



God's Purposes for Humanity

Part Three

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16

Colin Winters

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Yahweh – our God – is so high and exalted; so majestic and glorious; and He is so worthy of all glory and honour. He is the One who created all things, and who has purposes in everything He does, and everything He allows to happen in the whole universe. His predominant purpose in all creation is to establish His Kingdom which would endure for all eternity – a glorious Kingdom ruled by a God who is loving, compassionate, and gracious – holy, righteous and just. In addition to the angels who were created to serve and worship Him, God also predetermined to have a people created with a free will, to choose either to submit to His loving and caring Lordship, or to living for their own personal satisfaction, and thereby eventually suffering His righteous judgement.

At the beginning of time when God made all things, He created man in His image and likeness; to live according to His ways; to be dependent on Him for all things; and to have a personal relationship with Him. But something happened that changed things from being as God had made them, to what they are now. People are no longer naturally dependent on God, but rather on their own independent nature— driven by their own selfish desires— ‘it’s all about me’. However, because God is our Maker, life is supposed to be ‘all about Him’ and His Kingdom.

This is what the Bible is all about. God has given us His Word to reveal Himself and His purposes for humanity. If we fail to recognize this – we will be the losers. But God will show us His purposes and how we can be winners, if we will humble ourselves before Him and diligently spend time getting to know God through His Word and Spirit. And as we get to know God more intimately, we will understand more about His purposes for humanity, and how He wants to restore the likeness to Himself that He created us to have, but which was disturbed by the sin of man.

Written by Colin Winters as motivated by God. Apart from Him, I can do nothing! (*John*15:5)

BUT – ‘I can do all things through him who strengthens me.’ (*Philippians* 4:13)

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Most Scripture quotations are based on the English Standard Version (ESV) with the only change being the insertion of 'Yahweh' in place of 'LORD' (in capitals)

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are based on the New International Version; again, with the only change being the insertion of 'Yahweh' in place of 'LORD'

Please note that all emphases in verses, by underlining or **highlighting**, are mine.

Please feel free to make comments or ask questions. Colin, colros48@gmail.com

Introduction

This booklet is 'Part Three' in this series of 'God's Purposes for Humanity', which is the third topic in the whole series about the importance of knowing God and His purposes for humanity. As an introduction to this booklet I will recap just a few of the introductory points from Part One.

For a Christian, the most important thing in our life should be **to know God**, and to know His plans and purposes for us. After all, **God is our Maker and He created us for a purpose**. Is that not true? Well, the Bible makes that very clear.

***Psa 100:3** Know that Yahweh, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. (See also **Rom 11:36 & 1Cor 8:6**)*

***Rom 11:36** For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

***Isa 46:10** I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.' ¹¹From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do.*

***Jer 29:11** For I know the plans I have for you, declares Yahweh, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

***1Pet 1:3-4** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...*

As noted a number of times in these booklets, **God has given us His Word – the Bible – for the primary purpose of making Himself known to humanity, and also to reveal His purposes for us**. So is God important enough for us to make a greater commitment to getting to know Him and the things that are really important to Him? If Yahweh is so high and exalted; so majestic and powerful; and the Sovereign Ruler over everything He has made; **shouldn't we show a much greater respect for Him by devoting more time to seek Him with all our heart, and to live our lives according to His purposes?** I'm just so grateful that God Almighty has graciously given us His Word so that we might truly know Him and His purposes for us as His created beings.

Please note that we will be continuing to use God's name Yahweh as explained in Part One of 'What an Awesome God we Have'. If necessary, please review what was written there.

17. To be Led by the Spirit and not by the flesh

The word 'flesh' has different meanings in the Bible, with the most natural meaning being the 'substance of the body'. But the common meaning in the context of this biblical subject is the sinful nature with which every person is born as a result of Adam and Eve's sin. It is also called the 'old self' in most Bible translations, or 'carnal' in KJV.

The 'flesh' is the life of self-will; of self-pleasing; and is so easily distracted by the things of the world – the world which is under the control of the evil one (**1 John 5:19**). It is the independent, prideful part of our nature, and it can be corrupted by its deceitful desires. The worst thing is that if we choose to continue to be controlled by our 'self-life', we will suffer eternal consequences:

Rom 8:12-13 *Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation--but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

Gal 6:7-8 *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

1John 2:15-17 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶For everything in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.*

There are serious warnings in these verses which we need to be very much aware of. But praise God – He has made a way for all this to be changed through our being united with Christ. You may recall what you read in chapter 14 – 'To free us from the power of sin'. The power of sin is what controls our 'flesh', but which we can overcome through Christ; and as we 'walk' by the Spirit. I would suggest that you review what is written in chapter 14.

a. We have a choice to make

As with everything that God has provided for us because of our relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ, **we have to make the right choices**. God doesn't make us do anything. As we have already emphasised elsewhere, we have to make the decision to obey God, and by faith be dependent on Him for all things. And by His grace He has given us His Holy Spirit to live within us; to empower us, and lead us in the right direction.

When Paul was writing to the churches he had established, it is clear that the believers did not really understand the problems of the ‘flesh’. Sometimes he had to explain the works of the flesh (**Eph 4:22-31; Gal 5:19-21; Col 3:5-10**), and sometimes he taught them about the need to put off the old self and put on the new (**Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:5 & 9-10; Rom 6:6 & 13:14**).

Then he emphasised the need to be focussed on spiritual things – things above – and not earthly things:

Col 3:1-3 *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Also **Psa 73:25-26; Matt 6:20 & 33; 2Cor 4:18**)*

Question: From the Scriptures listed above, about putting off our ‘old self’ and putting on the ‘new’, have you come to recognise any natural tendencies that you have – things of the flesh – things that you should be ‘putting off’?

b. God’s provisions to assist us

The grace of God is so amazing, because even though we still have a strong tendency to live according to our own desires – even if they are opposed to God’s desires – He still makes a way for changes to take place. He has provided everything we need to live a godly life as He wants:

2Pet 1:3-4 *His divine power has given us **everything we need for a godly life** through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

What an amazing passage this is, even though it takes some time and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to properly understand it. Please – get to know these verses; meditate on them; and ask God’s Spirit to reveal the truth of it to you.

As we have noted in the previous chapter, God has graciously given us the gift of His Holy Spirit to enable us to be all that God wants us to be. But we must form the habit of remembering our need to consistently submit ourselves to Him, and ask Him to lead us through each day. This is what Paul calls **‘walking by the Spirit’, or being ‘led by the Spirit’**.

Paul explains the full significance of walking by the Spirit as part of his full explanation of the Gospel in the book of Romans. Throughout Romans, Paul explains progressively what the full Gospel message involves. He takes us from

the first step which is the gift of righteousness from God which comes by faith in Jesus Christ – right through to the importance of walking by the Spirit.

The first issue he addresses when teaching about the new way of the Spirit compared to the old way of keeping the law, is the difficulty we all face when we try to obey God's commands in our own strength. In the following passage, Paul may have been describing his own experience, or using the personal pronoun to explain what was a common experience among Christians. Leading up to the verses below, Paul had explained the frustration that he – or we – had when we try to obey God's laws by our own efforts; leading to a sense of wretchedness.

Then he goes on to say that God opened his 'eyes' to see that we no longer need to feel condemned because of our personal failure to keep God's laws, because God has made a new way through Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit.

Rom 7:24 to 8:4 (NIV) *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁴Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*

8:1-4 *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴**in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.***

These are the main points I want to emphasise from these verses:

This is for those who are 'in Christ Jesus' – those who are true born again Christians.

- It is because of what Jesus has achieved for us on the cross that there is a new law at work in us – the law of the Spirit of life.
- It is this Spirit of life that sets us free from the law of sin and death which was causing Paul to feel so wretched (See Ch.7:24 above)
- God worked this out by sending His own Son to be a sin offering on our behalf, and so He condemned sin in the flesh.
- He did this to make a way for the righteous requirement of the law to be worked out in our lives so that there is no sense of guilt or condemnation.

- **But this only happens as we make the choice to submit ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and not try to do it in our own natural strength.**

The Holy Spirit provides **the way and the power** – but the decision is ours to continually submit to that!

c. But wait – there's more

This is such an important issue, that following straight on from the passage above, Paul continues to speak of the dangers of living by the flesh.

Rom 8:5-8 (NIV) *Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.⁶The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.*

Firstly; what Paul is emphasising here is that it is what the mind is set on that determines the direction in which our life is heading. If our mind is set on the desires of our natural self, then it is an enemy of God and leads to spiritual death; which is separation from God. This is too serious to overlook – **we need to be aware of how God is totally against the mind controlled by its sinful nature.** *The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God... Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God (v7 & 8)*

Secondly; the wonderful side is that if our minds are set on what the Spirit desires, **we have life and peace.**

The next verses give us a challenge which we need to take notice of:

Rom 8:9 *You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, **if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.** And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.*

There's the challenge. We are in the realm of the Spirit – if in fact the Spirit of God lives in us. If we don't have the Spirit, then we don't belong to Christ.

Rom 8:10-11 *But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.*

Our physical body is still going to die as a result of the sin of all humanity, but the Spirit who now lives in us gives 'life' – true spiritual life – because of the righteousness that we receive by the grace of God. Halleluiah!

But remember – we have to make the right choices – we have a responsibility to **reject** living according to the flesh, and rather, be **led by the Spirit** and put to death the misdeeds of the body:

Rom 8:12-14 (NIV) *Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation--but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.*

Romans chapter 8 is a most encouraging, but also challenging passage about the daily choice we need to make to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh. For more encouragement, continue to read through the rest of chapter 8.

d. I have been crucified with Christ

Because the challenges to follow our own fleshly desires is ongoing, there is a verse which I would encourage you to memorise and repeat in your mind whenever you realise that you are about to make the wrong choice or response to some situation. The devil will never give up – unless by faith you quote verses like this to him. The example Jesus gave us when he experienced the temptations of Satan was to quote the Scriptures (Read **Matt 4:1-11**). When we are tempted to act according to our flesh, this is what we need to declare:

*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. **Gal 2:20***

e. A change of mindset

Living by the Spirit and not the flesh is a major part of being changed into the likeness of Christ, which should also give us a different focus in life. In fact Paul encourages us to serve; and look to the interests of fellow Christians, with the main goal being to have the same mindset as Christ:

Phil 2:1-8 *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ²complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ*

Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

A true biblical Christian life is not an easy one is it? You can see that God's purposes for us are challenging; thought-provoking; testing; and daring. It requires commitment; submission; love; and courage. Take for example Yahweh's instruction to Joshua to be strong and courageous:

Josh 1:9 *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for Yahweh your God will be with you wherever you go."* In fact God repeated the same thing three times - read verses 6-9

The beautiful thing is that the Lord is always with us as He was with Joshua, and He has provided us with everything we need to be winners and not losers. The NT also has verses of encouragement to be strong:

1Cor 16:13 *(NIV) Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.*

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

Col 1:11-12 *May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*

Finally, God gives us the strength and courage to be overcomers – provided we make the clear decision to do so. God our Maker; our Saviour; our Redeemer; and our Provider, will always be with us and give us the power to overcome.

18. To Love Our Neighbours as Ourselves

As previously explained in these booklets, the primary word for 'love' in the Bible is 'Agape' – 'a love that can only be known from the actions it inspires'. It is 'an active and generous interest in the well-being of the person loved.' Not only is 'Agape' used of our love for God, but also of our love for our 'neighbor'.

As noted in 'God's Purposes...Part One', a Pharisee had asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was. Jesus' reply was:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. (Matt 22:37-38)

Then He immediately added:

"And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matt 22:39

The second command is 'like it' in the sense that it resembles the first command in importance, dignity, purity, and practicality. And because of its importance, it is referred to in Leviticus, and then a number of times in the NT.

Lev 19:18 *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am Yahweh.*

Matt 19:19 *Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

Rom 13:8-10 *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Also Gal 5:13-14; James 2:8)*

One day, as was often the case, Jesus was being tested by an 'expert in the law' who asked Jesus: *"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25)*

Luke 10:26-28 *(Jesus) said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" ²⁷And (the Jew) answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."*

Then when the lawyer asked: *"And who is my neighbor?"* Jesus answered with the well-known story of the Good Samaritan. The point of that story is that a

'neighbor' is not just someone who lives next door, but any person whom we recognize has a need – whether a person who lives next door; any person with whom we have dealings; a friend or relative; or even an enemy. And to such people we have to be willing to make the necessary sacrifices to help them.

On another occasion Jesus explained the practical aspect of 'loving your neighbor' from another perspective:

Matt 7:12 *"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

The ultimate and most challenging example of the practical outworking of 'love' is in Jesus Himself.

1John 3:16-18 *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*

Given the emphasis that God's Word places on the 'second command', loving our neighbours as ourselves is certainly high on the list of God's purposes for us. In fact – if we see a brother in need, but show no compassion for him – then how can we say that God's love is in us? True Agape love is *'an active and generous interest in the well-being of the person loved.'*

Paul, in his outstanding portrayal of love (**1Cor 13:1-13**), makes love the greatest of the graces of the Christian life - greater than speaking in tongues, or the gift of prophecy, or the possession of a faith of superior excellence. For without love all these gifts and graces, desirable and useful as they are in themselves, are as nothing, certainly of no permanent value in the sight of God.

Love is patient and kind;

love does not envy or boast;

it is not arrogant or rude.

It does not insist on its own way;

it is not irritable or resentful;

it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. (1Cor 13:4-8)

Clearly love is of extremely high importance to God. It is the highest expression of God in His relation to mankind, so it must be the highest expression of man's relation to his Maker and to his fellow-man.

19. To Build up the Body of Christ

God's purpose has always been to have a people for Himself – a people who would be separated from the standards and influences of the world, and bound together in a close relationship with each other and with Jesus Christ. The nation of Israel was the first people-group that God set apart for Himself, but they failed miserably when it came to honouring God and walking in His ways.

God knew this was going to be the case, so He planned from the beginning of time to form another people-group by sending His Son Jesus to make a way to set us free from the control of our sinful self-life, and unite all true believers with Christ in such an intimate way, that they became known as the body of Christ.

Our connection with Jesus is truly amazing, as has been more fully explained in 'What an Awesome God We Have – Part Three'; and again in 'God's Purposes for Humanity – Part One, chapter 8'. Now we are extending our understanding of being united with Christ by considering the significance of the 'body of Christ'.

a. The Body of Christ – the significance of...

What a wonderful blessing – we are united with Jesus Christ, the Son of Yahweh Almighty, who appointed Jesus as Head over everything for the church. All true believers – past, present, and future, are bound up in Christ – baptized into one body – and hence called the 'body of Christ'.

Eph 1:22-23 *And he (God) put all things under his (Jesus') feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Also ***Col 1:18***)*

The apostle Paul gives a clear explanation of the nature of the body of Christ in his letters, using our physical bodies as an analogy for the body of Christ. Please read ***1Cor 12:12-27*** in your own Bible

This extensive definition of the body of Christ places an emphasis on the importance of every part of the body – all are indispensable. Even the weaker parts are worthy of more honor than those we think are the more honourable parts. There are many parts, but one body, and we are to have the same care for every member of the body of Christ, as we do for our own bodies. And as with our physical bodies – so it is with the body of Christ; every part is of equal importance, but each part has a different function.

Rom 12:4-5 *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

b. The Body of Christ – the temple of God

In Ephesians 2 Paul refers to the 'body of Christ' as a structure; and that structure is a holy temple of the Lord – a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Eph 2:19-22 *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

Under the old covenant the innermost court of the Temple – also known as 'the most holy place' – was the dwelling place of Yahweh, and the place where the Ark of the Covenant was set. Only the High Priest could enter the most holy place, but only once a year to offer blood for his own sins and the sins which the people had committed in ignorance.

But when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain which closed off access to the most holy place was torn from top to bottom – right down the middle (**Matt 27:51**) – symbolic of the fact that now all true believers have free access into the presence of Yahweh Almighty. What an awesome privilege!

Heb 10:19-22 *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

Not only do we have direct access to the presence of God, but as the body of Christ we are now **the dwelling place of God**, growing into a 'holy temple', a dwelling place for God by His Spirit.

1Cor 3:16-17 *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (Compare **Eph 2:21-22** above)*

Do we really appreciate the full significance of this? It's not only that the Spirit of God dwells in each of us as individuals, but also as the communal body of Christ. Christians from every nation, ethnicity, and language, are all united as part of the Body of Christ, corporately indwelt by God Himself.

c. The Body of Christ – a holy priesthood

Peter also refers to the temple of the Lord as a 'spiritual house', and then adds that we are being built up as that spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ, and proclaiming the excellencies of Yahweh and His Son Jesus.

1Pet 2:4-5 *As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

1Pet 2:9 *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

So what does it mean to be a 'holy priesthood'; or even a 'royal priesthood'? The first mention of a 'priest' in the Scriptures was with regard to Melchizedek who was a priest of the Most High God. Albert Barnes makes the following comment on the meaning of 'priest':

The כהן kohen, or priest ... was one who acted in sacred things on the part of others. He was a mediator between God and man, representing God holding out the hand of mercy, and man reaching forth the hand of faith. The necessity of such an office grew out of the distance between God and man produced by sin. The business of the priest was to offer sacrifices and to intercede.

Vines NT Dictionary suggests that 'royal priesthood' is associated with 'the royal dignity of showing forth the Lord's excellencies.'

Those very helpful comments give us a better understanding of the significance of the body of Christ being a holy priesthood for God; offering spiritual sacrifices; being a mediator between God and man, interceding for the needs of people; and proclaiming the excellencies of God who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

In the OT, the office of priesthood was a high privilege limited to those whom God chose; but in the New Covenant the whole body of Christ is a holy, and royal priesthood. What an amazing privilege!

d. The Body of Christ – the growth of...

Col 2:19 ... *holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.*

God's purpose has always been that His people would 'grow' – firstly in their personal relationship with Himself; secondly as the communal church in spiritual maturity and unity; and thirdly, resulting from the above, growing in numbers of people as the Gospel is spread throughout the world. As we remain tightly connected to Jesus Christ the Head, the whole body will be supported and bound together through its various parts, and will grow with a growth that is from God Himself (**Col 2:19** above). It is God who supplies us with everything we need for spiritual growth – for believers personally; and for the Church corporately.

Both Paul and Peter sum this up very clearly:

'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?' **Rom 8:32**

'His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through the full knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence.' (**2Peter 1:3** ISV)

In Ephesians ch.4 Paul gives us a broad perspective of the provisions that God has made for the growth of the body of Christ. A part of that chapter has been used in 'God's Purposes ... Part Two', chapter 15, section c; addressing the subject of the spiritual gifts that have been imparted to the body of Christ. I would suggest that you read **Ephesians 4:1-16** again; and I will add a few more comments here, particularly with respect to the growth of the body of Christ.

In the context of the growth of the body of Christ, I would highlight the following points from the Ephesians 4 passage:

- 1. 'I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called ...' (vs. 1)

Paul introduces Ephesians 4 with a 'therefore', which links what he is about to say to the wonderful truths of the previous chapters; including the amazing blessings that we have in Christ Jesus; the riches of His grace; the dimensions of God's eternal purposes; the unsearchable riches of Christ; and His incomparably great power at work in lives of true believers.

Therefore – because of all that God has done for us through Christ – all believers are encouraged to walk in a manner worthy of the purposes to which

God has called us. To 'walk', in the sense that Paul regularly uses the word, refers to **the conduct; or the manner in which we live**. So we are to conduct our lives in such a way that is worthy of; or appropriate to; the calling to which we have been called. Paul makes the same request to other churches as well; for example: ***Phil 1:27; Col 1:10; 1Thess 2:12; 2Tim 1:9.***

It is as we 'walk' in the light of these immense blessings that the body of Christ will truly grow; primarily spiritual growth – into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; and secondly physical growth – in numbers of true believers.

Following on from verse one with the call to conduct our lives in a manner worthy of the calling, Paul lists some of the vital aspects of such a life, all of which will influence the growth of the body of Christ:

...²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

This is a challenge for each of us individually, and which we need to ask the Lord to show us if and where we might be falling short. So take some time to examine your own life to see if you are actually bearing these fruit. As we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ we will certainly be growing in the application of these qualities which are actually the fruit of the Spirit.

Being eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit is an aspect of the body of Christ which we will address in section e.

➤ 2. Jesus gave spiritual leadership gifts for the purpose of building up the body of Christ.

Eph 4:11-12 *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...*

I refer briefly again to this point here in the context of the growth of the body, but as noted, it has been addressed in Part Two, chapter 15. Please revise that chapter again if necessary.

The main point to note here in the context of this chapter is that Jesus gave these gifts for **the specific purpose of equipping the saints for the work of ministry '...so that the body of Christ may be built up.'** (NIV)

For many Christians, going to church tends to become simply a habit– after all, that's what Christians should be doing! While that is true, there is much more to the body of Christ than attending a Sunday morning service.

As we are frequently saying in these booklets – life is supposed to be all about God and His purposes for us. God is our Maker; He is the Sovereign Lord of all things; and He has gone to extreme lengths to restore us to the relationship with Himself which was broken by sin. God has purposes in all that He does, and all He has allowed to happen; and it's vital that we understand those purposes so that we can live our lives according to the purposes of our Maker and Lord.

So we need to put aside the 'religious', patterned aspect of 'church' life, and get our focus back on the plans of God to build the church as He has ordained. All the saints – all believers – need to be equipped for a diversity of serving, primarily within the body, but also in the community. And it is the role of the spiritual leaders in the church to equip – to train and prepare every member of the church – so that they can play their part in the growth of the body of Christ.

➤ 3. The crucial objectives for the spiritual leadership in equipping.

Eph 4:13 ... until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...

The first two objectives are of vital importance in enabling us to grow into the third objective, which is '*mature manhood*'; with the ultimate measure of that maturity being '*the fullness of Christ*'.

As explained more fully in 'Part Two' pages 64-65, these objectives are:

a. 'Unity of the faith'

Unity – the oneness that all true believers should have. Of 'the faith' – the whole body of true Christian belief.

b. 'Unity of the knowledge of the Son of God...'

As explained a number of times, the knowledge of God is a true; personal; even intimate knowledge of Yahweh and His Son Jesus, and is a fundamental aspect of what eternal life is all about. We have frequently pointed back to this key verse: '*And **this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent***'. (**John 17:3**)

c. 'To mature manhood...'

That is – maturity in contrast to the immaturity of children as per **v.14**.

The amazing result of 'attaining' to all these objectives is that we will:

d. **Attain...to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...**

As we have previously remarked, this is certainly a challenging concept, especially in view of the fact that we seem to be falling so far short of it.

Another way in which Paul expresses the goal of attaining to the measure of the fullness of Christ is that of being transformed into the likeness of Christ as per **Rom 8:28** and **1Cor 3:18**; and as addressed in Part Two, chapter 9. I would suggest that, if you haven't really absorbed the significance of God's purpose for us to attain 'to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ', that you meditate your way through that chapter again. It is of huge importance – for us personally – and for building up the body of Christ.

➤ 4. The need to consistently focused on these crucial objectives

Eph 4:14 ... so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

From the time of the early church and throughout its history, the church has certainly been influenced by '...every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.' (**v. 14 NIV**)

It is without doubt that the evil one is behind all these misleading teachings. He has been all too effective in getting so-called teachers and pastors to be self-exalting in their ministry, and thereby leading many astray from the real truth. But we have been given the means of avoiding such craftiness by following the spiritual guidelines that we have been examining from the Word of God, and thereby growing spiritually so that we will no longer be easily distracted or lead astray. If we do not grow – in the spiritual sense – then we will continue to be like immature children who are so easily misled.

This is why it is so important that we consistently grow in unity of the faith; unity of the knowledge of the Son of God; to mature manhood; to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. The degree to which we fall short of these objectives, will determine the degree of our spiritual maturity – of our growing into the likeness of Christ. This is God's highest purpose for us in our life-time on earth, and He has made every provision for us to attain that goal; but we need to be consistent in applying those provisions.

➤ 5. Growing up in every way into him who is the Head

So rather than being carried away by 'human' cunning, we are exhorted to speak the truth in love, and thereby grow up in every way into Christ who is the Head of the body.

Eph 4:15-16 *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and*

held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Growing up in every way **into Christ** is another expression connected with attaining '*to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*'; and following straight on from that Paul writes: '*...so that we may no longer be children...*' (v.14). In other words we need to focus on mature manhood and Christlikeness, rather than being like children who are so easily led astray. He then extends his point by writing in v.15: '*Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way...into Christ*'.

So rather than being like immature children – tossed about by misleading teachings – **we are to speak the truth in love** as one of the means of growing up in every way into Christ – we are '*to attain ...to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...*'

In order to speak the truth, **we need to know the real truth of God's Word**, which can only be gained as we diligently search the Scriptures with **total reliance upon the Spirit of Truth** – the One whom Jesus said would guide us into the Truth (**John 16:13 & 14:26**). There is a spiritual depth to the Word of God which cannot be rightly understood solely on an intellectual basis. We have addressed this issue a number of times; and if you have been reading these booklets you will have already come across it – so we won't go there again.

Spiritual maturity is the result of knowing the 'Truth', and is to be passed on to our brothers and sisters in Christ **in love** – in other words, with a genuine concern for the spiritual wellbeing of the person or people being addressed, and in a compassionate manner that conveys that genuine concern.

➤ 6. The working together of every part of the Body for its growth

...into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

It is as we speak the Truth in love that God's people will grow up in every way into Christ; and it is from Christ that the whole body will grow as it builds itself up in love when every part of the body is knit together and working properly.

It seems that we need to keep reminding ourselves that **all true believers** are parts of the body of Christ, with Christ being the Head. In our physical bodies, it is the head – the mind – that directs the different parts of the body as to what they should do. So it is with Christ – the Head – He directs the various parts of the body – the Church – as to how they should play their part.

So often we do the things which we like to do, or feel we are naturally gifted to do in the Church. But we need to realize that those giftings actually come from God Himself, and we should be giving Him the glory for the abilities that He has granted to us individually; and also submitting ourselves to the Spirit of Christ to guide us as we exercise those gifts in the body of Christ.

It is **from Christ** that '*...the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*'

What a fitting conclusion to the 'The Body of Christ – the 'growth of...'

e. The Body of Christ – unity amongst God's people

Unity amongst God's people is of real importance to Yahweh as we will see.

Psa 133:1-3 *A Song of Ascents. Of David. Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!*

²*It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!*

³*It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there Yahweh has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.*

In the culture of our day it is not easy to grasp the significance of verse 2. But in the Jewish culture the anointing with oil was common at festivals and joyful celebrations, carried to the highest level with the anointing of a high priest to his sacred duties. Thus it is a poetical way of expressing the joy that fills Yahweh's heart when He sees His people dwelling in unity. Therefore it should be an encouragement to us as God's chosen ones now, to do all we can to live in harmony with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

While there are but a few OT verses that refer directly to unity among God's people, Jesus placed a strong emphasis on it. He spoke of the love that we should have for one another, with the outcome that all people will know that we are Jesus disciples.

John 13:34-35 *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* ³⁵*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Please bear in mind that this is 'agape' love – a love that can only be known by the actions it inspires; a love which includes a strong desire and an active and generous interest in the well-being of the person loved. This love for one another

should be at the core of the body of Christ – creating such unity that will be obvious to the world.

Following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and the preaching of the Good News of Jesus, the effects were phenomenal, and the unity among all the believers was so great that they were even willing to give up their possessions for the common good of all believers.

Act 4:32 *Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.*

The apostle John who loved Jesus, and whom Jesus loved, wrote much about love in the body of Christ in his apostolic letters; as per the following example.

1John 4:7-8 *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

Such love is a vital part of building unity within the body of Christ; and as John emphasizes, is evidence of whether or not we truly know God in the sense of a genuinely close and active relationship with Him.

In Paul's letter to the Romans where he addresses the significance of the spiritual gifts given to the Church, he emphasizes the oneness of all members of the Body of Christ.

Rom 12:4-5 *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

...10 *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.*

...16 *Live in harmony with one another.*

Then further on in chapter 15, after addressing certain personal differences that existed among the readers, Paul prays that in spite of such differences they would live in such harmony that together they may glorify God.

Rom 15:5-6 *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

As a final, and yet challenging point, let's get back to more of what Jesus said about unity in His prayer to the Father just before His arrest. Much of His prayer was for His disciples, and also for all believers.

John 17:10-11 *All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.*

That's the challenging point – '*that they may be one, even as we are one.*' But Jesus goes on to add more about this 'oneness' in His prayer to the Father.

John 17:20-23 *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*

There couldn't be a stronger emphasis of 'oneness' than what we find here. It is obviously of great importance, as Jesus repeatedly asks the same thing of the Father – not only for His disciples at that time, but for all who will believe in Him – that they would be 'one', even as Jesus and the Father are 'one'! This takes us to the pinnacle of the unity which the Scriptures speak of – a unity of such closeness of heart and life, which is not only seen in the Father and the Son, but is found in **our union** with the Father and the Son – '*perfectly one*'.

1Cor 6:17 *But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.*

We ought to be challenged by the intensity of this 'oneness' that Jesus is expressing in His High Priestly Prayer. Challenged, because the body of Christ seems to be falling well short of it, and also because it's not on display to the world, and therefore they are not motivated to believe that Jesus has truly been sent by the Father to bring us to God (**John 17:23**).

Take time to praise and worship

Psa 16:5-8 *Yahweh, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. ⁶The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. ⁷I will praise Yahweh, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. ⁸I keep my eyes always on Yahweh. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ⁹Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices...*

20. To Proclaim the Gospel and Make Disciples

a. To proclaim the Gospel

The 'Gospel', otherwise known as the 'Good News of Jesus', is central to God's plan of salvation for mankind. By now I'm sure you will all understand this plan, and will have no doubt fully accepted Jesus as Saviour, Redeemer, and Deliverer from the powers of evil; and you will also be aware of **Jesus' call for us to go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel.**

Mat 24:14 *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

But as Jesus also made clear, we don't do this in our own strength, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

So why is it that many Christians are so reluctant to share the Gospel with people? There are probably a number of reasons, including maybe not being familiar with full Gospel message; or being a bit shy; or not being sure what to actually share with unbelievers. If this is the case for you, and if you haven't read this in the first booklet of this whole series – 'The Most Important Thing in Life: Knowing God', I have included the Good News message below.

The title on the front cover is: **'Heaven: not what you know, but Who you know'**

The Gospel – The Good News about God and Jesus

In the beginning God created the whole universe, including the earth and everything in it. Then He made the first people – Adam and Eve – who lived in the beautiful Garden of Eden where God had planted the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. God had told them that they were not to eat the fruit of that tree – because if they did, they would surely die.

➤ **But God left it up to them to make that choice.**

One day Satan made himself look like a snake and he tempted Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. He said 'you will not die, but you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' They really liked the sound of that because they could make their own decisions about what was right and wrong, and in that way they would be a more like God. But when they ate the fruit, they suddenly felt really bad. They realised that they were naked and tried to cover themselves with

leaves. Then they heard God calling to them in the Garden, and in fear they tried to hide; because they knew they had disobeyed Him.

God said to Adam and Eve, 'what is this you have done?' Eve said: 'the snake tricked me, and I ate the fruit.' So God told them that they were going to have to leave the wonderful Garden of Eden; that life on earth was not going to be so easy for them; and that eventually they would die.

Adam and Eve's disobedience is called 'sin', and every human being has inherited the same sinful nature which results in 'death'. The Bible says:

'When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.' Romans 5v12

The worst thing about sin is that it separates us from God, because God is holy and righteous. That means He is totally perfect in His whole being, and everything around Him must be perfect. That is why Adam and Eve had to leave the place where God lived.

What about us – what are some of the things that show us that we have a sinful nature? How many of the following sins are you guilty of: lying; stealing; pride; greed; selfishness; watching pornography; sex outside marriage; etc?

When we disobey God's laws it shows that we are living to please our own selfish nature, rather than living to please God. But if our selfish behaviour continues until we die there are serious eternal results.

The Bible makes it clear that because God is holy and righteous, He cannot overlook our sinfulness or leave it unpunished. If He did, He would be like a judge who would let criminals go free. To a holy God, our sin is so serious that He cannot, and will not let it enter His perfect heaven. The most serious result of sin is that:

'...those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus... will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from His glorious power.' 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9.

➤ **This will happen in that place called hell.**

Going to hell is an atrocious thought which many people struggle to accept. The question they ask is, **"How could a perfect, loving God send people to hell?"**

But wait – God doesn't want anyone to go to hell, and **He has gone to extreme lengths** to make a way for us to become part of His family so that we don't have to go to hell. So really, it's our choice whether we end up going to heaven or hell.

The '**extreme lengths**' is where we get to see the incredible mercy, love, and grace of God. He is the high and mighty God – holy and righteous; creator of all things; and the sovereign ruler over the whole universe. And yet He chose to send His only Son Jesus to earth as a man; in order **to show His amazing love and grace to the world, by suffering the punishment for our sins as He endured the cruellest of deaths on the cross.**

'But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.' Romans 5v8

➤ But why did Jesus need to die for us?

Firstly, apart from Jesus we have no hope; we are separated from God, and will one day face eternal judgement:

'Before you believed in Christ, you were separated from him. ... You were without hope and without God in the world.' Ephesians 2v12

Secondly, Romans 6v23 says:

'For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.'

This is saying that death is what we deserve for being sinners – not only physical death of our bodies, but also spiritual death – which is separation from God. We are not just physical beings. We also have a spiritual side to us.

For example – have you ever wondered about your thoughts? You can't touch them or see them. What about your feelings or emotions? These are some of the things that make up the spiritual part of our being which is the most important part of us, because it will live forever – for all eternity. One day our body will die, but the spiritual part of us will remain. And that will be either in heaven or in hell.

Hell is the place we will go to if we are still separated from God when we die. That's where spiritual death will take us.

Heaven is the place where we will live with God forever – **but only if we make the right choices.**

Going back to Romans 6v23, the second part says: *'...but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.'* Now we have come to the exciting **Good News**, which is that **God freely gives us eternal life through Jesus Christ.**

When Jesus was hanging on that cross, His Father God laid all our sins on Him, and He was punished for our sins. This was the worst part of what Jesus suffered, and it separated him from His Father God for a short time.

Jesus was buried in a grave, but on the third day God raised Him back to life again; and over the next 40 days He appeared to all his followers many times. Then He was taken back to heaven, and now God and Jesus are patiently waiting for us to come to Him. They get so excited when anyone really wants to receive the free gift of eternal life, and become a child of God.

➤ What do we have to do to receive this free gift?

1. Believe with all your heart that what the Bible tells us about Jesus is really true, and also that your sins have separated you from a holy God: *'For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.'* Romans 3v23.

2. Accept that you can only be saved by God's grace, and also through your faith: *'God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift.'* Ephesians 2v8

3. Confess that you are a sinner. Talk to God in prayer and tell Him that you are really sorry for all your wrong attitudes and actions. Ask Him to forgive you and to make you clean inside.

4. Repent – which means that you make the decision to turn away from anything that offends God.

5. Count the cost. Jesus advised us to count the cost before deciding to follow him: *'Then He said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be My follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow Me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake, you will save it."* Luke 9v23-24

6. If you have believed, accepted, confessed, repented, and counted the cost - then as you pray, **receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.**

When you have sincerely done all of the above, you will be restored to the family relationship with God that He created us for; and you will receive the gift of eternal life. You will also receive **the gift of God's Holy Spirit** who will come to live within you, **to help you live as God wants you to – not as you want.**

If you have made this life-changing decision to become a child of God and escape the eternal destruction of hell; it is just **the first step in this new life of a personal relationship with God and His Son Jesus.** Beyond that there are other important purposes that God has for us. For example:

1. If we sin again, as we all do, God promises to forgive us of our sins – provided we confess them to him.

'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.' 1John 1:9

2. Getting to know God personally is the most important thing you can do in your lifetime. **It is what God created you for.** This relationship with God will only grow as you **regularly seek God through his Word (the Bible) and prayer.**

'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.' Jeremiah 29v13.

God has given us the **Bible for the main purpose of revealing himself and his ways to us.** He wants us to **live by faith and dependence on him, and in obedience to his ways.** This is where Adam and Eve failed when they chose to be independent of God and live life as they chose. But the God of love and grace has given us another chance, and **he will give us everything we need to live as he wants us to:**

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

3. Finding out how God wants to change you. Adam was created in God's 'likeness', but that was seriously spoiled by his sin. Now it is God's purpose to restore that likeness in us. And even though there are times when this will be challenging, the future rewards are huge.

*'And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them. For God knew His people in advance, and He chose them **to become like His Son...**' Romans 8:28-29*

God uses every circumstance in our life – whether good or bad – for the purpose of changing us to be more like Jesus. But this will only happen as we commit our whole life to following Jesus and saying 'NO' to our selfish ways and to the things of the world, and instead be led by the Spirit. We need to: *'Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Colossians 3:2'* (also read v.1), and *'... no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.'* Romans 8:4

4. Pray. This is simply having a conversation with God. Tell him what is on your heart and wait for his reply. Ask God to help you to know him and his ways for you. He will speak through the Bible and by his Spirit who now lives in you.

5. Join a Christ centred Church where you can worship; fellowship; be baptised; serve with other Christians; and grow in your faith.

6. Share with others the 'Good News' of what Jesus has done for you. Tell them about the exciting changes that are taking place in your life so that they too can come to know Jesus and join with you.

That is the conclusion to 'The Good News about God and Jesus'.

As well as becoming familiar with the Gospel message, we need to be very much aware of the fundamental benefits of receiving Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. The list below is not complete – it is just the essential aspects – and there is much more to learn about having a personal relationship with Jesus. This is what this series of booklets is all about.

i. The priceless benefits of accepting Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

All of these benefits are what we need to know for our personal encouragement; and for being prepared to pass on to people as we lead them to Christ and disciple them.

➤ We are saved

As we saw in the Good News message, we were all born with a sinful nature; separated from God; and destined for hell. But Jesus made the way for us to be saved from our sins and restored to a relationship with God. Jesus is the only way to be saved. It is a gift from God, but can only be received by faith in what Jesus did for us on the cross.

Acts 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.*"(Also **John 14:6**)

Rom 10:9-10 *...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

➤ We are redeemed

To redeem; or alternatively to ransom; has to do with paying a price for a person's deliverance. In the case of the Gospel, as noted above, it has to do with Jesus paying the huge price as He was being punished for our sins on the cross, in order to restore us to the relationship with God which had been broken by sin.

"...even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." **Mat 20:28**

What Jesus suffered on our behalf was God's means of putting on full display His amazing love and grace; and it was all for our salvation and redemption, and to deliver us from the evil one.

Col 1:13-14 *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

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

Also: **Rom 3:21-26; 1Tim 2:5-6; Titus 2:11-14; Heb 9:11-15; 1Pet 1:18-19; & 3:18**

Oh the wonder of God's love and grace, that He should send His only begotten Son to this earth to punish Him for the sins of all humanity, so that we can be saved from our sins and restored back to the relationship with Himself that He created us for. All we have to do is truly believe in all that Jesus did for us, and by faith accept Him as Saviour, Redeemer, and Lord of our lives. And when we sincerely do this we will receive the gift of eternal life.

➤ **We are united with Jesus Christ and set free from the power of sin**

These two priceless benefits of becoming a Christian have been fully addressed in 'God's Purposes...Part One', ch.8; and 'Part Two' ch.14. So if you are not yet familiar with these aspects, I would suggest that you go back over those chapters.

➤ **We receive eternal life**

What a glorious future we are anticipating, to live in the presence of God for all eternity.

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.*

Also **1John 5:11-12**

Jesus enlightened us to the deeper significance of 'eternal life' in His 'High-priestly prayer' with the disciples. We have referred to this a few times in this whole series of booklets, but here it is again – such an important verse.

"Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent". John 17:3 (NIV)

'Now this is eternal life...' In other words, this is what eternal life is all about; this is the essence of eternal life: "... that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ..."

Now as we have previously pointed out, to 'know God' is not just knowing information about God. It is about knowing Him in the sense of **personal relationship knowledge**. We have previously explained why this is the true meaning of knowing God, and if you haven't taken that on board yet, then I would suggest that you go back to the first booklet – 'The Most Important Thing in Life: Knowing God', chapter 4.

All of God's purposes have eternity in view, and He created us to live with Him for all eternity, and to have a personal family relationship with the Godhead – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

➤ **We have the hope of a glorious future in the presence of Jesus and the Father for all eternity**

It is a glorious hope which we won't fully comprehend until we actually get there. But it is nevertheless a tremendous hope that we have been given.

***Col 1:3-5** We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel...*

***Col 1:27** 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.*

We know that Christ is in us – we experienced His transformation in our lives when we received Him as Saviour; and that gives us the confidence that one day we will be with Him in His glorious heaven forever – this is the hope of glory!

See also **Rom 5:1-2**

One of the challenging aspects of the Christian life where 'the hope of glory' should be kept at the forefront of our thinking is the sufferings we will endure for the sake of Christ.

***Rom 8:16-17** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

But these sufferings are going to be well worth enduring because of the future glory we will one day experience in the presence of the Lord.

Read **Rom 8:18-21** and **2Cor 4:16-18**

➤ **We have been filled with the Holy Spirit**

It is crucial that every believer in Jesus knows that he was filled with the Spirit at the time of his new birth. This is a subject that has been fully addressed in Part Two of this series. Apart from the power of the Holy Spirit we cannot live our lives as God has purposed; including being effective in proclaiming the Gospel, or making true disciples.

But there is another comforting aspect of being filled with the Spirit:

➤ **We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit**

Eph 1:13 *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, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Also **2Cor 1:21-22**)*

A 'seal' is a sign of ownership and security, together with the guarantee of our destination. This gives us an enduring confidence – we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit

All of these benefits are what we need for our personal encouragement; and also for being prepared to share them with people as we lead them to Christ and disciple them. All praise be to our awesome God, who by His extravagant love and grace has given us the gifts of salvation; redemption; unity with Christ; freedom from the power of sin; eternal life; the hope of glory; and the power and seal of the Holy Spirit.

ii. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation

As we have seen in the Gospel message, we are all born as sinners, separated from God, and without hope. We were in a state of such weakness, and without the ability or the power to do anything about it. To be forgiven for our sins and to bring us into a right relationship with God our Maker and His Son Jesus, required something powerful to happen; and that is what God Himself did for us by sending His only Son to suffer the punishment for our sins, and make the way for us to be redeemed. **The Gospel is the power of God to save lost humanity.**

When Jesus was about to leave the world and return to His Father, He gathered His disciples, and among other things He told them:

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses... **Acts 1:8***

This happened soon after, on the Day of Pentecost. The power of the Spirit was very evident; the Gospel was preached, and many were impacted by it.

Act 2:36-37 & 41 *Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." ³⁷Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"*

⁴¹*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

This was the beginning of the Church, and the Gospel continued to spread widely, having a powerful impact by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But the apostles and the Church had an opponent whose name was Saul – a devout Jewish Pharisee. However Jesus had already predetermined to use Saul as an ambassador for the Gospel, and He encountered Saul as he was on his way to Damascus to persecute Jesus' followers.

As a result of this transforming encounter, Saul's name was changed to 'Paul', and he became passionate about proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, particularly to non-Jewish people. Paul was appointed as an apostle, and his ministry was impressively effective due to the power of the Spirit of God at work in his life. In his letters to the Churches Paul declared:

Rom 1:16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*

1Cor 1:18 *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

1Thess 1:5 *because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.*

To what degree are we aware of the power of the Gospel to save people from their sins, and bring them into a personal relationship with Jesus? Let's not take this too lightly – it is of vital importance in the growth of God's Kingdom; and we are all chosen to proclaim the Gospel and make disciples of people.

b. To make disciples

It's one thing to share the Gospel with people and lead them to know Jesus as their Saviour and Lord, but that's just the beginning of a new life in relationship with Jesus and the Father. From there on there is much that needs to be shared with new believers to encourage them in their spiritual growth, and to know and apply God's purposes in their lives.

The basic understanding of a 'disciple' is one who is a follower of the one leading; or teaching them. But more broadly speaking it involves believing the doctrines being taught; applying them to one's life; imitating the example of the disciple-maker; and therefore also making disciples.

It also involves encouraging new disciples to be growing daily in their personal relationship with the Father and the Son by spending time in God's Word; praying; sharing the Gospel with others; and of course making disciples. These are all aspects of being a true disciple that we all need to consistently be applying to our own lives.

➤ Jesus' commission to make disciples

This is what is known as 'The Great Commission', given by Jesus to His eleven disciples shortly before His ascension back to heaven.

Mat 28:18-20 *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (Also **John 20:21**)

It is phrased a bit differently in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, but the commission 'to go' is still there:

Mar 16:15-16 *And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. ¹⁶Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*

Luk 24:47 *"...and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."*

It is clear from these verses alone that the great commission was not restricted to the eleven disciples to whom Jesus spoke at that time. It wouldn't be possible for them to '*make disciples of all nations*', or to proclaim the Gospel to '*the whole creation*'. Also, disciples are to make disciples, who are also to make disciples.

So the commission to make disciples was, and still is, for '*all nations*'; and is therefore for all true believers. **We are all supposed to be involved in making disciples**, so we need to ask ourselves – 'In what way am I being a disciple of Jesus?' 'Am I actually leading people to Jesus and making disciples of them?'

➤ A true disciple will deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus

In addition to the aspects of being a disciple as mentioned above is one of the most challenging aspects of being a true disciple – we must **deny ourselves** and '**take up our cross daily**'. Jesus emphasized this a number of times, and it occurs in all four of the Gospels; with the most perplexing statement being that we are to 'hate' family members if we are to be followers of Jesus.

Luke 9:23-24 *..."Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. (See also **Matt 10:34-39; 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-38; John 12:24-26; Col 5:14-15**)*

Luke 14:26-27 & 33 *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*

³³So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

To 'hate' family members, and even our own life, means that Christ must be loved supremely – or he is not loved at all. If we are not **willing** to give up all earthly possessions, and forsake all earthly friends; and if we do not obey him rather than all others, then we do not really love Him. I have highlighted the word '**willing**' because that is a fundamental attitude that true disciples should have – according to Jesus. That's not say that we will necessarily have to give up everything, but that we will submit everything to the Lord, and allow Him to show us the things we are to give up. A believer's devotedness to Jesus Christ should be such that, by comparison, it looks as if everything else is hated.

➤ **Disciples will make disciples, and the Church will grow**

Jesus commission to make disciples is God's plan for the extension of his Kingdom, which is primarily the growth of the Church – 'the Body of Christ'. This is the 'Church' in the fullest sense of the word, which includes all true believers in Jesus Christ, no matter what part of the world they are in, or what denomination they belong to. Unfortunately, at least in western society, the 'Church' has become more of a religious organization with its own formats or traditions; depending on which denomination one belongs to.

However, we can praise God that in many countries, including those under persecution or poverty, the Church is growing rapidly. This is often happening in disciple-making or church-planting missions which usually result in smaller churches meeting in peoples' homes.

Some of these organizations that I am aware of are: Heaven's Family; Appleseed Ministries; Amazima Ministries Uganda; Iris Global; and World Challenge. I would recommend that you look up these establishments on the internet to see what they are up to, and even give them financial support, which in fact is another way of you actually being involved in the spread of the Gospel.

My prayer is that as we grow in our intimacy with the Father and the Son, we will appreciate His compassion for the lost; including the orphans, the widows, the poor and needy; and we will make the right response by laying down our lives; taking up our cross; and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus to the world.

21. To be Overcomers

A significant theme in the Bible is that of 'battle' against enemies. In the Old Testament, God's chosen people Israel were involved in wars and battles against physical enemies – against the inhabitants of Canaan as Israel was in the process of gaining and occupying the Promised Land. These battles were ongoing for longer than they were supposed to because of Israel's failure to be submissive to God and His requirements for them to worship Him alone; to love Him with their whole being; and to live in the fear of the Yahweh. Then on top of all that, they intermarried with those from whom they were to be set apart; and even worshipped their foreign gods. As a result Yahweh allowed Israel's enemies to attack them, and in many cases defeat them. It was only when the people repented of their sinfulness and rebellion that God allowed them to overcome their enemies; and it was God who fought for them and gave them the victory.

Deut 1:30 *Yahweh your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes...*

Deut 20:3-4 *...and shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, ⁴for Yahweh your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.'*

Sadly, Israel's rebellion against Yahweh was ongoing, and in spite of God's many warnings through His prophets, He eventually had to send them into captivity under foreign nations. Israel had failed to be obedient to Yahweh and to walk in His ways, and therefore they failed to be victorious against their enemies; even though God was there to give them the victory.

In the New Testament there is **a shift from physical battles to spiritual battles**, and struggles in life for God's people. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, makes it clear that our battle is not against flesh and blood (people), but against spiritual forces of wickedness in the spiritual realms. (**Eph 6:10-18**)

Because battle against enemies is a major feature of the Bible, it is important that we learn how God wants us to be overcomers of those enemies. God hasn't made an issue of it for no particular reason. In fact it is so important that when Jesus was addressing different issues within the seven churches in the book of Revelation, He said to each one of the churches: *'To him who overcomes...'*; followed by wonderful blessings that would be given to those who were 'overcomers'.

In the final stages of history, before Jesus comes to take us to be with Himself, the Bible tells us that the enemy against whom we are battling will be defeated, and God's people – the brethren – are the ones who will overcome the devil:

Rev 12:10-11 (NASB) *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. **"And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.***

To understand the reasons why God has deliberately allowed this battle to continue throughout history, we need to go back to the beginning of time where it all started in the book of Genesis.

a. From the beginning

I'm sure you are familiar with the Garden of Eden story which we have referred to a number of times, including the fact that this was where our enemy the devil first tempted Adam and Eve. Sadly they disobeyed God's command not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and when they did their perfect inner being was changed and came under the power of sin and the subtle influences of the evil one.

God knew what was going to happen, and He allowed it for a purpose; one of those being that **He wants us to be overcomers.**

➤ **Why does God want us to be overcomers?**

God created humanity with a free will, and clearly He wants us to make the right choices as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling – according to God's purposes for us. This is why He allows us to be in testing circumstances, to see if we will walk in His ways; standing strong in our faith in Him and all His provisions for us to be overcomers.

➤ **God is testing us**

Yahweh's testing of His people is frequently recorded in the Scriptures, although such testing was not always in the context of being overcomers.

When Israel was on their journey to the Promised Land, Yahweh tested them in a number of ways to see if they would faithfully do what is right in God's eyes, and live according to His laws; and certainly to promote a true fear of Yahweh so that they would not sin.

Deut 8:2-3 *And you shall remember the whole way that Yahweh your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of Yahweh.*

Such testing was ongoing as we see throughout the Scriptures. Read – **Judges 2:21-23; 3:1-4; Job 23:10; Psa 66:10; Isa 48:10-11; James 1:2-3,12; 1 Pet 1:6-7.**

Because of all the difficulties we have to face in life as a result of sin and the work of the evil one to continually lead us astray, we will always have a struggle to live our lives as God really wants us to.

We are in a battle, and one of God's primary purposes is that we learn to be overcomers – overcomers of the 'flesh' – **the sinful nature** which we all possess; overcomers of all the **spiritual forces of evil** that are under the control the devil; and overcomers of **the world and its enticements**. But let us be clear about this – **God does not leave us to do this on our own**. As He promised to be with Israel and give them the victory over their enemies, so He will be with us in all our struggles to give us the victory – provided our lives are fully submitted to Him to live according to His ways; and be willing to play our part in such ways as these:

- **to commit ourselves to live according to God's purposes and not our own;**
- **to offer our whole being as a living sacrifice – a spiritual act of worship;**
- **to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh;**
- **to live by faith in God and all the wonderful promises He has given us to help us to be overcomers.**
- **to rely on the strength of the Lord that He has provided us with to enable us to be overcomers**

In Paul's well-known teaching on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6 he writes:

¹⁰*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³Therefore **put on the full armor of God**, so that*

*when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. **Eph 6:10-13***

In these verses we see that our **real battle** is not against people but against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. These are our most dangerous enemies, and are constantly at work in the lives of people, and especially in our self-life to motivate us to have wrong attitudes or behaviour, or to disturb our relationship with God. But even though they are powerful, they are limited by God in what they can do to us. Their power does not come anywhere near God's power.

Psa 24:8 *Who is this King of glory? Yahweh, strong and mighty, Yahweh, mighty in battle!*

Eph 3:20-21 *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, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

We never need to fear the power of the devil, but we do need to trust in Yahweh's power to protect us in all circumstances. And He has given us many promises of His protection and deliverance for us to take hold of and claim by faith in our Almighty Yahweh and His Son Jesus.

b. Who, or what, are the enemies that we need to overcome?

i. Our own self-life

The Bible talks a lot about our self-life which is the spiritual part of our being that has been affected by sin which entered humanity when Adam and Eve sinned against God in the Garden of Eden. It is called 'the flesh'; the 'sinful nature'; or our 'old self'. We were all born with a sinful nature, and that remains as long as we live. However – we have been set free from the power of sin when we commit our lives to Christ. But for that freedom to be effective, we have to constantly reckon ourselves to be dead to the power of sin, and take the appropriate actions.

Romans 6:11-13 (NLT) *So you also should **consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.** ¹²Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. ¹³Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.*

As you can see from the way that Paul is writing, **we** have to make the decision to **not** let sin control the way we live. It's always challenging for us because the devil will always be at work to tempt us to make wrong decisions, or to react with wrong attitudes to other people. But praise God, He has given us His Spirit to enable us to do the right thing, and to live without condemnation, as we commit ourselves to living according to the leading of His Holy Spirit who now dwells within us.

Rom 8:3-4 *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

Generally speaking, people tend to think mostly about themselves – their own needs and wants, and their own self-satisfaction in so many ways. The 'flesh' still tends to be the predominant focus in our lives. But Paul goes on to explain the seriousness of living a self-focused life.

Rom 8:5-8 *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

This letter by Paul was written to the church in Rome; so it was believers whom Paul was addressing. These verses contain some serious issues which we need to take note of. As noted above, we still have to make the decision – in an active sense – to **not** let sin control the way we live. In these verses above he phrases it slightly differently – he speaks of setting our minds – either on the flesh, or on the Spirit.

As believers we still possess 'the flesh' – the self-life – as part of our soul. And it is the self-life that causes us to have so many difficulties as we try to live the Christian life. We have mentioned the well-known phrase a few times – 'It's all about me!' But that's **not** how God wants it to be, and He has made the way for us to be overcomers of our self-life. One of His provisions, as we have mentioned, is that the 'power of sin' has been dealt with when we were crucified with Christ. But the temptations still come; and we have to recognize them and take a stand against them. 'Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires.' (**Rom 6:12**)

By the grace of God He has given us His Holy Spirit to dwell within us for the purpose (amongst other things) of enabling us to fulfil God's righteous requirements – to live our lives according to the desire of His heart.

Rom 8:9-14 *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

¹²*So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.*
¹³*For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.* ¹⁴*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

It's important that we absorb the fact that the Holy Spirit '**dwells in us**'. To 'dwell' means to have an abiding, consistent, living relationship with the Spirit of God. And that relationship can only be real if we consistently '*... put to death the deeds of the body...*' (v.13) Otherwise – we will 'die' – in the spiritual sense. This may refer to the ultimate 'death' – eternal separation from God.

Because of what Christ has done for us, and because His Spirit dwells in us, we have an obligation – **we are debtors** – NOT to live according to the flesh, but to be led by the Spirit. This will be an ongoing issue for all our lives, but by the Spirit of God we can put to death the deeds of the body, and we will live. In fact:

ii. The devil and all the spiritual forces of wickedness

Satan has been the enemy of mankind since the beginning of time. And he continues to be relentless in his endeavours to lead people astray; to stimulate self-centredness; to arouse fear in the hearts of people; etc. etc. And while our natural self-centred tendency is react to people when they disturb us in some way or another, Paul makes it clear that our real battle is not actually against people, but against the evil spiritual forces who are most likely the ones behind the confrontations we have with others.

Eph 6:11-12 *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

Peter also wrote about our need to be aware that the devil is always looking for someone to devour; and that we must resist him; standing firm in the faith.

1Pet 5:8-9 (NIV) *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*

We dare not take all this too lightly. It is a relentless issue, but one which we tend to overlook because we just want to be ourselves – we have become too familiar with our self-life, and we are not necessarily submitting ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The devil is so cunning – so shrewd; and it seems that people are so easily deceived and led astray by him and his evil spirits.

Jesus taught us to pray –

Mat 6:13 (NIV) *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*

And when He was praying for His disciples (which includes us) He said:

John 17:15 *I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.*

Jesus referred to the devil as a thief who ‘comes only to steal and kill and destroy.’ But Jesus ‘came that they may have life and have it abundantly.’ (**John 10:10**)

The devil – Satan – is always at work to lead people astray through false christs and false prophets. The disciples asked Jesus - “*what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?*”, and along with many other things, Jesus told them to be aware of the dangers of being led astray. Take note that Jesus was addressing His disciples in this discourse:

Mat 24:4-5 *And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. ⁵For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.*

Mat 24:11 *And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.*

Mat 24:24 *For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.*

And these warnings that Jesus gave to His disciples actually happened in the early church as seen in Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

2Cor 11:3 *But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

2Cor 11:13-15 *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder, for even Satan disguises*

himself as an angel of light.¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

The apostles also gave other warnings about the influences that deceitful spirits and false teachers will have among God's people.

1Tim 4:1-2 *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared...*

2Pet 2:1 *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.*

Question. From what we have read so far, do you understand the seriousness of the opposition we have from the devil and his forces of wickedness that are relentlessly at work to keep us off track in our walk with the Lord; even to the point of leading us astray?

We need to be constantly aware of this so that we can learn to be overcomers; and **not** be overcome.

So far we have exposed two of the enemies that we need to be aware of, and the need to overcome them with the provisions that God has given us. These provisions we will address a bit further on in this chapter; but for now we are exposing another enemy which most Christians are quite unaware of, but which are all too influential in the lives of people – even believers!

iii. The world and its subtle enticements

The word 'world' has a variety of implications; but in the present context, and in the general use of 'world' in the Scriptures, it means: the "*present condition (or state) of human affairs, in alienation from, and opposition to God...*" (from Vine's NT Dictionary). And the reason why that is so, is that the whole 'world' is under the power of the evil one.

John 12:31 *Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.*

1John 5:19 *We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*

During the course of our life we have become all too familiar with the world around us – our culture; lifestyle; and the things of the world that are so attractive to us and which bring us enjoyment. But if we are to grow in our

relationship with our Father and His Son Jesus, then we need to be aware of the dangers of the world to us as children of God.

Eph 2:1-5 *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved...*

If we have been saved by the amazing grace of God – not only from our sins – but also from the world and its passions – then surely we should taking a different approach to the things of the world – especially those things that we still give attention to. But it seems that so many Christians are oblivious to the significance of 'the world' from a biblical perspective; and are also reluctant to abandon the things of the world because of their attractions and satisfactions.

So, please take on board what the following scriptures are conveying to us about the serious wrongs of being attached to the things of the world.

1John 2:15-17 *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world--the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions--is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

Gal 6:14 *But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

James 4:4 *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

The underlying force that motivates us to remain connected to the world – particularly the world's entertainment system – is the 'flesh' – our own self-life with its naturally inherent desires. But among the many scriptures which speak strongly against the 'flesh' are these words from Paul:

Rom 8:5-8 *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to*

God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Gal 5:24-25 *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.*

One of the things that most Christians seem to be oblivious to, is that the whole entertainment industry (except for Christian movies) is part of the 'world', and therefore under the control of the evil one (**1John 5:19**). This would include worldly movies and TV programs, worldly music etc. Anyone who loves being entertained by these things is being a friend of the world, and therefore makes himself an enemy of God (**James 4:4**). This will be a challenge for many Christians, but it is something we need to give serious attention to. **We should hate the idea of being entertained by stuff that comes from the devil.** Even social media, which can have its good side, is also an instrument of the devil which can influence people in the wrong direction – even to the point of leading people to commit suicide as we all know these days.

The response that many Christians would make to all this is that they carefully check out the content of what they are engaging in. But the real issue is not whether the **content** appears to be quite harmless, but whether or not the **source** of the entertainment is **the devil himself!** Satan's works can appear to be quite harmless, but he always has underlying and deceitful motives for the purpose of leading people astray. *'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.'* (**John 10:10**) Satan even used the Word of God in his efforts to tempt Jesus; but Jesus recognized his motives and responded with *'It is written...'*

Entertainment is a 'passion and desire of the flesh' (**Gal 5:24** above). It is a 'thing of the world'; a 'desire of the flesh' and of 'the eyes' (**1John 2:15-16** above). However, a true believer has been *'crucified to the world'* (**Gal 6:14**), which means that we are meant to be **dead to the world and its self-satisfying influences.**

Another issue with 'entertainment' is **the time that we waste** when we are engaged in it. Consider the time that you might spend watching TV or getting caught up things like social media and so on. Weigh that up against the time you spend seeking the Lord; meditating on His Word; fellowshiping with believers; serving Him in some practical way; or praying! Which is really the most important thing to you? Is it your personal relationship with God, and working out His purposes in your life; or is it the things that are satisfying to our own self-life; the things of the world?

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

The world and its subtle enticements is certainly an influential enemy which all believers need to learn to overcome – by making a firm decision to disengage from the 'world' in the sense that we have been addressing, and to consistently be seeking to know the Lord to a deeper level; and asking the Holy Spirit to lead us in the right direction and keep us from the evil one.

c. How do we become overcomers?

God has certainly provided us with the means of being overcomers as listed in the next sections.

i. Firstly; we need to know for sure, that as well as Jesus being crucified to bring us to God, **He also broke the power of the devil over all who have become united with Christ.**

Col 2:15 *He (Jesus) disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

Heb 2:14-15 (NIV) *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Also **1John 3:8b**)*

ii. Secondly; as already noted, we need to realise that **we are not alone in this battle.** We can have **full confidence in Yahweh and His Son Jesus**, because **they are our deliverers** from all the forces of evil; and they are the source of everything we need for life and godliness; including everything we need to be overcomers.

Psa 27:1-3 *Yahweh is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? Yahweh is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

²*When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.*

³*Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. (Also **Isa 12:2**)*

1Cor 15:57 *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1Cor 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the*

temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

2Pet 1:3-4 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, ⁴by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

iii. Thirdly; by putting off the old self and putting on the new; which is the Spirit of Christ in us.

Rom 13:14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Eph 4:20-24 But that is not the way you learned Christ!-- ²¹assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²²to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Also **Col 3:1-17**)

Gal 5:16-17 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

iv. Fourthly; by claiming the promises of God's protection and deliverance. The OT abounds with Scriptures proclaiming **God's power to protect His people and deliver them from their enemies**. And by faith we can claim; and articulate those promises to the enemy, and he will back off. Jesus was our example for doing this when He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness.

These are just a few examples of such OT scriptures:

➤ **Yahweh is the Almighty One; He is our strength**

Psa 24:7-8 Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

⁸Who is this King of glory? Yahweh, strong and mighty, Yahweh, mighty in battle!

Psa 28:7-8 Yahweh is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

⁸Yahweh is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed.

Psa 46:1b-3 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

²*Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,*

³*though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.*

➤ **Yahweh is our Rock; our Fortress; and our strong Deliverer**

Psa 18:1b-3 *I love you, O Yahweh, my strength.*

²*Yahweh is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*

³*I called to Yahweh, who is worthy of praise, and I have been saved from my enemies.*

Let me suggest that you read through all of ***Psalms 18***, and ***91***, as they are particularly focused on God's power to deliver us out of the hand our enemies.

Psa 91:1-4 *Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*

²*I will say of Yahweh, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."*

³*Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.*

⁴*He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.*

Psa 37:39-40 *The salvation of the righteous is from Yahweh; he is their stronghold in the time of trouble.*

⁴⁰*Yahweh helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him.*

Please read also, and familiarise yourself with the following scriptures:

Psa 31:1-5; 44:4-8; 46:1; 62:5-8; 121; 144:1-2; Prov 18:10; Nah 1:7-8

Praise God for all the encouraging promises He has given us; that He is there for us as our mighty deliverer; and He is our safe refuge and fortress to protect us from the enemy.

v. Fifthly; by living by faith and not by sight.

God's purpose for us to live by faith in Him is of huge importance and has been addressed more fully in chapter 12 in Part Two of this series. So in this section I am including some of the scriptures which highlight the importance of living by faith in God; and also which are given to us as encouragements in Yahweh our almighty protector and deliverer, and which we can declare to the enemy when he is attempting to lead us off track, or to disturb us in some way.

In the OT there are many examples of people – particularly Israel – who attempted to fight battles in the own strength, but they lost; and also in contrast

to them, there were **those who trusted in Yahweh** to deliver them; and they won. And these examples are written for us to learn this vital lesson as children of God – to live by faith in Yahweh Almighty and His Son Jesus.

The scriptures that we have looked at so far are certainly encouraging and faith-building in our battle against the evil one. But wait – there's more!

This next verse is rather amazing, with an added emphasis on trusting in Yahweh – '*Blessed is the man... whose trust **IS** Yahweh*'.

Jer 17:7-8 *"Blessed is the man who trusts in Yahweh, whose trust is Yahweh. ⁸He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."*

Our faith can go deeper than trusting in Yahweh, **to trusting Yahweh Himself**. That is the faith that grows from building our personal relationship with God through diligently seeking Him and walking in His ways.

Psa 40:4 *Blessed is the man who makes Yahweh his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie!*

Then in the NT the principal of living by faith is made very clear.

2Cor 5:7 *...for we walk by faith, not by sight.*

'Faith' means having absolute confidence in God – who He is, and all that He has said in His Word. And as noted, that confidence will grow as we build our relationship with Him.

'Sight' is seeing the things of life that are constantly before our eyes, but which we shouldn't allow to govern our lives – we are not to look to the things that are 'seen', but to the things that are 'unseen'. 'Faith' realizes that our life on earth with its afflictions is only temporary; and we have a glorious future to look forward to.

2Cor 4:17-18 *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (See also **Col 3:1-4**)*

Heb 10:36-38 *For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; ³⁸but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him."*

Verse 38 shows us the negative side – that if we shrink back from living by faith, the Lord has no pleasure in us. Serious thought, but one which we need to take note of!

Our old self has been crucified with Christ, and the life we now live in these earthly bodies, we live by faith in Jesus who lives in us by His Spirit.

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.*

Also on the positive side of living by faith are many God-given words encouraging us to constantly trust in God in all circumstances.

Psa 37:1-5 *Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!*

²*For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.*

³*Trust in Yahweh, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.*

⁴*Delight yourself in Yahweh, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

⁵*Commit your way to Yahweh; trust in him, and he will act.*

Psa 62:5-8 *For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.*

⁶*He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.*

⁷*On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.*

⁸*Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah*

Isa 26:3-4 *You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. ⁴Trust in Yahweh forever, for the Yah, Yahweh is an everlasting rock.*

As we have been learning up to this point, we are in a battle which God has allowed for a purpose. And that purpose is that He wants us to be overcomers – overcomers of our flesh; the devil; and the world. But praise God that He has provided us everything we need to be overcomers.

So far we have looked at five God-given means by which we become overcomers. And now there is a sixth one to which I have dedicated a separate section as below.

d. The armor that God has provided us with

Let me repeat – in our walk with the Lord, and in the midst of all the difficulties we face in life; including relationship issues; we need to constantly remind ourselves that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

'Flesh and blood' refers to people. But this doesn't only mean other people; for as we have already said, one of our enemies is our own self-life – the flesh. So in this context, 'flesh and blood' refers to any person including myself.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he expands on the dimensions of God's eternal purpose and grace, along with the high goals that God has for the Church; including being overcomers. We are in a spiritual conflict, and we need to apply the appropriate armor in order to have the victory. So getting back to chapter 6 again –

Eph 6:10-18 *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of **truth**, and having put on the breastplate of **righteousness**, ¹⁵and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by **the gospel of peace**. ¹⁶In all circumstances take up the shield of **faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷and take the helmet of **salvation**, and **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**, ¹⁸**praying at all times in the Spirit**, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...*

Paul is using the image of a Roman soldier to emphasise the 'battle' part of our life as Christians; but the main thing to take note of in the verses above is **the words that are highlighted**. These are the main parts of the armor in our struggle against the forces of evil, and will be clarified over the next few pages.

i. Truth

v.14 ...having fastened on the belt of truth...

Back in the days when Paul was writing his letters, the soldiers 'belt' about his waist, held in place every other part of his uniform, including a sheath for his sword. Therefore it was a vital part of his armor; as is the Truth of God's Word that He has provided for us. The Bible contains all of God's truth that we need to know if we are to live as God wants us to.

Psa 119:160 *The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.*

Prov 30:5 *Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.*

Also **2Tim 3:16-17**

Jesus said: *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (**John 8:31-32** NIV).

Knowing the truth of God's Word will keep us aware of the way that God wants us to live, and also aware of the influences of the evil one when he is trying to lead us astray. When the Truth of God's Word is in our hearts, it is part of our armor. And when the devil is trying to lead us astray, we can declare the truth of God's Word – just as Jesus did when He was tempted – and the devil will flee from us.

Truly knowing God through His Word and Spirit gives us confidence to stand against our enemies, and declare that Truth. Even in our struggles against our self-life we have to know the Truth, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, apply it to our lives.

ii. Righteousness

v.14 ...having put on the breastplate of righteousness...

The soldier's breastplate covered his body from his neck to his thighs and protected him from sword, spear, or arrow, as discharged by his enemy. We too as God's soldiers need to be protected from any weapons fired at us by our enemies; and 'righteousness' is a primary means of such protection.

Righteousness is that which is upright or virtuous – displaying integrity and purity of life – it is the character or quality of being right or just, and is one aspect of holiness. Righteousness is a vital part of the life of a believer from God's perspective, and praise God it is credited to us through faith in Jesus Christ. When we believe in what Jesus did for us on the Cross; repent of our sins; and by faith accept Him as Savior and Lord, the righteousness of Christ is credited to us.

Rom 4:3-5 *For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." ⁴Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...*

Praise God for His amazing grace –He has provided us with a righteousness that puts us in a right standing with Him, and is a part of our 'armor'. It is a vital aspect of our victory over the enemy; it gives us confidence; it releases us from the guilt of our sin; and enables us to be overcomers.

iii. Readiness with the Gospel of peace

v.15 ...and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. NIV

The 'Gospel' is the 'Good News of Jesus' – who as the Son of God, came to earth as a man, and suffered the punishment for our sins as He was being crucified on the cross. And by faith in Him we can be forgiven and receive eternal life. This frees us from the power and control of the devil; it gives us peace; and being filled with the Spirit of God, we can live a life that is pleasing to God.

The devil hates the Gospel, and will seek to hinder its proclamation in any subtle way he can. But it is the responsibility of every Christian to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom throughout the whole world (***Matt 24:14; Mark 16:15-16***)

Therefore, familiarise yourself with the Gospel message, so that when you have the opportunity, you can share the Good News of Jesus with other people. The devil hates it – but it is powerful. *'For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.' (Rom 1:16)*

iv. Faith

v.16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one...

True faith is having **absolute trust and confidence in God – who He is – and what He has promised He will do for us**. Many of God's promises are about protection, deliverance, strength, and victory over the forces of evil that are constantly trying to disturb us, and to keep us off track from growing in our relationship with our amazing God. So with the shield of faith we can have confidence that God is there for us; that He will be faithful to His promises of protection and deliverance; and therefore the fiery darts from the evil one will be extinguished. Please refer back to section iv. on pages 43-44 for some examples of those promises.

Heb 11:1 (NIV) *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

v. Salvation

v.17 ...take the helmet of salvation...

As with the other parts of a soldier's armor, the helmet is a protection from the blows of the enemy.

'Salvation' primarily refers to being saved from a life of sin; redeemed; united with Christ; and set free from the power of sin – all when we accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Accordingly, we can be strengthened with all power for all endurance, knowing that we have been delivered from Satan's domain and transferred to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Col 1:11-14 *May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

We need to continually be aware of these blessings of our salvation – even keeping on reminding the enemy of the glorious hope of salvation that is our in Christ Jesus.

1Thess 5:8 *But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.*

Praise God for the wonderful salvation which He has graciously provided for us, and which is the source of the victory that we have over the enemy.

vi. The Sword of the Spirit – the Word of God

*v.17 ...the sword of the Spirit, which is **the Word of God**...*

In the Ephesians passage on the full armor of God, God's Word is compared to a **sword** that is used by a soldier in two ways: to **defend** himself against the enemy; and also to **attack** the enemy and defeat him. *Defence* is usually when the enemy is coming against us personally. *Attack* is mostly when the enemy is attacking someone else and they are in need of others to pray for them. Often the same Scriptures can be used for defense or attack.

The Word of God is such a powerful weapon – the one which Jesus used when He was being tempted by Satan. He did this as an example for us to follow. But we need to become very familiar with God's Word by reading it regularly, and by memorising verses so that they are always in our minds when we need to use them; especially in times when we don't have a Bible with us.

Following are some OT Scriptures which speak of the confidence we can have in God's protection, and the victory we can have over the forces of evil when we trust in God as our protector, and speak forth His Word when appropriate.

Psalms 91: *(Selected verses from NIV) – ¹Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. ²I will say of Yahweh, "He is my*

refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." ³Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. ⁴He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart...

⁹If you say, "Yahweh is my refuge," and you make the Most High your dwelling, ¹⁰no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. ¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways...

¹⁴"Because he loves me," says Yahweh, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. ¹⁵He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. ¹⁶With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

Psalms 18:1-3 (NIV) I love you, Yahweh, my strength. ²Yahweh is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. ³I called to Yahweh, who is worthy of praise, and I have been saved from my enemies.

The next verses in Psalm 44 below talk about victory for Israel (Jacob). Back in the OT days, only the Israelites were God's people. But now all true believers are God's people, so we too can claim these verses for ourselves. Notice that it is only in God's strength and in His **Name** that we can win the victory.

As noted elsewhere, the Bible frequently mentions God's '**Name**' and it is of huge significance. It refers to the whole of God's Divine Nature, including His almighty power and authority over every other power and authority. Also, Jesus 'Name' refers to who He is as the Son of God, and everything He accomplished through His death and resurrection; and also His authority over the forces of evil.

Psalms 44:4-8 (NIV) You are my King and my God, who decrees victories for Jacob. ⁵Through you we push back our enemies; through your name we trample our foes. ⁶I put no trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; ⁷but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame. ⁸In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever.

Please familiarise yourself with these verses so that when the enemy is disturbing you, or trying to lead you astray, you can confidently declare them to the enemy and push him back. The Word of God is a powerful weapon against our enemies – even against our own self-life. One of the key verses to claim when 'I' comes to the fore and tries to have its way is **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.

Even though some of the passages quoted or referred to are too long to memorise, I would suggest that you familiarise yourself with the substance of them so that you can tell the evil ones that you trust in your Almighty God and His Son Jesus as your strength, your deliverer, and your protector.

vii. Prayer

v.18 ...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

The notes in this section are in addition to those made in Part Two ch.12, as they are particularly related to prayer as a spiritual weapon against our enemies.

Being overcomers through prayer is an amazing privilege that God has given us. In fact it is not just a privilege; it is a requirement of God that we pray. In the Scriptures there are many examples of godly men and women who sought the Lord in prayer; and also many scriptures which encourage God's people to pray.

A very interesting example of the vitality of prevailing prayer against our enemies is found in Exodus 17. Israel was on its journey to the Promised Land when they were attacked by the Amalekites at Rephidim. Moses asked Joshua to gather some of the men to engage in the battle, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of the hill with the staff of God in Moses' hand.

Exod 17:10-13 *So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed.*

¹²But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

¹³And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

An appropriate comment that someone made, is that this battle of God's people against the enemy, and the victory that they gained through Moses prevailing prayer, is symbolic of the battles that we now face in the spiritual realm, and the victory that we have as we raise up the banner of Jesus through prevailing prayer. This was clearly a biblical illustration for us to apply in our prayer as overcomers in Yahweh's Kingdom.

David was a man of prayer, with many of the Psalms being his prayers; including quite a number of positive declarations of God's power to protect and

deliver from the enemy. Many such scriptures have already been quoted in these booklets, but following are some that are appropriate for this section on prayer as a weapon against the forces of wickedness.

Psa 18:1b-6 *I love you, O Yahweh, my strength.*

²*Yahweh is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*

³*I call upon Yahweh, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.*

⁴*The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me;*

⁵*the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me.*

⁶*In my distress I called upon Yahweh; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.*

Psa 34:3-6 *Oh, magnify Yahweh with me, and let us exalt his name together!*

⁴*I sought Yahweh, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.*

⁵ *Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.*

⁶*This poor man cried, and Yahweh heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.*

Psa 50:14 *Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High,¹⁵ and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.*"

The prayer of faith will always be victorious, even though there are times when we have to wait patiently for God to answer.

Psa 27:14 *Wait for Yahweh; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for Yahweh!*

Lam 3:25-26 *Yahweh is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. ²It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of Yahweh.*

Praise God for the amazing privilege of being able to openly communicate with Yahweh Almighty, the High and Exalted One who inhabits eternity. And praise Him too for the power of prayer to give us strength to overcome our enemies; to meet the needs of others; to pray for the world, especially in times of hardship or calamity; and to provide for our own needs – all as we pray in faith to the Almighty One with whom all things are possible.

viii. Praise is another weapon against the enemy

Psalms 8:2 (NIV) *Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.*

God wants all of His people to be like 'children and infants' by having such a **simple and confident trust in Yahweh and Jesus and all their promises**. Praise Him in your prayers; praise Him with songs and musical instruments; and the victory will be yours.

In one of the final Psalms in this chapter, which is full of encouragement for God's people to praise Him with joy, the Psalmist reveals the results of their 'high praises' and of having their two-edged swords in their hands.

Psa 149:6-9 *Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands, ⁷to execute vengeance on the nations and punishments on the peoples, ⁸to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron, ⁹to execute on them the judgment written! This is honor for all his godly ones. Praise Yahweh!*

The praise aspect parallels that of **Psalm 8:2**, and is quoted by Jesus in **Matt 21:16**. The two-edged sword aspect relates to the Word of God which is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword (**Heb 4:12**). The victory that we will have over our enemies is an honor for all Yahweh's godly ones (**v.9**)

Therefore, when we find ourselves in a struggle against our enemies, be encouraged to praise the Lord – either in song, or prayer, or in verbally quoting any of the Psalms that we have highlighted in this chapter; and we will '*silence the foe and the avenger.*'

ix. Conclusion on the armor that God has provided us with

We have appropriately given a lot of attention to the importance of being aware of our need to be overcomers, and also of the means that God has graciously provided us with to be overcomers, including the spiritual weapons which are not of the flesh, but have divine power.

2Cor 10:3-4 *For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.*

All this should give us great confidence as we seek to live our lives for the glory of Yahweh and His Son Jesus. And what will also give us confidence is the fact that one day it will all be over, and we will inherit a glorious, eternal future in the presence of the King of Glory – the 'hope of glory'.

e. The ultimate glorious inheritance for overcomers

As noted elsewhere – Leonard Ravenhill's succinct conclusion about the purpose of our life was: 'This Life is a Dressing Room for Eternity - THAT'S ALL IT

IS!' Oh, how we need to realise the significance of God's purpose for us in our lifetime. A brief summary of what it will be like in God's glorious heavenly dwelling place is given in *Revelation 21:1-7*; and **the inheritance of these things is for those who have been overcomers!**

Rev 21:1-7 (NASB) *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."*

⁵*And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."*

⁶*Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. ⁷He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son."*

Surely this statement in v.7 by Jesus Himself emphasizes the crucial importance of being overcomers! Overcomers will inherit '*these things*' – the things announced in verses 3-6. We traditionally understand that all 'believers' will inherit these things; but Jesus is saying here that it is the overcomers who will inherit these things – not all believers are necessarily 'overcomers'!

This should be a serious challenge for us! From a personal perspective, I have not previously recognized what these verses are actually saying. So now that I appreciate the significance of what Jesus has said, I can be all the more joyful about the glorious inheritance that will be ours as overcomers when Jesus returns to take us to be with Himself.

Conclusion to being overcomers

I trust that you have come to appreciate more about the significance of being overcomers. It is certainly one of Yahweh's most important purposes for us as His people. Do we want to be overcomers or losers? If we want to be overcomers, then God will provide us with everything we need to do so. We need to be determined to be overcomers; lay down our lives; submit ourselves to Him; and be led by the Spirit and not by the flesh.

22. To Suffer Persecution and Endure for the Sake of Christ

Phil 1:29-30 *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

This is something that naturally speaking, we would all want to avoid, but which is in fact one of the consequences of being a true follower of Christ. And if we do everything we can to steer clear of persecutions and sufferings, we will in fact be avoiding one of the God-ordained purposes for His people. The Scriptures are full of examples of men of God who suffered opposition because they stood up for Yahweh; His righteousness; and His kingdom. Think especially about the prophets who were filled with the Spirit of God, and strongly warned the Israelites – not only about their turning aside from the decrees and requirements of Yahweh their God; but also about having idols and worshipping foreign gods. The serious consequences of the prophets standing up for Yahweh and proclaiming His judgments, was that they were persecuted; even killed.

Even Jesus, the Son of God, suffered persecution at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders, and in general the nation of Israel rejected Him as the promised Messiah, and crucified Him. The Father knew this was going to happen, and in fact was part of His plan to bring salvation to the Gentiles, as well as the Jews. But the main point here is that **Jesus was an example for us** – and He made it very clear to His disciples that persecution would be an expected part of the life of a follower of Jesus.

John 15:18-20 *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.*

Matt 10:17-22 *Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹Brother will deliver brother over*

to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²²and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

These were the stern warnings given to the disciples as Jesus was sending them out to proclaim the kingdom of God. And surely they are still applicable today – certainly in some countries where Christians are seriously persecuted – even imprisoned; tortured; or put to death. But that doesn't mean it won't happen to us some time. The devil is steadily increasing his influence in the world, and will no doubt, one day, stir up greater persecution against us.

➤ **Jesus is our example of suffering**

In his first letter, Peter was addressing believers who were undergoing suffering and persecution in foreign lands where they had been dispersed. One of his main themes was to address this issue and to encourage his readers in a variety of ways, including pointing to **Jesus being an example for them to follow.**

1Pet 2:20-23 *For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²²He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*

1Pet 4:1-2 *Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ²so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.*

Following on from reminders of the men and women of faith; some of whom faced mistreatment; the author of Hebrews goes on to encourage God's people to run the race of the faith life with perseverance, fixing our eyes on Jesus who is our example – the initiator and perfecter of faith. In fact there was a joy set before Him; the joy of delivering people out of the hand of the enemy and transferring them into His Kingdom; the joy of redeeming people and giving them true life; and the joy of having them spend eternity in His glorious heaven.

We too should have the same joy, even when we suffer mistreatment, and persevere on our heavenward journey.

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, ²fixing 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.

➤ **It is for discipline that we have to endure**

The writer of Hebrews goes on to expound that one of the purposes that God has in allowing us to go through such struggles, is that He is in the process of disciplining us so that we will grow in the likeness of Jesus and share in His holiness.

Heb 12:3-8 *Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." ⁷It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*

Heb 12:10-14 *For they (our fathers) disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. ¹²Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. ¹⁴Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*

Though all the discipline we have to endure is often unpleasant and painful, we can rejoice that it will produce fruit of righteousness for those who have been trained by it; that we will share in His holiness; and that ultimately we will be with Him forever in His glorious heaven.

➤ **The apostles were examples of suffering for the Name of Jesus**

The disciple Stephen was the first one to be stoned to death because of his condemnation of the Jewish leaders (**Acts 6:8 -7:60**)

Saul, a dedicated Pharisee, approved Stephen's execution, and from then on continued to persecute believers and imprison them – until the day when he was

confronted by Jesus Himself on the road to Damascus. He was dramatically transformed, and he became a passionate follower of Jesus Christ. His name was soon changed to 'Paul' and he became an apostle who fervently proclaimed the Good News of Jesus. As a result, he too suffered persecutions and imprisonment.

But Paul also emphasized to his readers that though he was hard pressed on every side, the life of Jesus would be seen in his body.

2Cor 4:7-12 (NIV) *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. ¹²We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure...*

Paul was willing to suffer for the sake of the Gospel, and for the sake of God's chosen ones, that they will obtain salvation and eternal glory. He then emphasises our need to suffer with Christ even to the point of death; but that if we endure we will also reign with Him in His glorious heaven.

2Tim 2:8-12 *Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. ¹⁰Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. ¹¹Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; ¹²if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us...*

In fact, leading up to Paul saying that everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted, he points out the persecutions and the sufferings that he endured as aspects of living a godly life.

2Tim 3:10-12 *You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹²In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...*

➤ We are to stand firm in the face of persecution and suffering

There are quite a number of scriptures encouraging believers to endure; to suffer for the sake of Christ; and to not be ashamed of our testimony.

Rev 14:12 *Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.*

2Tim 1:8 *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God...*

1Pet 3:14-16 *But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.*

Rev 1:9 *I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*

Rev 2:9-10 *"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

Rev 12:11 *And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.*

Rev 13:10 *If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.*

Acts 14:22 *...strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*

➤ **The blessings that flow from persecution and suffering for Christ**

Coupled with the **fact** of persecution, are the **blessings** that come to those who are persecuted due to the fact that we proclaim Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the Saviour of those who will believe in Him.

Matt 5:10-12 (NIV) *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

¹¹*"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*

¹²*Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Jesus is encouraging His followers that even though they suffer persecution and insults, there is a glorious reward awaiting them in heaven. We ought to rejoice in our sufferings because, being part of God's purpose for us, it will produce hope – the hope of an amazing future in the very presence of Yahweh and His Son Jesus – **'the hope of glory!'**

Rom 5:3-5 *More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Rom 8:17-18 *...and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. ¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

2Cor 4:16-18 *So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

James 1:2-4 *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

1Pet 4:12-16 *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.*

Read also **2Cor 1:3-7** & **1Pet 3:14-17**

23. To be Generous and Give Freely to the Poor and Needy

The primary thing to keep in mind as we go through this chapter is the compassionate heart of God, and His desire for us to show compassion to the poor and needy; the hungry; widows and orphans; and even beggars. God's compassion is infinitely greater than we appreciate, and He wants us to have a deeper appreciation of His compassion.

It is abundantly clear that the longing of God's heart is that we 'give'; and if we give with genuine motives of love and compassion, He will give generously in return. There's no way that we can even begin to compare our generosity with the incredible generosity, love, and grace of God who sacrificed his beloved Son as the punishment for our sins, and as a result freely offers us eternal life. Jesus gave up His all for totally undeserving creatures such as we all are.

Are we willing to make a sacrifice by giving up some of our own 'wants', or even needs, to give to those who have greater needs than we do?

➤ **Yahweh discloses His heart of compassion for the poor and needy**

***Deut 15:7-8 &10-11 (NIV)** If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land Yahweh your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. ⁸Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. ...¹⁰Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this Yahweh your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. ¹¹There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.*

***Psa 82:3-4** Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. ⁴Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." (Also **Psa 112:5-9**)*

***Prov 11:24-25 (NIV)** One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. ²⁵A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.*

***Prov 19:17 (NIV)** Whoever is kind to the poor lends to Yahweh, and he will reward them for what they have done. (Also **Prov 28:27**)*

Yahweh spoke through the prophet Isaiah, expressing His people's rebellion against God. They made false pretenses in seeking to know God's ways, and in their fasting; yet they were exploiting their workers.

Isa 58:1-3 *"Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. ²For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. ³'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.*

Yahweh continued by intensely expressing some of the real issues relating to fasting, including sharing their food with the hungry and providing shelters for the poor. If only they had the right heart attitude, leading to acts of giving, they would be blessed abundantly.

Isa 58:6-11 (NIV) *"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ⁷Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? ⁸Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of Yahweh will be your rear guard. ⁹Then you will call, and Yahweh will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, ¹⁰**and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. ¹¹Yahweh will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail."***

This Isaiah passage is certainly one of the most challenging, even for us, as to our understanding, and application, of true fasting and meeting the needs of those who are suffering injustice; and the needs of the oppressed; the hungry; the poor; and even the naked! If we do what Yahweh desires of us, the blessings are truly amazing.

Yahweh's wants us to recognise His compassion for the poor and needy and apply in our lives.

➤ **The psalmists speak of the blessings for God's people when they give generously**

Psa 37:21 & 25-26 *The wicked borrows but does not pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives... ²⁵I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread. ²⁶He is ever lending generously, and his children become a blessing.*

Psa 112:5-9 *It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice.⁶For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever. ⁷He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in Yahweh. ⁸ His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries. ⁹He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor.*

➤ **Jesus' strong encouragements to give to the poor and needy, and even to our enemies!**

Jesus, being the Son of God, has the same compassion for the poor and needy as the Father, and also has the same desire for us to be the same.

Luke 6:30-38 (NIV) *Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

³²*"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ³⁴And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

³⁷*"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸**Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.**"*

What a tremendous encouragement for us be true givers to the needy; and the degree to which we give will be the measure by which God will give back to us. But I need to emphasise that the promises of blessings should not be the driving factor behind our giving – we give out of our love for God and for people.

Luke 12:33-34 (NIV) *Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Luke 14:12-14 *He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."*

Luke 21:1-4 *Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, ²and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. ⁴For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."*

Mat 25:34-40 *Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'*

Read also verses **41-46** for the seriously negative consequences for those do not feed the hungry, or give drink to the thirsty, or clothe the naked, or visit the sick or those in prison. The conclusion that Jesus gave was that such people are not actually righteous, and will therefore suffer eternal punishment!

➤ Paul's encouragement for believers to give generously

Acts 20:35 *In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

2Cor 9:6-8 (NIV) *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion,*

for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Phil 4:18-19 *I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

➤ Hebrews

Heb 13:16 *Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*

➤ James

James 1:27 (NIV) *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

James 2:15-17 *If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

➤ John

1John 3:16-18 *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸Dear children, **let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.** (Also **John 15:12-13**)*

➤ Conclusion on being generous and giving freely to the poor and needy

The emphasis in God's Word on giving is certainly very clear. Through it all God is making it very plain that He wants us to know His heart; to recognise His concern for the poor and needy; the orphans and widows; the hungry and the oppressed; and to have the same compassion as He has and give to those in need – even to the point of selling our possessions to give to the poor.

1John 4:11 (NIV) *Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

Take time to praise and worship

Not only does this passage from Deuteronomy point us to the awesomeness of Yahweh, and the honor that is due to Him, but also to His loving concern for the fatherless and the widow; and foreigners living among the Israelites.

Deut 10:12-22 NIV *And now, Israel, what does Yahweh your God ask of you but to fear Yahweh your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³and to observe the Yahweh's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?*

¹⁴*To Yahweh your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. ¹⁵Yet Yahweh set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today. ¹⁶Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. ¹⁷For Yahweh your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. ¹⁸He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. ¹⁹And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. ²⁰Fear Yahweh your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. ²¹He is the one you praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. ²²Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now Yahweh your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.*

Psa 24:1-10 NIV *The earth is Yahweh 's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; ²for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.*

³*Who may ascend the mountain of Yahweh? Who may stand in his holy place?*

⁴*The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.*

⁵*They will receive blessing from Yahweh and vindication from God their Savior.*

⁶*Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob.*

⁷*Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.*

⁸*Who is this King of glory? Yahweh strong and mighty, Yahweh mighty in battle.*

⁹*Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.*

¹⁰*Who is he, this King of glory? Yahweh Almighty— he is the King of glory.*

24. Conclusion to 'God's Purposes for Humanity'

As we come to a close on this important and challenging series of booklets, I would like to reiterate some of the introductory comments.

For a Christian, the most important thing in our life should be **to know God**; and to know His plans and purposes for us. After all, **God is our Maker and He created us for a purpose. Is that not true?** Well, the Bible makes that very clear.

1Cor 8:6 *...yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.* (Also **Psa 100:3 & Rom 11:36**)

The essential message we get from these verses is that **God created all things**; everything was made **through Him** – by His almighty power and wisdom; and all things were made **for Him** –for His glory and satisfaction, and that we would be participants of His Kingdom, and give all glory and honour to Him.

In Paul's prayer for the Colossians he expresses his unceasing prayer for the saints with a focus on knowing God's will (i.e. His purposes), and applying those purposes in their daily lives in a manner worthy of the Lord.

Col 1:9-12 *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.*

And then; as already noted elsewhere in these booklets – I'm sure you realise that **it was God who gave us the Bible** – that's why it is called '**the Word of God**'. And **the primary reasons why He has given it to us, are firstly to make Himself known to His people; and then to make known His purposes for humanity.**

As already noted, Leonard Ravenhill made this very succinct statement:

"This Life is a Dressing Room for Eternity - THAT'S ALL IT IS!"

Jer 29:11 *For I know the plans I have for you, declares Yahweh, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

Eph 3:11 *... according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

1Pet 1:3-4 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...*

In summary – God is the Maker of all things, and He has purposes in everything He does and all He allows to happen. His all-inclusive plan has eternity in view; but He also has essential purposes that we need to apply from day-to-day, in order to be living our lives as our Maker, and our gracious merciful Saviour has determined.

It is God Himself who has clearly drawn my attention to the importance of truly knowing Him and His purposes for us; and in spite of my limitations in expressing these things, the Holy Spirit has been at my side, leading me on the journey, and enlightening me to what God's Word reveals to us about Himself.

I trust that you have learned much about God's purposes for you as a child of God. But, from my own personal experience, I have to say that the necessary changes won't happen overnight. It requires a consistency in seeking to know God more every day; submitting you whole self to Him; and relying on the leading of the Holy Spirit whom God has graciously given to us.

The very applicable motto which I have posted at the bottom of the front pages of all these booklets is:

'Apart from Him I can do nothing!' (From **John 15:5**)

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

May the Lord bless you as you grow in your personal relationship with Yahweh and His Son Jesus. And because of His mercies, may you be willing to *'present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.'* **Rom 12:1-2**