schisms and patriarchal cults, and the Corinthian condition is the only possible outcome.

The cross and the Corinthian church

It is all the more plain to us now, with this meditation in the background, what Paul was addressing in the opening of his first letter. The whole 'package' of the gospel, the operation of all the elements of salvation, was falling somewhat into disarray because the Corinthians were not walking 'in the name'. They had not continued in the 'weakness of God' to which they were called. (I Cor 1:24-25). Instead, they were puffed up, carnal, 'mere men', contentious, judgmental, immoral, defrauding, idolatrous, partial, disorderly, mystical, dualistic, hedonistic and disobedient. (I Cor 3:3; 4:6). We learn from an analysis of II Corinthians, that perhaps 2 or 3 more letters in total, and two further visits did not finally assure Paul that he would not 'find them' resorting to 'contentions, jealousies … tumults'. (II Cor 13:19-20).

We do not know in what condition he found them upon the visit *after* his letters; only that he wrote Romans at that time - undoubtedly the most thorough gospel statement. Certainly, by that time, he was 'not ashamed of the gospel', as it was 'the power of God unto salvation'. (Rom 1:16). Perhaps he had reason to exult in the power and effectiveness of the cross within Corinth in the end.

As mentioned earlier, in the interests of observing Paul's two phase establishment of the gospel, it is essential to focus on the process by which Paul clarified his apostolic gospel between the first and second letters. We will discover that the further deep waters that he passed through himself, led to a strengthening and maturing of the message of the 'weakness' and tribulation by which the Corinthian church would be established. (II Cor 1:5-10).

Corinthian visits and correspondence

Before moving to a study of the second (remaining) epistle, let us refer to a brief synopsis of Paul's Corinthian visits and correspondence; (compiled from FF Bruce: 'Apostle of the Free Spirit'; Lions Handbook of the Bible, and various other sources).

- AD 50-52 Paul brings the gospel to Corinth after Athens, toward the end of 2nd missionary journey;

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- Acts 19:1 – on third journey, Apollos arrives in Corinth as Paul arrives in Ephesus;
- part way through his three years in Ephesus (perhaps a year), long enough for 'beasts' to trouble him', division brews in Corinth ('I am of Apollos' etc);
- reports (1:11; 5:1) including one from house of Chloe and a delegation (7:1; 16:17) lead to writing a letter (Bruce calls it Corinthians A) which is alluded to in 5:1;
- later 1st Corinthians (Bruce: Corinthians B) is sent, after which Paul expected to visit (16:5), and this could lead us to the suggestion below, as per Bruce, that the painful visit did actually take place during his Ephesus stay (this visit not recorded in Acts);
- [Bruce AD 55, Spring] - all indicators are that the brief painful visit must have taken place before Paul finally left Ephesus.
- His severe letter (Corinthians C) is sent by the hand of Titus, the letter from which he received some joy and relief (II Cor 7:13) must have followed this short 'painful visit';
- The summer of the same year could have seen the deadly peril in Asia (II Cor 1:8-10), after which he left Ephesus; (see below on this severe trouble in Asia);
- Late summer finds him in Troas; II Cor 2:12
- October – he leaves Troas for Macedonia, having no 'rest in spirit', only 'troubles … fears' in Macedonia, until Titus arrives with a report (7:5-7);
- Now Paul sends his 'letter of reconciliation', i.e. II Corinthians; (Bruce – Corinthians D),;
- Early AD 56 while in Macedonia, Paul probably received news of interlopers at Corinth, to which matter he sends what Bruce calls 'Corinthians E', a letter of rebuke (warning) thought to embrace chapters 10-13, (where Paul expands on his 'thorn' message, in a final endeavour to establish the Corinthians by magnifying his trials as the proof of his apostleship);
- From here Bruce suggests that AD 56-57 is spent in Illyricum, Macedonia and Corinth – about which (P 317), he argues that the total period hinted at in Acts 20:1-3 may have been up to 18 months, and that it is the more plausible period in which to embrace the allusions in the pastoral epistles; this would link

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the 3 months in Greece with a visit to Corinth (provided we agree that his second epistle was written en-route to Corinth through Macedonia (Acts 20:1) as suggested above; (again, this formulation relies on the theory that his 'painful visit' was from Ephesus, and is not listed in Acts).

Dangers at Ephesus

Bruce also comments [P 295] on the dangers at Ephesus, reminding us that Paul speaks in his first letter (15:32) of wild beasts at Ephesus; then Bruce adds that when his second letter speaks of mortal peril recently endured in Asia, it is 'more probable that it was due to *human hostility*, and that certain sensitive political circumstances may have made it inadvisable to include details in writing.'

[Bruce says that] in addition to the 'fightings without and fears within' (7:5) there was one specially *serious danger* which overtook him … one from which he could see no way out but death … on this occasion he felt like a man who had received a death sentence … when escape did come [from what we don't know] Paul welcomed it as little short of resurrection from death.'

In conclusion, we surely know that between our two books, there was a painful visit (II Cor 2:1) and a letter (Corinthians C) carried by Titus (2:3,9; 7:8). In the first chapter of the 2nd letter, Paul says that he had intended something else (1:15-17), a plan which he had not conceived lightly. This plan had not been carried out due to some incorrigibility which caused Paul to make an alternative hasty unscheduled visit; (the 'painful visit' referred to above). This caused him to reinforce his displeasure by reminding them of what he would originally have done; (1:15-17) i.e. he would have made two visits, one en-route to Macedonia and another on the way back, receiving help toward a hasty return to Judea with relief funds.

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Section 6 – Corinth - 2nd Letter

These are most useful backgrounds (previous section) in building our case that Paul himself, as well as the Corinthians, had something to learn which was crucial to the establishment of the church through tribulation. In this regard, Corinth is a particularly poignant parallel to our contemporary situation – not in every sense, but in the sense that the presently divided charismatic-Pentecostal movement also needs to receive the heartfelt apostolic message of the 2nd letter, and face the same maturity issues that are addressed therein.

One thing is certain, and this is our focal point. By the time of the writing of the 2nd Corinthian epistle, the mindset of the gospel and weaponry of the cross of Christ were firmly established in Paul. Elements that were present in earlier epistles were now seasoned and settled. It was in this letter that he would speak emphatically of the 'living and dying' of Jesus – an entirely seasoned and mature integration of all his earlier teachings. Of course, he had earlier taught (Thessalonians) that believers are appointed to affliction (I Th 3:3), but now he was able to say that the 'sentence of death is in ourselves that we may not trust in ourselves but in God who *raises* the dead. (II Cor 1:9). He had already 'told them before' that they would suffer tribulations, but now it is the signature of gospel ministry that tribulations … stripes … honour and dishonour … dying and living … must be endured. (I Thess 1:3:4; II Cor 6:4ff). He had already warned Corinth that the word of the cross, on its own, would reduce everything to 'nothing'. (I Cor 1:19). But now Paul was fully adjusted to being a 'worker together with Him', pleading and imploring on Christ's behalf that they not receive grace in vain. (II Cor 5:20; 6:1). According to his first letter, he had already been with them 'in weakness, in fear', preaching with no 'bodily presence' or 'persuasive words'. (I Cor 2:3-4). But now the 'weakness' of Christ, as the key to living by the power of God, was to be fully established.

Consolation

It is fascinating to consider that Paul himself needed to come to terms, more deeply, with the essential gospel life and process, across those few concentrated years of his establishment of the churches. It is tempting to conclude that the choice of Silas over Barnabas (around the contention over John Mark) left him *without* the unique 'name' and ministry of the son of consolation (Acts 4:36; the meaning of 'Barnabas'). Could this mean that Paul established Corinth without fully affirming the message of consolation, weakness and the power of God; (in that Silas, and not Barnabas, was with him). It is fair to suggest then, that later, through the additional life-threatening struggles he endured in Asia between the 2 letters (II Cor 1:8) that he needed to learn about consolation – something not native to him, that was in fact part of the 'name' and nature of Barnabas. Thus he qualified to complete the message with which he had begun to establish Corinth – an establishment that was quite uncertain up until this time.

Certainly we conclude, as other commentators have, (cf. FF Bruce; see previous section) that Paul, even in the short space between the 2 remaining letters, did learn a better harmony, a richer adjustment to the principle of consolation; (i.e. how to transform weakness into character by the power of God).

Paul's 'pastoral' method

As to our central meditation, viz. Paul's mode in establishing the gospel, 2nd Corinthians is also highly valuable because he makes such a concise statement on his method, over against and in clear contrast to the 'false apostles, deceitful workers' who were commending themselves and 'beguiling' the believers back to the tree of reason. (IICor 11:1). We shall develop this matter later in the section.

The nature of the new creation

According to the explanation in chapter 5 (16-21), the 'new creation' (the body of Christ) now functions as a reconciling organism, for the functions of the cross - God in Christ reconciling, not imputing - are now embodied in the new creation. We are not waiting to become the 'new creation' in heaven, for it now that 'all things' are 'new' and all things are 'of God'. (II Cor 5:17,18). We have

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been called to the active ministry which is able to enliven, and make available, the processes of the cross. For the new creation, it is true as the Scripture says that, 'all things are of God Who has reconciled … given us the ministry … THAT IS (describing the ministry of reconciliation) God was in Christ etc. As we read on, we are told clearly that the 'new creation' describes those who are now in the mode of imploring, pleading, working together, approving ourselves (in this ministry) by endurance, distresses, … dying and living, chastened not killed, poor but making many rich, etc.

Our heart is open – the doorway to the cross

When he goes on in the same context to say that 'our heart is wide open', we conclude gloriously, that the hearts of the messengers of the new creation carry in themselves the doorway to the cross, the doorway that leads across the threshold of the house of Yahweh. (II Cor 6:11). At the point Where hearers receive the messengers' word, the door is open to the mechanisms of the cross. Such a dimension of ministry has rarely ever been understood. The dynamic described here is surely the most important point of pursuit for every servant of the Lord.

Indeed, the weakness of Calvary is an entirely revolutionary modus operandi. This is how the 'new creation' functions, for the point about weakness is not merely that God will compensate and bolster our impotence. The point is that the cross is to be the birthplace of an entirely new bios/zoe creation. This is and will be an entirely different statement of existence from a biological creature who has added Christian religion to their experience. This is new creation, brought into being by resurrection life.

As the new creation, it is intended that we should carry in ourselves the passions of the cross so that we can minister an access. This is the prescribed way that the ministry of reconciliation functions. Can we say with Paul: 'our hearts have no rest' (7:5); that we have no 'consolation' until others enter the process of accountable 'mourning'. (7:7).

THE CROSS – THE WEAKNESS OF GOD

In a clear statement by Paul in 1st Corinthians, the cross is called 'the weakness of God'. (1:25). As this 'weakness of God is stronger

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than men', clearly this dimension, once we understand it, is the key to victory over flesh and Satan also.

Looking at essential definitions for a moment, we conclude that the *cross confined to flesh* is the weakness of God. All the suffering of God is only *in* the flesh, and in relation *to* the flesh. Christ has suffered in the flesh, and now we are that flesh ('of His flesh'; Eph 5:30). Now His travails, His dying and living etc are wrought in us.

Where flesh is touching God, in the cross, *there* is the 'weakness of God'. In the first letter, we are told that it is to this dimension that we are 'called' (1:24,26), and 'chosen' (27,28). Obviously, our complete predestination is contained within the weakness of God.

Defining weakness

Very simply, we would say that 'weakness' describes a state of complete dependence on God's life, an entire condition where strength is not drawn from the elements and devices of the world. In weakness, we rely totally on the Spirit of Yahweh – the Father's Lordship (for provision, i.e. identity, hidden manna), the Son's Lordship for our participation in the adoption (in the body where we find sustenance and definition), and the Lordship of the Spirit (for His immanent leading and empowering). Paul simply said that we have the 'sentence of death in ourselves' so that we will not 'trust in ourselves but in God Who raises the dead'. This is weakness. (II Cor 1:9).

To Corinth, to a church becoming strong in fleshly projections, wisdom and worldly nobility, Paul recalls them to an entire ethos that is the way and temperament of God in the world, the way of the mystery. (2:1, 2:7). He recalled them to an entire culture that should be the effect of the cross, in contrast to the culture of flesh that reduces the cross to no effect. The cross, says Paul, is a constant weapon and assault on the strength and dependence of the flesh, so that our 'faith would not stand … but in the power of God. (2:5).

What kind of weakness?

The cross, he shows, brings us down to weakness. The cross delivers us to weakness. This is the effect of the cross. What a magnificent and delivering thought, for when this is our condition, we have no further need to doubt or fall into condemnation. In fact, the cross is made of no effect if we reinstate 'wisdom of words' (theology).

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Of course, we should add the caution that this 'weakness of God' is not the same as the somewhat pathetic non-accountability that is common to the human race. For the man who has met the Lord at the cross, weakness is the condition he should accept. All confidence in fleshly strength, wisdom, resources, resorts, is gone. Before we came to the cross, we leaned always and only on the strength, projection, conquering and manoeuvring impulses of the flesh. Since we encountered the cross, since we died with Christ, we have been planted in weakness so that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.

Glorying in the Lord

No flesh can glory in His presence. Everything must be brought to nothing, so that Christ may be all in all, so that we may be OF Christ s the new creation. (Eph 1:23). He who glories, he who has any sense of light, life, expression identity and destiny whatsoever, let this 'glory [be] in the Lord'. Hallelujah.

After the cross - weakness

If any man has come to the cross to die with Christ, the first element of His post-cross, post-death experience, is that he is delivered directly into weakness. This is the context of tribulation where he will produce character by the power of God. God's will is to produce of a new synthesis of bios and zoe, in the cross, a new dimension unique to the flesh of mankind called the 'weakness of God'.

Partaking of affliction by the power of God

'That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.' (I Cor 2:5)

'For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall *live with Him by the power of God* toward you.' (II Cor 13:4).

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but *share* with me in the *sufferings* for the gospel according to the *power* of God.' (II Tim 1:8).

We must partake of affliction '*by the power of God*' for it to be valuable in our lives. Character development takes places through

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weakness. At the cross we die with Christ. Then we are translated to weakness for the producing of character.

Partaking of weakness by the power of God is a form of transformation that can be illustrated by thinking of photosynthesis – one form of life is transformed to another by the addition by light (power). At the points of pressure, we are not just earthlings becoming irritated by contrary circumstances, who turn our stoic, religious faces heavenward. We are not sub-standard believers, trying hard to get near the cross - needing a spiritual tablet or injection to help us across the line. Indeed not. We have died with Christ. We have put on Christ and taken up His cross. We respond as sons. We open our hearts, we expose our weakness, we trust in the Lord, we lean our burden upon Him. Having received Him, we have authority as sons, through faith in His word, to exercise the supernatural ability to impute, or reckon. As sons, we impute real death (substance) to our inadequacy and we impute real substance to our life before God. We repent of the actions belonging to death, and we eagerly turn our faces to 'the presence of Him … Who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.' (Rom 4;17). We impute life out of death, and we call into existence. This is how we '*produce*' character rather than *producing* all manner of evil desire; (same Greek word in Rom 5:3 and 7:8).

The 'equation' of grace

The epistles describe the particular set of responses that will produce character – we will call these 'glorious' responses; i.e. 'glorying in tribulation; 'rejoicing in hope'. (Rom 5:2; 12:12) These are the identity responses which *add* to faith virtue, to virtue knowledge etc. (II Pet 1:5). To 'add' is to produce. There is an 'equation' as it were, by which we produce! The glorious truth is that the addition of resurrection life (the power of God) synthesises our realm and God's realm in a new creation. This is the equation of grace that breaks the neck of Satan. This is the dimension of being 'weak in Him' that flowed like a triumphal procession, a fragrance of death and life, across the New Testament world and turned it upside down.

Our attitude to death and dying

Quite clearly, we have to revise our attitude to death and dying. We have come to think of death as termination, non-existence,

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something which diminishes our quality of life. In truth, we fear and avoid it. Our major pursuit is avoiding death. We forget that even the gifts of miracle healing only quicken the mortal body so that we can run our course. We will still die, as did Lazarus who arose to die once more.

We must come to terms with dying, for only then does the life of Jesus function. If we believe that we will run the course of our destiny, then we must say, 'I am dead'. Our life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col 3:3). This is the contract of the gospel.

The death of the cross, the dying of the Lord Jesus, is in fact a death where we *do not* actually die. Rather, we put to death the things that need to die; we reckon them dead. Gloriously, a substantial death is effected. Sin, in the flesh, really does die.

Why then do we suffer? Because having died with Christ, our eternal sentence has been commuted (transferred) to the pangs of Calvary; i.e. to the travail and birth pangs by which we mourn for lost sonship, bring forth divine life, and completely recover our destiny.

Our sentence 'commuted' to tribulation – implications?

Accepting this basic proposition of the gospel brings great peace. We can now accept that there is no 'ideal life' for anyone. For too long, the church has been confused in its purpose, and been lured into offering the ideal life, or at least a more ideal life. When the hearers profess the desire for these ideals; the messengers obligate themselves to seek all means to provide them. The hearers oblige the speakers by espousing the ideals. Mutual obligation takes over as the fundamental basis of the church. This is not the purpose of the church.

Filling up the sufferings

Paul spoke clearly on this subject. 'I now rejoice in my *sufferings* for *you*, and *fill* up in my *flesh* what is *lacking* in the *afflictions* of Christ, for the sake of *His body*, which is the *church*. (Col 1:24). This is succinct and powerful. This declares the purpose of the church. The full work and result of the cross is still to be manifested in the events of time. What work is that? The work of gathering Jew and Gentile into the processes of the cross, the work of making both one, removing the enmity, and releasing creation. The apostles understood that there was full measure for each believer to fill up in relation to his co-destiny in the body of Christ.

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Peter similarly links 'fiery trials' with partaking of Christ's sufferings. (I Pet 4:4). These sufferings are His – they can only be His – for the cross embodies all sufferings.[27] Christ's suffering was and is only in the flesh, only in time, 'once at the end of the world' - a suffering that ends sin and synthesises bios into zoe. (Heb 9:26 AV). 'He that suffers in the flesh has ceased from sin.' (I Pet 4:1). The dying of the Lord Jesus is an event only in the flesh, only on the cross. I join the cross where I participate in the suffering of the cross - that once for all time and eternity dimension - which is given to us, in the flesh.

Each daily weakness, each momentary yielding, conviction or contrition, is a point where the cross makes a breach, and where we may know the power of God.

Adopting the mindset of weakness – Christ is in us

An entirely different and revolutionary mindset begins to take as hold of us as we digest these points. Our renewed mind works this way: Yes I'm weak, and I do have sin, but Christ is within me and is also within you (unless you're disqualified), and is completing His work. (II Cor 13:5,9). As we examine ourselves, we know Christ is in us. This should be cause for great exclamation, great rejoicing and great rest. If our souls have no rest, it is because at the points of struggle, we do not enter the promised land of sonship by accountable reckoning. Instead, the operation of our own law judges and gives substance to all kinds of other things. Perhaps we are weak in the exercise of faith to impute. We don't 'go in'; we won't cross over, when we *have* been given authority to impute life out of death and call into existence.

Reckon yourselves dead indeed

Following this through the, let us ask, 'To what sin must we reckon ourselves dead?' First of all, to the sin of unbelief. We must believe that God can give life to our mortal [bios] bodies. (II Cor 1:9). We should begin by believing that God can raise us from the death that is caused by the law of our own being. We should recognise that *unbelief* is an *active* exercise, just as faith is. Unbelief is not simply the absence of faith. Unbelief actively grants substance to the law in my

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[27] Peter does argue of course that we can be buffeted for our faults, which lacks credit. I Pet 2:20

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members, just as 'faith is the substance' of the dimensions 'hoped for' (beyond my members). (Heb 11:1).

The sin of unbelief

Oh the insurgent power of unbelief, trapped in an identity that is functioning by the glory of law. Where law is the glory, and not Christ through faith, there is only ever unbelief. Where law is, there is no faith. There is no accountability; there is no sonship; therefore there is no power to convert weakness into character, flesh into Spirit; bios into zoe.

Authority and power

Admittedly, experiences of weakness do arouse the laws of survival in our members. But once we believe, we can convert weakness into the substance of identity by the prevailing power of God. The power of God is both the right (authority; Gr. exousia; Jn 1;12) and the enabling 'dunamis'. These function by the 'energia', the working of God - i.e. the same supernatural way He works – by imputing. (Gr. 'dunamis' – power – and 'energia' – working – both used in Eph 1:19). We have authority (right) to the dunamis which functions according to the same working (energia) as God Himself. The working (energia) of God *is* the cross - the operation of God. Here we can embrace dying and living, always triumphing. 'Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.' (II Cor 2:14).

The ministry of death

If on the other hand, we administer the glory of law, it will appear exactly the same as the ministry and glory of identity functioning. Paul declares, over against the false shepherds (see later), that the administration of law can look glorious. This is amazing, and frightening. The difference is only in the result. The glorious ministry of death is killing the very Christ identity within ourselves and others – just as Christ was killed by those practising God's own law. We can crucify Him within ourselves by the glory of law, if we fail to confess and impute substance to the glory of identity.

Law has a glory, because law always has its own light (i.e. the preoccupation with the self-capacity to be good or evil). Law has its

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own source and its own expression - identity drawn from self. No wonder law produces such a horrendous veil, in which darkness Satan works to blind the minds. (Take note that Paul connects his struggle over the false workers with the glory of ministering law, with the 'veil', which in turn connects in the next chapter with the 'god of this world' and with 'perishing'. II Cor 3:1, 9, 14; 4:3-4).

It is important then that we do learn to impute, for if we do not exercise the authority and power to reckon rightly, we begin to oppose Christ (crucify Him again) and we begin to replace His glory with the glory of flesh/law - with religious identity. Tragically, this is exactly what has happened in the church – true glory replaced by the glory of flesh and law.

CONTEMPORARY CORINTH

In our contemporary situation, so like Corinth with all its division, immorality and idolatry, Christ is being crucified to ourselves again, by the failure to avail ourselves of the cross and its effects. And furthermore, the administration and glory of fleshly law is replacing the operation of the cross of Christ. The glory of law is being mistaken for the 'zoe' life of Christ.

If we cannot transform weakness to character by the power of God, right at the critical points, are we not in danger of destroying the seed of Christ's life that has been planted within us! Sadly, the crisis points of offence arouse many to resort to the glory of law as a replacement for the 'living Christ' expression.

It is sobering to consider that some may believe they have a ministry, even a glorious ministry. It could be however, that the glory is of law, and the result is slowly killing Christ within, crucifying Him again, and quenching the Spirit of His life. (More on 'crucifying Him again' in section 7).

We should take heed that to approach God in prayer, to pray in the Holy Spirit, with the glory of law filling our being, will bring death to us and others.

False shepherding base

If it is true that Paul, in 2nd Corinthians, is stating the mature mode of His apostleship, then it is also clear that he was doing so over against interlopers who had a completely different base. A brief scan across the following references shows this clearly.

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- 2 Cor 2:11 - Satan taking advantage
- 2:17 - comments that 'we are not like the rest' who were adulterating the word of God
- 3:1 - do we commend ourselves?
- 3:7 - the ministry of death; (to whom is Paul referring?)
- 4:5 - do not preach ourselves; (with whom is he comparing himself?)
- 5:12 – we do not preach ourselves in answer to those who glory in appearance;
- 5:16 - from now on … no one according to the flesh (what is the issue here?)
- 10:12 - not comparing ourselves (were other doing so?)
- 11:3 – minds beguiled from simplicity
- 11:4 - another Jesus, another gospel, another apostleship
- 11:12 - cut off the opportunity of those … boast
- 11:13 - such are false
- 11:22 - are they … I am more!

Shepherding in weakness

The final chapters of 2nd Corinthians give a marvellous summary of Paul's mode of making the gospel process available. He laboured to make the gospel 'free of charge'. (11:7). This is a most significant comment. He did not coerce his hearers, nor did he put his hearers under an obligation. If they were faithful, that was their prerogative, and indeed he did fear they would be courted away from espousal to Christ. But his boast was that he stood free of them. (II Cor 11:10 ff). He did not obligate them in a burdensome way. This mode, he said, was in no way because he did not love them. God knew, he said. He did most earnestly seek their relationship. (11:11). God knew, Paul professed, that what he did and would continue to do, was for a clear reason - to identify those (false apostles 11:13) who grasped the right to 'be as they were')i.e. like Paul and his company) - with the same right to connect hearers to their authority. This is what he confronted. These were not like Paul as all.

Paul's hearers were putting up with this kind of false ministry, even to the point where ones brought them into 'bondage', 'devoured' them, 'took' them, 'exalted themselves' and struck the disciples 'on the face'. (11:20). This is amazing. This is mutilation!. These were the

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marks of false shepherding! Paul's defence was, 'we are too weak for that'. (11:21). Weakness was Paul's mode; though he could have easily measured himself against their signs of apostleship.

Following this idle, foolish and tangential boasting, Paul explains that the 'thorn' was given for the very reason of cutting off this kind of proud pastoral apostleship. (12:1-7) If he came again, he testified, he would not be burdensome, for he sought 'you, not yours. (12:14). To the end of the letter, he maintained his position that he was not seeking to draw obligating responses and commitments from his hearers. He sought only the individuals *themselves* as a reward. He did not seek the binding commitment of children to parents, but sought rather to 'lay up' as a parent toward the children. (12:14).

Paul secretly knew that this was, in fact, the only way to make them stand accountable for the remission of all the fleshly conditions with which they contended unsuccessfully – contentions, jealousies etc. (12:20-21).

Prove your own selves

Having employed all his apostolic weapons (10:4), he now concludes, 'Prove your own selves'. (13:5). This is the bottom line of the 'weakness' mode, which Paul summarises in verses 3-4. There are those, he says, that seek a proof of Christ's speaking through the messengers (i.e. proof of the value and effectiveness of the entire messenger principle). Why do they seek proof? Because they see what they consider to be a 'weak' position and mode, not at all like the dominant, aggressive stance of the false apostles who obviously told them 'what to do' with all the self-qualifying authority of Satan himself.

Continuing on, Paul declared that Christ was *not* in fact weak toward you but 'mighty in you' FOR [he explains the whole proposition once in a nutshell] He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. FOR WE ALSO are weak in Him, but shall live by the power of God toward you. (13:4).

So 'examine yourselves', Paul continues, according to this genuine reality. 'For we are glad' (continuing the weakness discussion) when we are weak [i.e. when we don't appear to have any answers] but you are strong – i.e. made strong by the fact that amidst weakness, you are caused to appropriate the power of God; [for any other 'strong'

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ministry stance would never produce any completeness (13:11) and this was the edification he sought.

Just as Paul expresses it here, it is crucial to the weakness of our approach to gospel ministry, that the demands of the flesh from others, meet with an answer of *inability* to help. Otherwise, we are feeding the principle of Babylon – i.e. supporting misappropriation to the flesh in the very place where holy seed is being sown.

False shepherding principles

If not false shepherds, then at least a false shepherding operation can be alive among us. As also there may be 'false brethren', who 'use' the church structure while giving the appearance of Christian living. (II Cor 11:26).

We must never be provoked into overbearing stances that have been incited or drawn by the incorrigible hearers. In the extreme sense, to be aroused to frustration by an intransigent group, moves us in a sense to reinvent Calvary, as if its power is uncertain, or as if it can be reused and re-applied to the self-centred position, word after word, principle after principle.

A disgruntled group can even provoke leaders in order to accuse them of self-serving authoritarianism, megalomania, or cult-like leadership. This is why leaders must never be provoked. For if our ministry should at any point become chained to this intractable attitude, supposing it to be genuine, for even an instant, are we not then false workers? If stubborn non-accountability provokes leaders to a gospel process that raises its profile to prevail and 'take' such, is Satan not gaining an advantage over us, since the forward progress of the gospel is hindered while we service this inordinate demand.

It is timely for every one of us to seriously examine whether we are living the life of Christ. For if we do not enter life ourselves, while we dominate others in the gospel process, we have a false shepherding structure. It is a false shepherding exercise to be led astray from weakness into deliberate 'idealistic' intention.

Idealism produces mutual obligation

The more the church praises itself with right doctrine, efficient programming and practice, successful evangelism and prosperous finances, the more the church falls into the trap of 'idealism'. Revivalist churches are particularly vulnerable. In turn, the pressure

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to perform well grows greater! The expectation of the ideal becomes a congregational pressure, upon leaders, to produce the ideals to which many of the hearers have gathered (often out of reaction to other backgrounds or church traditions). Now the structure of the church is locked in patriarchy – the leaders provide counsel toward the ideal outcomes, and the entire gospel proposition, which commits every believer to tribulation, is undermined.

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Section 7 - Rome, Philippi and beyond

Following on from our Corinthian discussion, we note that Paul wrote to the Romans *from Corinth* when he did finally visit (after the two letters, and at the conclusion of the 3rd journey). It is exciting to observe that Romans, his most complete statement of the gospel, and one made without the same lengths of anguish that appear in the 2nd Corinthian letter, bears the marks of a harmony and balance and total statement, not seen beforehand in the other epistles.

Very many highlights can be drawn from the book of Romans – in particular the themes of imputation and co-operating in our destiny, as per the example set by Abraham. These are taken up in Volume 2. In relation to our present theme, one of the most important sections is in chapter five where the theme of tribulation is developed. In the whole direction of his teaching, Paul is not aiming to theologise about justification by faith. In truth, he is teaching us how imputation works at the points of tribulation, to produce the character of godliness. He is reinforcing his entire apostolic method for the establishing the gospel amidst tribulation.

Producing character

'And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.' (Rom 5:3-5).

Linking Jesus' parable teachings to this passage, we learn that our call to 'produce' (Rom 5), links with the call to tend and steward the seed, to build, and to 'add' to our faith, to use Peter's expression. By making a glorious response, we are able to produce perseverance first of all, and then produce character. This is where we each need to call on the name of the Lord, for we call on the Lord to make Himself

known to us and make known who we are so that we can impute character by the power of God; (according to the power that works in us; Eph 3:20).

The gospel proposition in Ephesians

Ephesians expresses the entire proposition in a most succinct way also. Having been 'enlightened' (1:18), we see the hope of the name - the specific, exceeding glory of our identity within the city of jewels. We also see what is the greatness of His power toward us – the power by which we may impute death and life. We believe 'according to the working of His power'. (1:19). We believe in the dynamic of His power, in the operation and exercise of the power of impute. We are able to exercise power as supernatural sons to turn the weakness of bios into endless life, into the identity and corporate glory of Christ, by resurrection life. We speak the word of life out of death; we speak a word to call into existence; this is the power and might of the apostles' perspective.

The Melchizedek Order to the world

The high point of Romans is the challenge to the church to carry the Melchizedek Order to the whole world. Israel was chosen to be the 'city set on a hill', to demonstrate the Melchizedek Order, so that the Gentiles would flow to Zion. Because of Israel's failure to fulfil this ministry, Paul turns the whole mystery of election around and shows that it is given to the Gentiles (Zion) for the deliverance of all Israel. This is why he urges the Romans to 'present yourselves' as a living sacrifice. (Rom 9-12).

Accordingly, our challenge is the same – to be the vehicle of the Melchizedek Order. We must remain passionately constrained to the mystery of God, to the fellowship of the mystery, to the charge upon us to be the custodians of the Melchizedek Order. If we cannot be custodians, we will also be cut off (Rom 11).

PHILIPPIANS

Once again, taking up the sequence of Paul's follow-up letters, we are intrigued by Philippians (almost certainly from prison in Rome), for now his apostolic world view is complete. Now his gospel 'package' is even more succinct. He is all the more clear how the

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gospel operates. He sums up, in chapter 3, what it means to be the true 'circumcision'. 'Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the *same* things to you is *not tedious*, but for you it is *safe*. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! For we are the *circumcision*, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have *no confidence* in the flesh ... But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ ... count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Phil 3:1-3, 7-8).

Philippians describes Paul's apostolic 'world view'. The salvation proposition is the driving motivation of his life. He seeks only to be conformed to the life of Christ. Those who are mature, he says, have same mindset. (3:15).

Paul is patiently adjusted to writing the same things. Repetition is not tedious since it is in the interest of safety for the sheep. He has no confidence in the flesh, either in his own, or in the projections of others. He is circumcised to the whole exercise of being relevant to the world. He understands the goal and expresses it more concisely than in any other letter – 'that I may know Him ...'. He now understands the goal more clearly than ever before – the 'exanastasis', the 'out-resurrection – literally, the 'standing up' (cf. in identity) while still in the body.

The true circumcision

If we worship (live) in the Spirit of God (Yahweh – Father, Son and Spirit) then we are cut from our own laws of being, judging and striving, and we join Him in eternal Spirit. We are linked to the activities of naming - 'knowing your election brethren', as Paul expressed it in Thessalonians. This is the base from which we function, from which we bring a word of imputation, a word that speaks life from death and calls into existence.

No confidence in the flesh

The heart of effective ministry of the gospel then, is to carry the messenger word (from the headship of the Father), labour in the processes of the cross (the Son aspect), being led by the Spirit. We remain circumcised to the flesh – having no confidence in, obligation to, or friendship with 'the flesh'. We maintain a disciplined connection with each new creature. Our point of connection is the 'word proceeding' from the mouth of God. We are not 'called out' or

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drawn to any other obligation. We have a 'conscience void of offence' – it is empty of taking offence at others, and it is not incited to offensive action toward others. (Acts 24:16 AV). We are not drawn to make assessments or take accountability for someone else's issues. Thus we do not become the victims of our own assessments, but are able to maintain the initiative of love at all times.

Knowing nothing according to the flesh

Outside of the initiative of the word of the cross, we do not know anything or anyone according to the flesh. We know others in Christ, and as fellow stewards of the word that is coming to them. We know them not as 'mere men', not according to fleshly behaviours, but as the jewels of spiritual predestination. We do not adopt any stance at all, unless it is in relation to *the* word, to *a* word. We don't have a judgement. We cut off the modes of relating that have confidence in the flesh, that base their confidence in a fleshly mode of relating.

Power to save and destroy

If we are ignored or rejected as messengers, we must never have attitude that 'takes it personally'. We must only ever move from the authority of the sonship of our own being, never taking another law from outside – the law that belongs to one Lawgiver. We do not take the power to save and destroy into our own hands. (Jas 4:12).

LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

A brief look at the letter to the Hebrews is most helpful as we conclude. To the Hebrews, the apostolic message from both testaments, from beginning to end in God's purpose, was clear – we must avail ourselves of the process now available in the true temple; not previously available in the Old Covenant temple. The apostolic perspective of Hebrews is outstanding in its own right, for it integrates the crucial issues from old to new, from the physical holy land to the rest still available to all who believe, from the Old Covenant priesthood to the New Covenant Melchizedek priesthood, from the creation of angels (as servants) through their mandate under law, to the mandate of Christ and the effective new and living way. Finally, the way of sonship is shown to be the same from old to new (Heb 12).

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Appropriation – entering the rest

If it was toward the end of his ministry, and if it *was* Paul who wrote the book of Hebrews, how appropriate it would be. For its whole thrust is toward apprehending, appropriating, substantiating and entering. Hence it is a most important book for us as part of this dialogue, for the church today is facing the challenge of making a final great shift to appropriation. It is time to understand imputation. It is time to enter the rest of identity and destiny. And if we do not, then the warnings and imperatives that have such a sense of finality attached to them, will also apply to the church in our day.

REJECTING THE PROCESS OFFERED

The message of Hebrews is that an irresistible process is now available for the effective cleansing of sin – a process which was not effective under the old covenant. This effective process with its irresistible blessing brings inescapable judgement where it is not availed; for one cannot put Christ to open shame.

'It is impossible ... if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.' (Heb 6:6). 'Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?' (Heb 10:29).

Crucifying again for themselves

In Hebrews six, a most serious warning is issued. Alongside the strong admonition concerning 'going on to perfection', there is a warning about falling away? In what way is 'falling away' to be understood as crucifying again for themselves the Son of God', putting Him to 'open shame'? This is amazing. It is possible to 'fall away' in such a way that Calvary is abused – 'since they crucify again for themselves'. It is clearly stated, that in some way there is a re-use of the crucifixion, as if Calvary was not adequate.

Our first conclusion, as Paul argues in Galatians (2:17), is this. If after all that Christ has done we are still found to be sinners, then what was the point of the cross? Is Christ a minister of sin? Was His

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operation and administration a failure, in that it has produced sin rather than change?

Hebrews strengthens the thought by suggesting that when believers fall away, they cause the son of God 'open shame', in that His death is seen to be ineffective.

More seriously still, they 'crucify again *for themselves* the Son of God'. While we cannot in real terms crucify Him again, the inference is that some are abusing Calvary 'for themselves', rejecting its first offering, and requiring that it produce something further for them. While others may have appropriated a death to sin through His death, they have not. In effect, although not in fact, they lay upon Him their own private piercing as if the first was not adequate. The Son of God is thus put Him to an open shame, since Calvary is deemed to have produced no change.

'For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgement and fiery indignation …' (Heb 10:26).

Here the point is made even more strongly than the effective hyperbole of Galatians. While the cross *can* be emptied of its power; and the grace of God *can be set aside* (in individual cases of unbelief), he can not actually be crucified again, and neither is he a minister of sin. The above passage focuses the corollaries of these potent images. There is *no sacrifice for sins* if the knowledge of the truth is refused. Those who remain foolish and bewitched, or who fall away (Heb 6:6) or who sin wilfully have only the prospect of judgement and fiery indignation upon them for refusal to avail themselves of the power of the cross to deal with sin.

Again, our key message is clear. We must remain in the crisis of salvation; not begin to crucify Him to ourselves *again*.

The 3 fold rejection of the gospel process - Heb 10:29

The other verse quoted above (10:29) shows how this is possible. The apostle lists 3 dimensions of neglect or abuse of Calvary: trampling the Son of God underfoot, counting the sanctifying blood a common thing; insulting the Spirit of grace.

Let us examine the 3 dimensions of insult included in verse 29.

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Trampling the Son of God

If we accept that the second despite mentioned relates to the blood of process and the third to the Holy Spirit, it is compelling that this first rejection links with the Father, as well as with His own Son sent as a messenger. We may take it that the failure the apostle has in mind is indeed the rejection of the entire messenger-headship order of the Son by which the life of sonship, that includes us, is sustained from the Father. Where we refuse the one or ones the Father has sent, we trample the Son. This is the only way it is possible for our actions to be construed as 'trampling the Son'.

We may extend our consideration to the common failure to accept the messengers of Christ, either to bypass the messenger or else 'use' and take advantage of the messenger by not disclosing the truth. The cross is a contradiction, but it does not normalise a lie; we may not normalise what the cross is putting to death;

Counting the blood as common

Clearly our attention is drawn here to the blood of process which is precious and powerful to those who genuinely come to the light and walk in the light. A rejection of coming to the light for cleansing, and the failure to avail oneself of the precious blood, are obviously tantamount to counting the blood to be common and ineffective.

Insulting the Spirit of grace

The final action worthy of sore punishment is the insulting of the Spirit (Gr. repeats the word for 'despite' to strengthen the point), Who graciously applies the entire work of God through His actions of leading, guiding and empowering the believer. Where there is no submission to His leading, there is no quality of sonship life; since [only] those led of the Spirit are the sons of God.

The 3 fold process of the gospel

In practical terms, it is clear that we may summarise the three despites as being directed against order, process and quality of life. When we examine the positive corollary of the three statements, we realise that they directly reflect the three essential elements of the gospel process – one related to the Father, one to the Son and one to the Spirit. When these three processes are properly activated, they

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are effective for the sending away of sin. First of all, the primary element of the gospel transaction is the word of sonship proceeding from the mouth of the Father via His messenger-headship order. Secondly, the blood of participation (communion, koinonia) and process is precious and effective where we properly come to the light and 'confess our sins' with genuine disclosure. Thirdly, the Spirit graciously sanctifies us by the cross, leads us into all truth, and empowers us in the life of sonship.

To 'use' the messenger order dishonestly, to abuse the blood made available for process, or to 'use' and grieve the Spirit of grace are tantamount to crucifying for ourselves the Son of God. We may not 'use' the messenger, 'use' the blood of process, or 'use' the Spirit.

Abusing the process of the six principles

At any point in the pathway of the six principles of Christ we do this, God will not permit us to proceed. If we receive the word of repentance and do despite to the word, this rejection is said to crucify Christ. We will not be able to proceed, since God will not permit us to proceed another way, to enter by another door. (Jn 10:1). The same admonition can be applied to faith, where it is possible to reject the messenger's word; also to baptisms where we commit to the remission of sins; (and if we draw back we begin to crucify Him again). Further, we may speak of the laying on of hands linked with submission, resurrection life linked with identity and power that may be abused, and as the sixth principle, eternal judgement to which all must submit in order to be counted worthy of the kingdom. (II Thess 1:5).

The implied message of these Hebrews passages is this. The believer who lacks integrity in the 3-fold process in one principle, God will not permit to proceed. Furthermore, the one who reuses Calvary once, and who then adopts this mode in all six principles, is assured of damnation. Of course, we must move constantly through all these principles as part of the living dynamic of the gospel. (They are not a 'linear', once only. process.)

The Holy Spirit will need to bring to the memory of some where it was that they stalled; for he will not permit progress past these points where the messenger order of the Son addressed us unto salvation. We may not simply forget the points upon the Lord took issue within the salvation process, as if they change or dissipate with time. We

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may not use friendship, family relationship, or some other historic obligation to regroup and shift the foundation of relationship.

Using and re-using

The moment one 'uses' another person, or uses family relationships for advantage to bypass the cross, he begins to reuse Calvary. Those who merely 'use' the church in the modern abusive sense, and even re-use the context inordinately to compensate for non-accountability are in danger of re-using Calvary and hence crucifying the Son afresh, for the processes which are offered are being put to ridicule (open shame) by being made to appear ineffective, powerless.

If leaders become caught by this obligation, the effect is that they begin to be ashamed of the gospel (and ashamed of themselves) finding themselves tied to producing successful solutions as a personal investment in the ministry. Such hearers obligate themselves to the leaders (by professing the ideals we proclaim) who in turn may unwittingly obligate themselves to the hearers in reply (to offer answers).

SUMMARY ON THE APOSTLES' MODE

Coming toward the end of this first volume, our direction and aim can be summarised thus. We have sought to digest the 'mode' in which the gospel was ministered, not just the message of the gospel. We have sought to understand how the apostles moved in weakness, amidst tribulation, to set cities on fire, and invoke the effective and fiery process of the gospel.

We have concluded that the true apostolic mode always proceeds in weakness, with no bodily presence, in 'simplicity and godly sincerity', knowing that death with Christ has translated us to this mode of living by the power of God. (II Cor 1:12). In this mode we have no answer, obligation to, or confidence in or toward the flesh, except to circumcise it through the cross. Our way of relating, our reference point is the election of each individual, and the process of mourning that must be entered. Our mode of living is in the processes of the cross, for which our hearts are put forward as the open door of entry. Our hope is the corporate development of the body of Christ. Our hope is the variegated light of a city in which each occupies his glorious inheritance with the saints in light, each a distinct and precious living stone.

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The apostles' mode of coming is a totally new system of thinking in the gospel and its ministry – large letters; not tedious; simplicity, godly simplicity, the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (II Cor 1:12; I Cor 5:8).

Each reforming son has been appointed to a pathway of tribulation. Hence the gospel is not promising the ideal life, in worldly terms, as if one can escape the unique, tailor-made context which produces character. If there is no acceptance of accountability (if nothing is 'born') there will be relentless pursuit of an escape from the context which alone can produce change, into the motions of religious circumcision, religious idealism. Allied to this, some believers merely pursue a social life of advantage in the church, where they 'use' others, including the shepherds and messengers for affirmation and support.

The end of these deliberations is to revise and reaffirm the mechanism by which the messenger word is applied to each family – by true circumcision and not fleshly mutilation; by calling hearers to their accountability, not carrying accountability and obligation to the flesh. We are to be 'weak' but not ineffective. We are to be free of all men, but still to warn as servants. 'For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more'. (I Cor 9:19)

REVELATION - OBSERVATION FROM THE SEVEN LETTERS

Having briefly traced the development of the churches, it is noteworthy to lift out a couple of high points from the very last book of the New Testament. In what condition where the churches of which we have spoken by this time? Of course, the cities of which we have spoken are not mentioned in the final book. In Christ's own epistle to the churches (the book of Revelation), we have only the seven letters to seven of the churches in Asia from which to extract observations.

As He writes to them by the hand of John, late in the apostolic era, we read that they had maintained *some* elements of salvation, but neglected, lost or forsaken others. There are things that He 'knows' they have 'preserved' (2:2,3) but there are things He has 'against them' (2:14) because they have 'left' certain foundations (2:4), or allowed dangerous or damnable elements to remain (2:20). The 'angels' or messengers of the churches are held responsible by Christ, and are

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warned that 'things' (elements of salvation) are ready to die, because they have stopped short. (3:2). To the seventh church, He must even speak about knocking on the door and being readmitted! (3:20).

We might say the Head of the church has been aroused to speak from heaven. His admonitions about having 'an ear to hear' indicate that the churches were clearly not hearing and heeding the Spirit's leading. Now Christ must come as a 'thief' to take back the very life and position in the candlestick that He had promised them.

Refusing Him Who speaks

'See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. `For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven'. (Heb 12:25).

The important observation here is that those who refuse to hear will *not* escape. This is not a possibility, but a certainty. As surely as hearing leads to escape, refusal leads to imprisonment.

Clearly, if the churches had kept an ear to hear what the Spirit was saying, Christ need not have been caused to speak from heaven.

We should be able to hear His voice through His messengers in the midst of the candlestick. We should be able to hear the 'word of prophecy made more sure' – i.e. the voice of those holy men who are moved by the Holy Spirit to address the churches.[28] (II Pet 1:19-21). We should not need a letter from Patmos. The candlestick should be maintained by the prophetic voice of the Spirit, and lit by the immanent lamp of the Spirit, in the midst of each local church. If we lose the voice/hearing dynamic, we will lose our candlestick. (Rev 2:5 AV).

The word in the midst of the candlestick

Thus we establish the imperative of hearing the word of the messenger in the midst of the candlestick (church). The word proceeding from the Father (mouth of God) by the headship order must be heard, received and obeyed. It must be done. The behaviour being addressed, commended or enjoined, must show change. If this process stalls, God will not permit progress. Then the lack of response leads to crucifying Him again. God will not permit another

[28] On the 'more sure word', see Vol. 2

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option. We cannot climb up another way or seek to enter by another door. Seeking to do so will lead to perjury, to taking His name in vain, leading to our imprisonment, according to Zechariah's warning, in Babylon. (Zech 5:3-4).

Strengthen the things that remain

Because salvation does indeed depend on maintaining all the elements in balance, we are urged to recover the things that are ready to die, before the 'Thief' removes our candlestick. (3:2; 2:5). Just as Christ warns about removing our candlestick, and about removing our names from the book of life, so too He may come as a thief to remove the 'things' that He gave to us that are 'of God', which we have failed to steward.

Recovering the keys

This warning and admonition leads to our subject in Volume 2 – recovering the essential keys of the gospel, the keys of the kingdom. For the apostles carried with them the vital keys that released the prison doors and opened wide the gates to the life of God, through the doorway of the cross. In Volume 2 – 'Keys, Gates and Prison Doors' – we shall take time to meditate on the keys that the Spirit of God is reviving and placing in our hands, for we are to proceed across the threshold to a new era of entry and appropriation.

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