

## **The Unsearchable Riches of Christ**

*To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ... Eph 3:8*

'...unsearchable..!' Does that mean that we are not to attempt to search for the riches of Christ? Absolutely not! It means that the magnitude of those riches is beyond human comprehension. The riches of Christ are immeasurable; boundless; unfathomable. And yet, as we diligently seek to know Him more, the Holy Spirit will open our spiritual eyes to see more of those riches.

As Paul expresses it in relation to the love of Christ: '*...and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...*' (**Eph 3:19**). And as we see in Ephesians 3:8 above, grace was given to Paul – '*...to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...*' **Just from those verses alone we learn that God's intention is that we are to 'know' and 'proclaim' the 'unsearchable riches of Christ'.**

The apostle Paul had a particularly strong appreciation of the riches of who Christ is, because of Jesus powerful revelation to Paul, who at that time was in the process of persecuting Jesus' followers – and therefore Jesus Himself. What an amazing transformation from being a persecutor, to a passionate follower and messenger for Jesus.

Following this encounter he spent the next three years researching the scriptures, and receiving revelations about the glorious, unsearchable riches of Christ. As a result he became a powerful proclaimer of Christ and Him crucified.

Paul's letters to the Colossian and Ephesian churches abound with the riches of Christ. So, before moving on to draw up a list of 'the unsearchable riches of Christ', let's take some selections from these letters to contemplate the treasures they contain.

**Take time to meditate on these treasures, and let the Word of God speak to your heart.**

**Col 1:15-22** (NIV) *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth*

or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.<sup>21</sup> Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.<sup>22</sup> But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation...

**Col 1:25-27** ...I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,<sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.<sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

**Col 2:2-3** My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,<sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

That last verse brings to mind another wonderful scripture:

**Isa 33:5-6** Yahweh is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with his justice and righteousness.<sup>6</sup> He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of Yahweh is the key to this treasure.

How wonderfully this was fulfilled in Jesus.

Continuing with the riches of Christ as found in Ephesians:

**Eph 1:3-14** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,<sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love<sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,<sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,<sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight<sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ<sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

<sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,<sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.<sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation,

and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

**Eph 1:18-19** ...having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe...

**Eph 2:4-8** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...

**Eph 2:12-13** remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

**Eph 3:7-12** Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, <sup>10</sup> so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup> This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup> in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

**Eph 3:14-21** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup> that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think,

according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

What an awesome God we have. The high and exalted One, who is perfect in holiness, has chosen sinful creatures in order to bless them in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. He has lavished His grace upon us with all wisdom and understanding. He has given us the promised Holy Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance – all to the praise of His glorious grace.

But wait – there's more! **Let's continue with a list of the unsearchable riches of Christ.** Some of these you will be quite familiar with, and some are included in the verses above. But don't gloss over them too quickly. Allow the Holy Spirit to refresh your appreciation of all that Christ is for us, lest we become complacent, as did the Ephesian Christians (*Rev 2:4*); or even lukewarm as were the Laodiceans (*Rev 3:14-16*). Complacency and lukewarmness are also common issues in contemporary Christianity. Please be aware of this, and **press on to know Christ to a deeper level, and to truly love Him with your whole being.**

### **a. Christ is the exact representation of Yahweh's being**

*Heb 1:3 (NIV) The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being...*

Other words used for 'radiance' are: reflection; shining splendour; effulgence; and gleaming brightness. Even though Jesus came as a humble babe, He radiated the glory of Yahweh through His power; His wisdom; His love, compassion and grace. And He also reflected the righteousness; the justice; and judgement of God.

In addition to the above verse from Hebrews, these verses below also highlight Christ as the image of the invisible God.

*John 14:9-10 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? <sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"*

*2Cor 4:4-6 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

**Col 1:15** *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*

## **Much editing done in the main booklet – Part Three**

### **c. Christ is our Saviour**

Before Yahweh created mankind, He knew that they were going to be deceived by the devil, and that they were going to sin. And as God had warned them, their sin resulted in their separation from their Maker – their Father. But Yahweh also had a plan to provide a Saviour for mankind – His own precious Son – whom He spoke about through the prophets. Then that wonderful day arrived – but in quite a different way than the people were expecting.

**Luk 2:10-11** *And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

Through the giving of His own Son as our Saviour, Yahweh was putting His extraordinary love for mankind on full display.

**John 3:16-17** *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

**Rom 5:8-11** *...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

Not only did Christ die for us, but He was made sin for us – the Father placed all our sins into Christ as He was being crucified on the cross. By doing this, He provided the means by which we can be made right with God.

**2Cor 5:21** *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

**1John 4:9-10** *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

**Christ alone is our Saviour.**

#### **d. Christ is our Redeemer**

To 'redeem' is to deliver or rescue; usually involving a price that must be paid – a ransom. We were separated from a holy God, and without hope. We were destined for judgement and eternal punishment – but Jesus satisfied the wrath of God on our behalf, and has delivered us from our sinful state by His sacrifice on the cross.

'Redemption' is not distinct from 'salvation', but is a significant feature of the overall concept of salvation which has its starting point when we place our faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and continues until the Day of His return.

**Gal 3:13-14** *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"--<sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

**Rom 3:23-26** *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,<sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.<sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

**Eph 1:7-8a** *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,<sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight*

**Col 1:13-14** *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,<sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

**1Pet 1:18-19** *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors,<sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

#### **e. Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life**

**John 14:6** *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

**He is the only Way** that we can be reconciled with God our Maker and our Father

**Rom 5:8-11** *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

**1Tim 2:5-6** *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

**1Pet 3:18** *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God*

➤ **Jesus is the only Way** that we can be saved from sin.

**Act 4:12** *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

**John 3:36** *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*

➤ **Jesus is the living Truth.**

Commentator Albert Barnes gives the following explanation about Jesus being 'the Truth':

*'The truth - the source of truth, or he who originates and communicates truth for the salvation of men. Truth is a representation of things as they are. The life, the purity, and the teaching of Jesus Christ was the most complete and perfect representation of the things of the eternal world that has been or can be presented to man.'*

**John 1:14** *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. **1John 5:20** And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.*

Jesus frequently emphasised that He was proclaiming the truth by prefacing His words with: 'Truly, truly I say to you...'

**John 1:51** *And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."*

➤ **Jesus is the source of true Life**

**John 1:4** *In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*

**John 5:26** *For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.*

➤ **He is the Bread of Life**

**John 6:48-51** *I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup> This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."*

These words were somewhat confusing to the listeners, but Jesus went on to explain to His disciples: *'It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life'. **Joh 6:63***

In other words, it was not Jesus physical body that we are to eat – rather there is a spiritual implication bound up in the sacrifice of His body. Jesus body was crucified on the cross; and as He was hanging there, His Father placed all our sins on Him. Jesus died on our behalf, and He was raised again to life. The 'bread' that He would give for the life of the world was His 'flesh' – His body – and now we can 'eat' of that 'flesh' simply by faith in His sacrifice for our sins, and by receiving him into our lives.

Here we find a direct connection to the communion bread. The 'bread' is a symbol of His body given up for our sins. It is a reminder of the huge sacrifice that Jesus, the Son of God, made for us as He endured the anguish of the cross on our behalf, and the life that He has given to us as a result of that suffering. And as we partake of the bread, it is a reminder that we have partaken of Jesus by faith in all that He did for us on the cross – Christ is 'in us'.

➤ **Jesus is the giver of eternal Life**

**John 5:21** *For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.*

**John 11:25** *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,*

**John 17:2-3** *since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*



The real essence of eternal life is **to know** the only true God and Jesus Christ.

### ➤ **Christ is our Life**

**Col 3:3-4** *For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

**Gal 2:20** *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

**1John 5:12** *Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

### **f. Christ is the Vine – the source of our spiritual life and strength**

Jesus used the image of Himself being the vine and we being the branches, grafted into the vine. As we closely abide in Him, we will bear much fruit, and this will be to the Father's glory.

**John 15:1-8** *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

Apart from Christ as our source of life, we can achieve nothing of real significance from God's perspective, either now, or for eternity. But in Christ:

*'I can do all things through him who strengthens me.'* **Phil 4:13**

### **g. Christ is our Righteousness**

'Righteousness' is *"the character or quality of being right or just"* (Vine's NT Dictionary), and is one of the perfect virtues of God's holiness. Jeremiah was inspired with one of the most important prophecies about the Messiah who would be known as 'the Lord our righteousness'.

**Jer 23:5-6** "Behold, the days are coming, declares Yahweh, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>6</sup> In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' (Also Jer 33:16)

**This is truly one of the immeasurable riches of Christ for us** – that the Righteous One should become our righteousness, when in fact we were separated from God because of sin, and totally unworthy of the love and grace of God. By the grace of God, righteousness is credited to us when we genuinely believe in Christ as our Saviour. And for a Christian, it is linked to the fact that at the point of our salvation, we are united with Christ – we are now 'in Christ'.

➤ **It is only 'in Christ' that we become righteous.**

**1Cor 1:30-31** And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

**And it is by faith in Christ that Yahweh credits us with righteousness. We are declared 'righteous' in God's sight.**

**Phil 3:9** ...and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-- (Also **2 Cor 5:17; Eph 1:3-4**)

We can take absolutely no credit for this – it is the gift of God. Prior to Christ, the Jews thought they could achieve righteousness by keeping the law. But no one was ever able to keep the whole law without fault. But through Christ:

**Rom 3:21-24** (NIV) ... now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

**Oh, the wonder of the love and grace of God.**

## **h. Christ is the Pioneer and Perfecter of faith**

**Heb 12:1-2** (NIV) Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup> **fixing**

***our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.*** For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Not only is Christ our Saviour; Redeemer; the Way, the Truth; the Life; the Vine; and our Righteousness; but He is also **the pioneer and perfecter of faith** – He is the author; the founder; the initiator and completer of faith. These are other words that different translations have applied, and which help to give us a better understanding of the thrust of this verse.

Just by way of background, these verses follow on from the great chapter of 'faith' – Hebrews chapter 11. With reference to the heroes of the faith in the OT, the writer concludes at the end of chapter 11, before moving on to these verses we are focusing on, that:

***Heb 11:39-40*** *These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised,<sup>40</sup> since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.*

What God had planned, was of course the sending of His Son who would introduce a new level of relationship with the Godhead; a relationship which begins when we truly believe and accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and continues to grow as we *'run with perseverance the race marked out for us...'*

**Jesus is the initiator and perfecter of that relationship** which is often referred to as **'the faith'** (See **Acts 6:7; 14:22; Gal 1:23**) Galatians 6:10 refers to *'the household of faith'* (or *'the family of believers'* NIV). In other words it is true Christianity – based on faith in what Christ has done to redeem us back to our Maker, and to give us a new life; a life in unity with Him.

Jesus has established this new 'faith' relationship with God; and He has perfected it. He has made every provision that we need, in order to fully apply this faith relationship with Himself.

***Rom 8:32*** *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

***2Pet 1:3*** *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence...*

But we have a part to play in the working out of the 'all things' in this faith relationship. We have to *'...throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us...'*

God has graciously provided 'all things', but He created us with a free will; and He is constantly observing our lives to see if we will truly apply what He has provided. We still have to work out this salvation:

*'Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. **Phil 2:12-13** (Also **ch.3:13-14**; **1 Cor 9:24-27**; **2 Pet 1:5-10**)*

We have to: Strive for ... the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.  
**Heb 12:14**

There is much more to be said about the part we have to play in working out our salvation, but this had been further addressed in Part One of – 'God's Purposes for Humanity'. But for now let us focus on the fact that **Christ is the pioneer and perfecter of faith**, and that we are exhorted to **fix our eyes** on Him. This is the purpose of these booklets – especially in this section.

Again, we see here another of the riches of Christ; in that even though we were separated from God because of our sinfulness – and there was nothing we could do to rectify that – Jesus made such an enormous sacrifice for the purpose of initiating the faith relationship that we now have with the Godhead.

*'For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.'*

This is the **primary reason** why we should be '*...fixing our eyes on Jesus...*' He is the One, along with the Father, who should be the centre of our lives; the One we look to for everything we need as children of God so that we can live a godly life.

The **secondary reason** why we fix our eyes on Jesus is that we have a race to run, and we can only successfully run that race as we look to the things above:

**Col 3:1-3** *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

Life is full of distractions; and sin will always be endeavouring to 'entangle' us – to keep us focused on our self-life – our wants and desires. The old saying is still, if not more, applicable to people in this generation – we seem to want to 'keep up with the Joneses'. This is often a major component of the 'everything that hinders'.

But the writer of Hebrews is encouraging believers to take note of those heroes of the faith who set aside the distractions of life; who considered themselves '*foreigners and strangers*' on this earth (*Heb 11:13*); and '*...were longing for a better country—a heavenly one.*' (*11:16*)

*'Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.'* (*12:1*)

But praise God that through Christ He has provided everything we need to live the 'faith' according to His purposes. The indwelling Christ is the perfecter of that faith, which becomes real for us as we run with perseverance the race prepared for us to run. It's not an easy race – it's full of challenges and distractions – often with the need for discipline from our loving heavenly Father.

A vital component of '*fixing our eyes on Jesus*' is that, for our encouragement, we are to constantly keep in mind what Jesus endured.

*Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. **Heb 12:3-4***

As we now know, since the time of this being written, there have been many martyrs who have resisted to the point of shedding blood.

But let us be eternally thankful that our Redeemer suffered the horrific crucifixion on the cross – for the joy that was set before Him – the joy of seeing many sons come into glory.

***Isa 53:10-12*** *Yet it was the will of Yahweh to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of Yahweh shall prosper in his hand.*

<sup>11</sup> *Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.*

<sup>12</sup> *Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.*

***Heb 2:10*** *For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.*

**Eph 1:11-12** *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,<sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.*

**Christ is truly the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith.**

### **i. Christ is the 'Image' into which God is transforming us**

At the beginning of time '*...God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."* **Gen 1:26**

But of course as we know, the man disobeyed God's command; sin entered the heart of man; and the image and likeness to God was seriously disturbed.

But as we also now know, Christ has made the way to redeem us back to God, and has provided the way for that image and likeness to be restored. **Christ is the very pattern and standard of that image.** This not something that happens completely at the moment of our spiritual birth. Rather it is a progressive thing, and is very much dependent on us realising the means by which God will do it; and on us pursuing that means. We will be addressing those 'means' in the next booklet – 'God's Purposes for Humanity'. But for now let's briefly consider the riches of Christ as the image that God has provided for us.

**Col 1:15** *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*

**Heb 1:3** *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...*

Jesus, in His very nature – His compassion for the lost; His grace; His extravagant love; and His holiness – is the image of God. These are the primary aspects of Yahweh's nature that He wanted to display to fallen humanity, and Jesus certainly exhibited those glorious attributes. He was the full likeness of the Father. When Jesus was talking with His disciples, He said to them:

**John 14:9-11** *..."Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?<sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.<sup>11</sup> Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves."*

As Jesus continued in this pre-crucifixion conversation with His disciples, they gradually began to see more of the reality of who Jesus really was.

**John 16:29-30** *His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech!"<sup>30</sup> Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God."*

Then in the course of time, Jesus chose to reveal Himself to Saul the persecutor in such a dramatic way that Saul was totally transformed. Now as the apostle Paul he received so much revelation about Jesus, and about the purposes of God that were now being worked out in the lives of those who came to faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul could now see that the image of God, disturbed by the sin of Adam, was to be restored in those who submitted themselves to the outworking of God's purposes in their lives, and who also diligently sought the face of God.

**Rom 8:28-29** *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

**2Cor 3:18** *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

**Eph 4:24** *...to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

To be transformed into the likeness of God is certainly beyond our natural ability to attain, but God has provided the means. This is one of the riches of Christ that Yahweh has graciously provided for us as His children, in order that His eternal purpose might be fulfilled in us.

### **k. Christ displayed the riches of Yahweh's compassion, grace and love**

Salvation and redemption are only ours because of the richness of the compassion and grace of Yahweh as fully displayed in Jesus Christ. And what is even more captivating, and humbling, is that He has '**lavished**' His grace upon us. In other words, He has heaped; smothered; showered upon; poured out His grace; – **all for totally undeserving creatures such as us.**

**Eph 1:7-8** *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,<sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight*

**Eph 2:4-7** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

What awesome verses these are. **Oh, the wonder of the riches of God's mercy, grace, and love; firstly revealed when Yahweh declared His glory to Moses; and then more fully, as they were abundantly demonstrated in Christ.**

**Exo 34:6 & 8** Yahweh passed before him and proclaimed, " Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness... <sup>8</sup> And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.

Such was the impact of Yahweh's revelation to Moses, and should be for us as we grow in our appreciation of the riches of God's compassion, grace, and love. These rich aspects of God's nature have been on display from the beginning of time; but sadly God's chosen people generally refused to lay hold of them. But in spite of their sinfulness, God's grace has abounded all the more through Christ.

**Rom 5:20-21** Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup> so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Eph 2:4-5** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

**1Tim 1:13-14** (Paul writing to Timothy) ...formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup> and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

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



**Rom 5:6-8** *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- <sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

**1John 3:1** (NIV) *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*

**Through the huge sacrifice that Jesus, the Holy Son of God, made for us on the cross as He was being punished for our sins, Christ has fully displayed the riches of Yahweh's compassion, grace, and love.**

Yahweh is '*rich in mercy*'; His love is so great; His '*grace abounded all the more*'; He has shown us '*the immeasurable riches of His grace*'; '*the grace of the Lord has overflowed*'. His love for humanity was so great that He sent His only Son to be the sacrifice for our sins.

**'See what great love the Father has lavished on us!'**

## **I. The love of Christ is so vast – it is beyond our comprehension**

The love of God is such a major aspect of Yahweh's whole being that the apostle John declares that '**God is love**' (1John 4:8). Yet even though God has shown the abundance of His love by sending His One and only Son to be the sacrifice for our sins (1John 4:9,10), we so easily tend to become complacent about 'the love of Christ', because we have become all too familiar with a basic level of knowledge about His love.

But from what Paul is very strongly expressing to the Ephesian Christians, it should be clear that we too need to devote more time seeking to know the love of Christ to a much greater level. His love surpasses our knowledge; it is immeasurable. But it is evident from the extreme lengths to which Yahweh has gone, by putting His extravagant love on display to sinful humanity; that He longs for us to know this love to a much greater measure than what we might know at this point of our lives. **Herein we see more of the unsearchable riches of Christ.**

**Eph 3:14-19** *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup> that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> **may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,** <sup>19</sup> **and***

***to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.***

This prayer of Paul's is awe-inspiring; it is powerful; and it is also challenging.

➤ **It is awe-inspiring**

Paul is praying in accordance with the riches of Yahweh's glory – the riches that are inexhaustible and unfathomable; the riches of the High and Exalted One who inhabits eternity; the One who is so awe-inspiring. And his prayer was not just for the Ephesians – it is for us too as children of God.

➤ **It is powerful**

Paul is praying that from those inexhaustible riches, Yahweh will strengthen us with power through His indwelling Spirit. That power is unlimited. It is '... the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe...' (**Eph1:19**), and '...is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us...' (**Eph 3:20**)

And he is praying that as we are strengthened with that power, Christ will dwell in our hearts through faith. It's not that Christ is not already in our hearts, but that so often the smallness of our faith limits:

- **firstly**: our realization; or sense of His indwelling presence;
- secondly**, the level to which His power is actually able to work in us;
- and thirdly**, our comprehension of the immensity of the love of Christ.

➤ **It is challenging**

Paul is also praying that following on from having a foundation in agape love, we might be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to comprehend the hugeness of the love of Christ; a love that cannot be fully known, but of which God obviously wants us to have a deeper, and more personal knowledge.

**Finally**, he is praying that as a result of knowing the love of Christ to a much greater degree, we will be filled with all the fullness of God. **Wow! Is that not challenging? How can we be 'filled with all the fullness of God'?**

From the context of 'the love of Christ' in which we find these thought-provoking words; and also taking into account that 'God is Love', could we not say that 'the fullness of God' is the magnitude of 'the love of Christ'?

## **I. The Love of Christ – how can we grasp its glorious wonders?**

Just by way of reminder again of a basic meaning of 'agape' love:

*'Agape love can be known only from the actions it inspires. God's love is seen in the gift of His Son. Agape...includes: a strong desire, and an active and generous interest in the well-being of the person loved.'*

Let me try to explain what I believe the Lord has shown me about the wonder of the love of Christ. I am sure there will be much more to add; and there would no doubt be a better way of expressing it. But as I currently see it – a major part of the process of increasing in our knowledge of the love of Christ, is to grasp at least something of the massive disparity between the High and exalted Yahweh – and sinful humanity. The more we appreciate the nature, Lordship, powers, and holiness of Almighty Yahweh; in comparison to humanity with its self-centredness; the greater will be our understanding of the love of Christ.

Human beings are sinners by nature; and that is what separates us from this holy God. Yahweh is totally perfect; we are totally imperfect. We are self-centred; generally focused on our own wants and needs more than on those of others. We are independent; self-determining; self-reliant. At worst we want to harm others, and to be domineering over them.

All this is completely the opposite of what God created us to be; and what makes it worse is that there is absolutely nothing humanity can do to put themselves right with God – apart from Him we are lost and without hope, separated from this most holy God. But – Yahweh is a God of compassion; grace; and love; a God who has gone to extreme lengths to bring us back to Himself.

I don't want to dwell on the 'sinfulness' aspect of humanity at this point, but I feel obligated to suggest that we do need to appreciate just how serious our natural self-life is in God's eyes, in order to more fully appreciate the wonders of the love of God. The Scriptures, in their fullness, clearly portray the vast disparity between sinful humanity and the most holy One.

So what I would suggest, before we move on to consider the glorious wonders of the love of Christ, is that we humble ourselves before the Lord and ask Him to open our 'eyes' to any sinfulness in our lives that we have not yet dealt with, or maybe are not aware of. We always need to be aware of anything that would stand between us and Yahweh, the Holy One; and be willing to confess those things to Him so that the forgiveness that Christ has already achieved for us on the cross can be applied in our lives.

**1John 1:8-9** *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

So having done the above, let's move on to consider; first of all the awesome greatness and holiness of Yahweh; and then the extreme lengths to which He has gone as seen in the agony which His precious Son Jesus endured on our behalf.

### **i. The awesome greatness of our God**

Hopefully, as you have meditated your way through these booklets about what an awesome God we have, you will have come to a greater appreciation of the awesome greatness of Yahweh.

From the beginning of time we see that Yahweh's powers and wisdom are way beyond human comprehension. He had decided what He wanted to make – right down to the finest detail and the tiniest components – and He spoke it all into being. The vastness of creation; including the size of the universe; the innumerable stars and planets; the way in which all things work together in such harmony – to name but a few things – is truly mind-boggling.

Then there is the fascination of every living creature; with such variety; beauty; and size – each with its own purpose and function; and each giving glory to God its creator. Not only is Yahweh the creator of all things, but He is the sovereign ruler over all things, and He knows everything that is happening – all the time – in the whole vastness of the universe. Even the hairs of our head are numbered, and Yahweh knows when a sparrow falls to the ground.

**Neh 9:6** *"You are Yahweh, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you*

**Isa 40:25-28** *To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. <sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing. <sup>27</sup> Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from Yahweh, and my right is disregarded by my God"? <sup>28</sup> Have you not known? Have you not heard? Yahweh is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.*

**Jer 32:17** *"Ah, Sovereign Yahweh, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.*

**Rom 11:33-36** *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

<sup>34</sup> *"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"*

<sup>35</sup> *"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"*

<sup>36</sup> *For from him and through him and to him are all things.*

*To him be glory forever. Amen.*

This summary of the greatness of our God is all too brief. And if you don't recall much of what is included in Part One of 'What an Awesome God We Have', then I would suggest that you go through it again, with the view to soaking in as much as you are can about the awesome greatness of our God.

Yahweh, and His Son Jesus Christ, are overwhelmingly awesome in their authority; power; and wisdom. They are glorious and majestic; high and exalted; inhabiting eternity. They are the sovereign rulers over all created things; and they determine the events of history and eternity.

### ➤ **What an awesome God we have.**

As we are in the process of seeking to grasp the glorious wonders of the love of Christ; not only do we need to appreciate more of the awesome greatness of Yahweh, but in this context we also need to focus on the absolutely key aspect of Yahweh's being – His holiness. This is of particular relevance at this point in our consideration of the magnitude of the love of Christ. Again, if you don't recall much about God's holiness, I would suggest that you take time to reflect on pages 4-11 in chapter 8 of 'What an Awesome God We Have, Part Two'. The chapter is titled 'Yahweh is Holy',

## **ii. The holiness of our God**

At this point let me summarize the important conclusions about God's holiness taken from the earlier chapters in this booklet.

### **1. Absoluteness and Majesty**

In the sense of Yahweh's separation from all that is human and earthly; it thus denotes the absoluteness, majesty, and awfulness of the Creator in His distinction from the creature. ('Awful' in the sense of awe-inspiring)

### **2. Ethical Holiness**

And perhaps more importantly; holiness of character in the distinct ethical sense is ascribed to God.

'Holiness' is considered to be the most important aspect of God's whole being – **Holy is the way He is**. Yahweh's holiness carries an infinite fullness of

moral purity which sets Him apart from all that is morally impure. While the concept of 'holiness' does include that of separation, it is actually something of far greater significance. Separation itself is **not** holiness, but it is **the way to it**.

As Andrew Murray expresses it: *Holiness is not so much an attribute of God; as the comprehensive summary of all His perfections.'*

And as another unknown author has summarised it:

*'God's Holiness is the sum total of all His absolutely perfect moral virtues which set Him apart from all created things.'*

### **iii. The extravagant love of Christ displayed**

And yet the most awesome thing about this extraordinary God is that He has gone to such extreme lengths to show His compassion for lost humanity. Even though we were separated from Him because of sin; Yahweh sent His Beloved Son to earth in the likeness of sinful man, to be a sin offering for us.

*'... though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **Phil 2:6-8***

Jesus knew what His mission was. He knew that He was going to have to bear the sins of all humanity. He who knew no sin was going to made sin for us; and He knew that He was going to suffer the wrath of His loving Father as He was hanging on the cruel cross of Calvary.

#### ➤ **The agony of Christ**

But the first time we actually get a glimpse of Jesus' awareness of what He was going to be suffering, was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus agony over what He was going to suffer is evidenced in three ways.

**1.** He took three of His disciples with Him and said to them:

*"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." **Mat 26:38** (NIV, and following vv. below)*

Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. This statement expresses the extremity of the distress and agony of His soul. As the NLT puts it: *'My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death.'*

**2.** He fell to the ground and pleaded with the Father:

*"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." **Mat 26:39***

Such was the distress He was feeling – even before going to the cross – that He preferred to avoid actually going through it all. But He was nevertheless prepared to do whatever was His Father's will. During His hour of prayer He made the same request three times, with the submissive conclusion:

*"My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."* **Mat 26:42**

**3.** In Luke's record of this agonising time of prayer, he adds two comments which add to our realisation of the depth of Jesus agony. Firstly, an angel came to strengthen Him; and secondly, Jesus was sweating drops of blood

*'An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.'* **Luk 22:43-44 (NIV)**

➤ **a. An angel came to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43)**

The Father was very much aware of the depth of the suffering of Jesus soul, and He sent an angel to be alongside Him, and to strengthen Him.

➤ **b. Being in anguish, Jesus sweat drops of blood (Luke 22:44)**

The sweating of drops of blood is a clear indication of the serious anguish that Jesus was enduring as He was anticipating the suffering that He knew He was going to have to endure.

But what was it that was actually causing Jesus such agony? Was it the physical beatings, the whip lashings, or the crown of thorns that He knew were going to be inflicted on Him? Or was it the abuse from the crowd; or the nails through His hands and feet as He was hanging on the cross? While it may have included all of those things to some degree, I believe that there were three other things which were of much greater concern to Him.

**1. Jesus knew that He was going to have to bear our sins on the cross.**

Now keep in mind that we are talking about the Holy Son of God – absolutely perfect in His whole being; with an inherent hatred of sin. He loves people – but He hates the sin in us. And yet in order to save us from our sins, the perfect One had to be made sin for us – He was going to be filled with the all of our sins.

It is impossible for imperfect human beings to feel what it would be like for the perfect Son of God to have to bear our sins. Sin, which He hates, is the total opposite to His holiness. But we need to absorb the fact that Jesus suffered such agony, both before and during His crucifixion, as He was bearing our sins in His

body, all because of His great love for us. Jesus' sweating drops of blood confirm for us the agony that He suffered.

**2. Jesus knew that He was going to have to suffer the wrath of God that was due to us because of our sin.**

Even worse than having to bear our sins, was the fact that He was going to suffer the wrath of His Holy Father as He was bearing our sin. Following is a helpful explanation of the wrath of our holy God:

*God's wrath is always regarded in the Scripture as the just, proper, and natural expression of His holiness and righteousness which must always, under all circumstances, and at all costs be maintained. It is therefore a righteous indignation and compatible with the holy and righteous nature of God. (ISBE)*

As the Son of God, Jesus knew full well what the wrath of God was all about. And for Him to suffer that wrath would certainly be something He would have wanted to avoid. But He knew it was the Father's will, and out of His love for humanity, He was prepared to go through such intensive agony.

This is something that is beyond our comprehension. The magnitude of the love of Christ surpasses our knowledge; and yet He wants us to know it. This may be a paradox, but because of the overwhelming display of the love of God as seen in Christ, we must press on to know '*...the breadth and length and height and depth...of the love of Christ...'*

Surely, the extremity of Jesus suffering the wrath of His loving Father, should lead us to a deeper appreciation of His love for us!

**3. Jesus knew that He was going to be separated from His Father.**

We cannot comprehend the love relationship between the Father and the Son. It would go way beyond any love relationship that we might know. The Father too would be suffering that same anguish as He saw His beloved Son suffering as He was enduring the whole crucifixion ordeal, and as He was separated from Him.

The Father and the Son are 'One'; 'One' in such unity and intimacy of relationship that is beyond our comprehension.

Jesus' bearing our sins; suffering the wrath of God; and His separation from His Father; are the most serious aspects of all that Jesus suffered on our behalf. The physical sufferings, while seriously painful, were not nearly as agonising.

**Herein are the unsearchable riches of Christ displayed. Here is at least something of the width and length and height and depth of the love of Christ.**



The following chorus from 'This Fathomless Love' by Sovereign Grace Music expresses it beautifully.

**I can't comprehend  
This fathomless love  
I'm gripped and amazed  
At what You have done  
Why would the Adored  
Become the despised  
To bear all the furious wrath  
That was mine  
How awesome this mystery of  
Your fathomless love for me**