



God's Purposes For Humanity

Part Two

**I am the vine; you are the branches.
Whoever abides in me and I in him, he
it is that bears much fruit, for apart
from me you can do nothing. John 15:5**

Colin Winters

God's Purposes for Humanity

Part Two

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– but who is also 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; 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*)

Contents - Part Two

Page

Introduction	2
9. To be Transformed into the Likeness of Christ	3
a. The primary means of being transformed to be like Jesus	4
b. Additional means of being transformed	6
c. The results of being transformed	8
d. The ultimate transformation	11
10. To be Holy and Blameless	14
a. God's call to be holy and blameless	14
b. The Holy Spirit – the significance of His name	16
c. What does it mean for us to be holy and blameless?	16
d. How does 'holiness' become effective in our lives?	17
11. To Live by Faith, Obedience, and Dependence on God	20
a. Humanities failure right from the beginning	20
b. God's purposes in giving the command to Adam	20
c. Israel's failure to trust, obey, and be dependent on God	21
d. Examples of people who were faithful, obedient, and dependent on God	22
e. Jesus as our ultimate example	24
f. Faith in God	25
g. Obedience to God	31
h. Dependence on God	35
12. To Pray	41
a. The importance of prayer	41
b. God-given Scriptural encouragements to pray	42
13. To Be Still and Wait for the Lord	46
14. To Free us From the Power of Sin	51
15. To be Filled With the Power of God's Spirit.	58
a. The power of God's Spirit in all believers	59
b. In what ways should we expect to see the power of the Spirit? . . .	61
c. The Holy Spirit imparts spiritual gifts to the Body of Christ	65
d. Are there things that will hinder, or restrict the outworking of the power of the Spirit in our lives?	70

These booklets are all about Yahweh, the One True God, the High and Exalted One, the Supreme Ruler of the universe, the Holy One. Therefore out of reverence for Him, and because of the importance that Yahweh Himself places on His Name, I am obligated to use His personal name 'Yahweh'.

Exod 3:15 *God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation."*

For a full explanation of the significance of God's personal name Yahweh, and also the reason for the changes in the Scripture quotations as underlined below, please read through **chapter 1** of '**What an Awesome God We Have, Part One**'.

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 from 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.

This edition was updated in October 2021

Please feel free to make comments or ask questions.

Colin, colros48@gmail.com

Introduction

This is the second booklet under the title 'God's Purposes for Humanity', which is the third topic in a series of booklets which are focused on the most important issue in the Bible – **to know God and His purposes for humanity.**

The One True God – Yahweh – is incredibly awesome. He is our Maker; He has purposes in everything He has made; and He longs for us to truly know Him in the sense of a close personal relationship; and to know and apply the purposes that He has established by His own wisdom; and by His mercy, love, and grace.

9. To be Transformed into the Likeness of Christ

What an inspiring concept this is – that we should be changed to be like Jesus – and yet it is one of God's highest purposes for us. No doubt you will see the connection here with being united with Christ and attaining to the measure of all His fullness; and it is a major aspect of '*...working out our salvation...*'

➤ Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of God

The meaning of being created in the 'image and likeness' of God is to some degree conveyed in the words of God when He was creating Adam and Eve: '*...let them have dominion...*' (authority; control), and '*...fill the earth and subdue it...*' (**Gen1:26-28**) The positive implication in the word 'subdue' is to keep under control; bring into subjection.

Adam and Eve were also 'like God' in the sense that they had a spiritual aspect to their being, including emotions and the capacity to exercise love, mercy, grace etc. They also possessed creative and developmental abilities.

Unfortunately this 'likeness' was seriously disturbed by the sin of Adam and Eve. But God knew this was going to happen, and He allowed it for a reason.

➤ God already had a plan to restore mankind to His image and likeness

Even before He created mankind, He already had a plan to restore us back to a relationship with Himself, and to the '**likeness**' which He originally created us to have. This restoration begins when we accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and progresses as we continue to seek Him diligently and work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

God is always at work in our lives – as we noted in the previous two chapters – so that He can work out His purposes in our lives. And perhaps the greatest of those purposes is **that we be conformed to the image of His Son Jesus:**

Rom 8:28-29 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

It's important to notice the connection between these two verses. The '*For*' points us to the reason why God is at work '*in all things for the good of those who love Him*' – and that is, that we '*be conformed to image of His Son.*'

Oh, the amazing grace of God – that He would provide such unfaithful creatures such as us, with such a wonderful opportunity to be changed to be like

His Son. But how does this transpire? For most of us, we seem to continue with the same self-focused desires – it's all about me – isn't it?

Other expressions which parallel that of being transformed into the likeness of Jesus are – to be renewed in '*the image of our creator*', and '*after the likeness of God*.'

Col 3:10 ...and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

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

Because Jesus is the image of God and the exact representation of His being, to be renewed in the image of our Creator is the same as to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. (See **Col 1:15** & **Heb 1:3**)

a. The primary means of being transformed to be like Jesus

God has graciously provided the means by which we are to be changed to be like Jesus, and that is primarily by beholding His glory. But this still takes commitment on our part; God doesn't just do it automatically.

➤ **As we behold His glory, we are in the process of being transformed**

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

There are four important points that Paul is making here:

➤ **1. It is the Lord's glory we are beholding.**

The word 'glory' has a range of implications in the Scriptures. But when it is applied directly to Yahweh and Jesus, it speaks of their splendour, majesty, beauty, brightness, and the excellence of their divine attributes and perfections. The Word of God reveals the glory of Yahweh – although not in its fullness. Moses was given a glimpse of that 'glory', but the 'glory' of God was more fully exhibited in Jesus Christ, God's only Son. The fullness of God's glory will surely be seen when we go to be with Him for eternity in His glorious Heaven.

Heb 1:3 (Jesus) is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

2Cor 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

➤ **2. It is as we 'behold' the Lord's glory that we are transformed.**

To 'behold' means to contemplate, observe, or gaze upon. The clear implication is that it takes a consistent, diligent commitment on our part to truly behold/ contemplate the Lord's glory. And while it true that we can see so much of the Lord's glory in His creation, it is primarily through God's Word, and by His Spirit, that we are enabled to truly 'behold' the glory of the Lord.

A well-known chorus, composed by Helen Lemmel in 1918, is an encouragement to behold the Lord's glory by turning our 'eyes' upon Jesus, and looking full in His wonderful face.

'Turn your eyes upon Jesus; Look full in His wonderful face;

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.'

➤ **3. We are 'being' transformed – it is a process.**

Being transformed doesn't happen straight away – it's a process, and it takes place in the lives of those who faithfully continue to 'behold' the glory of the Lord, and who apply the purposes of God that He has prepared for us, and which we come to recognise as we diligently seek His face.

➤ **4. We are being transformed with 'ever-increasing glory'.**

This glory is what we see in Jesus; and as we consistently observe His glory, then we will be changed into His likeness in increasing measure. I love the way the New Living Translation puts it: *'So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like Him as we are changed into His glorious image.'*

'The veil' is like a spiritual curtain between us and God. There was a time when we didn't believe in God or Jesus and we were spiritually blind. But then, by the grace of God, He opened our spiritual eyes and helped us to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we made the decision to commit our lives to Jesus, the veil was removed and we could 'see'.

That was just the starting point of the process of us being changed into His likeness, but it doesn't stop there. If we are to be changed with **'ever-increasing glory'**, then we need to be committed to consistently seeking His face – beholding His glory, and of course, applying in our daily living the changes that God has purposed for us. It's a life-long process with the ultimate transformation

taking place at the return of Christ. And we will be more prepared for that glorious day if we purify ourselves, and work out our salvation in co-operation with God as He works in us to transform us into the likeness of Christ.

b. Additional means of being transformed

Primarily it is God who is changing us as we consistently behold His face. But as Romans 8:28,29 shows us, it also involves us being aware that God is at work in our lives through our daily circumstances for the purpose of transforming us. Therefore we have to make the right response – we have our part to play as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

These are some of the challenging things we need to be aware of and apply:

➤ **Being crucified with Christ**

Paul attends to this more fully in Romans chapter 6 where he writes about believers being baptised into Christ, and therefore into His death. We were buried with Him; united with Him in His death; and our old self was crucified with Christ. Not only (in the spiritual sense) were we crucified with Christ, but we were also raised to newness of life. (See **Romans 6:3-8**)

But the scripture I want to highlight here – one which we regularly need to declare – is **Galatians 2:20**, to remind ourselves, and the spiritual forces of wickedness who are always trying to keep us focused on our self-life:

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.

I have been crucified with Christ, and now the very life of Christ is within me. I have to determine that it will be no longer 'I' who lives, but rather that I allow Christ to have His way in me. Our self-life – 'I' – will always try to come to the forefront of our lives. And the only way that we can have the victory over 'I' is to live by faith in Jesus who gave His life for me, and by consistently putting off the old self and putting on the new.

➤ **Putting off the old self and putting on the new**

In the verses below Paul is referring directly to putting off the old self, and putting on the new self which is being changed into the image of our Creator.

Col 3:8-10 (NIV) *But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

(Please read **Col 3:1-17**)

Eph 4:22-24 *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Also read through to **Eph 5:21**)*

'Putting on the new' is in fact putting on the Lord Jesus Christ; being united with Him; and becoming a new creation.

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

2Cor 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

'Putting off the old' is a life-long process. It is not easy; it can only be fulfilled as we deliberately commit ourselves to doing so; and as we daily walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh. One of the reasons why it is not easy is that there are many things about our old way of life that we want to hang on to; and also, we might face criticism or rejection from our friends.

Another reason is that we don't necessarily recognise many of our faults. Some things have become such ingrained habits that they don't seem to be so wrong. This can include attitudes or wrong emotions; seeing ourselves as more important than others; or remaining attached to the things of this world.

Pride and independence are two major issues that we need to recognise and ask the Lord to help us change. God is looking for people who will humble themselves and choose to live in full dependence on Him for all things.

Putting off the old self is always going to be a challenge, and the devil will make sure that we are always faced with such trials. But we always need to remember, as emphasised in 'being overcomers', that the real issue in the difficulties and challenges we face in life; is not the people who are the real cause of the problems, but the spiritual forces of wickedness who are at work in those people to stir us up and to try to lead us to make wrong responses. (**Eph 6:12,13**)

➤ Denying ourselves; taking up our cross; and losing our lives

Jesus had some strong words to say about this.

Luke 9:23-24 *And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. (Also **Matt 10:38-39; 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; John 12:25-26**)*

The 'cross' was an instrument of death. However the implication in Jesus words is not physical death, but rather, as explained in the next verse, it is losing our 'life' for the purpose of truly following Jesus. It is denying ourselves; it is crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires (**Gal 5:24**); and walking by the Spirit and not by the flesh (**Rom 8:4-11**).

➤ Fixing our 'eyes' on heavenly things and not earthly things

Jesus had a lot to say about storing up treasures in heaven, because our treasures will be where our hearts are.

Mat 6:19-21 *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Read also **Matt 19:21; Luke 12:33-34; 18:22**

Paul also emphasizes the need for those who have been united with Christ to be seeking and setting our minds on things that are above. As often noted, we are all too easily distracted with life's issues, and also with the things of the world. But we need to constantly remind ourselves that our earthly life is only temporary, and all of life's distractions and difficulties are allowed for the purpose of changing us; and also to prepare us for a glorious eternity in the presence of Yahweh and His Son Jesus. God has allowed all things for a purpose, and He is at work in all circumstances for the good of those who love Him, with the main goal being to transform us into the likeness of His Son (**Rom 8:28-29**)

Col 3:1-4 *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³*For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**

Read also **2Cor 4:16-18**

c. The results of being transformed

➤ Inner transformation will result in an outward display of Christ

This transformation into the likeness of Christ is not just an inner spiritual makeover; but the life of Christ within us should also be outwardly manifested to those around us. We will reflect the nature and life of Jesus – His compassion; His love; His grace; His patience; and even His endurance and suffering.

The apostle John concisely summarises what our life in Christ should look like

1John 2:5b-6 *By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*

'To walk in the same way in which He walked' is to live and act as Jesus did; to conduct one's behavior along the lines of Jesus life. Jesus is the founder and perfecter of our faith – the ultimate example of what our lives should look like.

Heb 12:1b-3 ... *let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*

Phil 2:5-8 *Have 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.*

We are to be servants as Jesus was, and live a humble life, enduring shame; hostility; and persecution as we allow Jesus to live out His life in us.

1Pet 2:21 *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*

Paul wrote: 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.' (**1Cor 11:1**)

In order to walk as Jesus walked, we need to become absorbed with His life as recorded in the Gospels. We must also take note of what the apostles taught us throughout the NT, as to what a true Christian life should look like. We need to be willing to lay aside our self-life (the flesh); to put on the new self; and to continuously set our minds on the things of the Spirit.

This is always going to be a challenge for Christians – after all, we are still human beings. But we need to realise the real significance of being transformed into the likeness of Christ; of having His mindset; and of letting that transformation be on display to the world.

➤ **We will be witnesses of the transforming power of Jesus**

When Jesus was about to leave His disciples and depart to His throne in heaven, His final words to them were:

Act 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."*

To be a witness for Jesus is not only a matter of proclaiming the gospel, or publically stating our beliefs, but also of our lives being a sign, or an example of what Jesus was like; thereby giving evidence of the transformation that Jesus has made in our lives. Such evidence is initially seen at the point of a person's conversion. They know the inner transformation in themselves, and others can see it as well – at least a period of time. But then what often happens is that the new believer becomes somewhat complacent, and doesn't feel or reflect the change that took place in their lives. This is due largely to the fact that they haven't been growing in their personal relationship with Jesus.

However, let me encourage you readers to be consistently pursuing your relationship with Jesus and the Father, and make it a goal of your life to reflect to fellow believers, and to the world, the 'life of Christ' that is now within us.

Eph 5:1-2 *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ²And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

➤ **We will be salt and light to the world.**

As Jesus was teaching His disciples in His Sermon on the Mount, He taught them that they would have an influence on the world as their lives had a purifying, preserving effect (salt). They would also be a light to the world as the life of Christ shone forth from their lives.

Mat 5:13-16 *"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In 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.*

Paul also uses the same imagery of 'light' with reference to the light of the knowledge of the glory of God which has shone into our hearts through Jesus Christ. This is a beautiful treasure imparted to us as mere vessels of clay in order to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

2Cor 4:6-7 *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.*

But there is a challenging side to possessing and displaying this treasure, as Paul goes on to explain in the verses following straight after the ones above.

2Cor 4:8-11 *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.*

One aspect of being salt and light, and reflecting the life of Jesus, is that we will suffer afflictions and persecutions, as Jesus Himself did. But God has a purpose for us in these afflictions. As the life of Christ is displayed in our lives, our inner self is being renewed, and God is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. Therefore –

'...we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as 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. (2Cor 4:16-18)

God's ultimate purpose is to take us to be with Himself in His glorious and perfect Heaven for all eternity. So do not lose heart because of what you are suffering, but rather keep your eyes fixed on Jesus – on things that are 'unseen' and are eternal.

d. The ultimate transformation

The ultimate transformation into the likeness of Christ will occur when we actually see Him face to face in heaven. Then we will like Him, for we will see Him as He is. This is the hope that we have – the hope of glory – and it should be a strong motivation for us to purify ourselves – to be holy as He is holy.

1John 3:2-3 *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.*

Phil 3:20-21 *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

1Cor 15:49-54 *Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. ⁵⁰I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."*

What wonderfully encouraging scriptures these are for us as mere mortals whose natural tendency is to be self-focussed. But yet again we are seeing the crucial need to be focussed on Christ – beholding His glory, and being transformed into His likeness.

Conclusion

Even though we are in the process of looking at some very thought-provoking Scriptures, which are showing us some of the purposes that God has given us to be worked out in our lives, we need to remember that it will take time and commitment on our part for it to transpire. Keep focussed on Jesus – keep seeking to know Him and be transformed into His likeness – keep on ‘dying to self’ – keep taking up your cross daily – because in the end you will be rewarded in ways that we cannot imagine, and you will be bringing glory to Him who is so much more worthy than we can appreciate.

Phil 2:5-11 *Have 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. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Take time to praise and worship

Following are a couple of very encouraging and well known passages with the main focus on Jesus – what He has done on our behalf, and also the spiritual blessings we receive by being united with Him. Therefore they are also an encouragement to praise and worship God for all that He has done for us.

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

¹¹In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹²so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³In 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.

Col 1:11-20 *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.*

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

10. To Be Holy and Blameless in His Sight.

To be holy and blameless is actually a major part of being changed to be like Jesus. In the previous chapter we saw how God had planned before creation that He would make a way for us to be changed to be like Jesus:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...(Rom 8:29)

Then in **Ephesians 1:4** we read: '*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*' These two concepts which God planned before creation – to be **conformed to the image of Jesus**; and **to be holy and blameless** – are not two separate issues, but rather they are different expressions of the same purpose that God has for us – because **Jesus is our example of a holy and blameless life**. Paul gives the same message to Timothy:

2Tim 1:9 *He has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time...*

(See also **Col 1:21-22**)

I love the added comment he makes there – **it is by God's grace that He has given us this wonderful opportunity to be holy as He is holy**. (See also **1 Pet 1:15-16**). It is not because of anything we have done, but rather by the amazing grace of God. How wonderful it is that we can be called the children of God, and can live a holy life to please Him **as we allow Him to lead us by His Holy Spirit**.

In 'What an Awesome God We Have-Part Two' we meditated on God's holiness, and now we see that God wants us to be holy as He is holy. How can that be possible? God's moral perfections will always be far greater than what we can achieve, so why has He set such a high standard for us. It seems that our sinful self is always going to limit our ability to be holy as He is holy.

But praise God – He doesn't expect us to be holy and blameless in our own strength, or by our own natural abilities. God has given us His Holy Spirit – His holiness is within us. And by His Spirit and His Word He will enable us to work out that holiness in our lives, and become holy as He wants us to be.

a. God's call to be holy and blameless

The main focus of the book of Leviticus is the laws and regulations for worship in the Tabernacle. The main thought of this book is 'holiness' – the holiness of God and man which is clearly emphasised in a number of verses:

Lev 11:44-45 For I am Yahweh your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. ⁴⁵For I am Yahweh who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy." (Also: **Leviticus 19:2; 20:7; Deuteronomy 14:2**)

Then when we come to the NT we also find quite a few scriptures calling us to be holy.

1Pet 1:15-16 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Rom 1:7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people...(Also **1 Cor. 1:2**)

Rom 6:19b-22 (NIV) Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. ²⁰When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²²But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

Eph 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Eph 5:26-27 ...to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

1Thess 4:7 (NIV) For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

2Tim 1:9 He has saved us and called us to a holy life...

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

2Pet 3:11-14 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹²as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. ---- ¹⁴So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. (Also **1Thess 3:12-13**)

As you can see, there are many verses which show the importance of holiness. **This is God's Word to us, showing us His purpose for us to be holy and blameless before Him.** As we have already said, we cannot do this by our own efforts or abilities, but only **by the enabling of the Holy Spirit.**

b. The Holy Spirit – the significance of His name

Have you ever thought about the name that God has given to His Spirit? He is called the **Holy** Spirit. Holy is not a personal name as names are for us. It is very common in the Bible for names to have special significance. In this case 'Holy Spirit' refers to **His nature – His Holiness, and the purpose for which God has given Him**. Therefore we could also call Him the **Spirit of Holiness** (See **Rom 1:4**).

He is the very Spirit of the Holy God who has come to dwell within us – to transform us, and to enable us to work out God's purposes for us in our lives. **But** – this is only effective as we commit ourselves to walk by the Spirit and not by our own self-life.

c. What does it mean for us to be holy and blameless?

God's holiness is **the standard** for our holiness – "*Be holy, for I am holy.*"

As we explained in 'What an Awesome God We Have - Part Two', there are two distinct senses in which the notion of holiness is used of God in the OT:

- 1. Absoluteness and Majesty
- 2. Ethical holiness.

'Absoluteness' has the sense of '*...the one ultimate reality that does not depend on anything, and is not relative to anything else*' (Encarta Dictionary). This is, in part, where the well-known aspect of being 'set apart' comes from. And while this is obviously an aspect of God's nature which is of huge significance, it should become clear to us as we observe the particular context in which the word 'holy' is used in reference to God, that **generally it refers to His ethical holiness – His absolute moral perfection**.

As ISBE notes: '*Men cannot resemble God in His incommunicable attributes. They can reflect His likeness only along the lines of those moral qualities of righteousness and love in which true holiness consists.*'

Therefore we can say that for us to be 'holy and blameless' – to 'be holy as He is holy' – is **to be perfect in our standards and practice of morality according to God's standards; set apart from the world and consecrated to Him alone**.

But the question is – how is it possible for us to be holy according to God's standard? Well – the answer is – **we** can't achieve this holiness by ourselves. But when you look at the number of Scriptures in which God is calling us to be holy, we dare not give up in despair simply because we cannot achieve His full standard on our own.

Remember – God has made every provision for us to be able to achieve His purposes for us, but **we have our part to play**. It takes a **real commitment** on our part, and daily **walking by the Spirit**, in order to be able work out God's purposes. This is what He is eagerly looking for; it is what pleases Him; and it is what He will bless in His own way and in His own time.

d. How does 'holiness' become effective in our lives?

- **When we became united with Christ, the blessings of His righteousness, holiness, and redemption became ours.**

1Cor 1:30 (NIV) *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

It is Christ in us who is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption; and it is by the grace of God, and through our faith in Jesus and all He has done for us.

This can be likened to a man who is a debtor - he has a debt which he simply cannot repay. But a friend has compassion on him and pays his debt; and the benefits of that payment flow to the man who was a debtor.

We were the 'debtors', and there was no way we could pay the debt that we owed to God for all our sinfulness. But Jesus paid the debt, and we now receive the benefits because we are united with Christ.

- **Holiness is imputed to us, but we have a responsibility to apply it**

There is a dual aspect to the benefits of all that God has imputed to us. God has done a work in us, and He wants to continue to do that work in us. But **we have a part to play in working out those benefits in our lives**. God has always required His people to be obedient to His perfect standards. But God's chosen people Israel are examples of the failure of people to be able to fulfil those requirements in their own natural abilities.

This is the duality of God's provision – **He has granted to us everything we need to live a holy life – but we have to work it out in our daily living.**

Phil 2:12-13 *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

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

2Cor 7:1 *Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

➤ **God disciplines us that we may share in His holiness**

The author of Hebrews encourages believers to persevere in the spiritual conquest in which we are engaged, and this includes understanding and accepting the need for the Lord's discipline because we are sons of God.

The first portion of Hebrews chapter 12 addresses this issue by encouraging believers to throw off everything that hinders us from following the examples of men and women of faith, and to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, and the One who endured such opposition from sinful men.

Then we are reminded that in our struggle against sin, we have not resisted to the point of shedding our blood – as did Jesus. We are also reminded of the word of encouragement given to the children of God:

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." **Heb 12:5b-6**

The author follows this with the purpose of the Lord's discipline:

Heb 12:7-14 *It 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. ⁹Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they 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.*

To be holy and blameless is a major aspect of God's purposes for us, and one which we cannot achieve in our own energy. But praise God, He is at work in all circumstances; and is disciplining us for the purposes of changing us into the likeness of Christ so that we may share in His holiness.

Oh, the love and grace of God. He is so worthy of all glory and honour.

Take time to praise and worship

Psa 47:1-9 Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!

²*For Yahweh, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth.*

³*He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet.*

⁴*He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves. Selah*

⁵*God has gone up with a shout, Yahweh with the sound of a trumpet.*

⁶*Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!*

⁷*For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm!*

⁸*God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne.*

⁹*The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted!*

Psa 111:1-10 Praise Yahweh! I will give thanks to Yahweh with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

²*Great are the works of Yahweh, studied by all who delight in them.*

³*Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever.*

⁴*He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; Yahweh is gracious and merciful.*

⁵*He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.*

⁶*He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations.*

⁷*The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy;*

⁸*they are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.*

⁹*He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name!*

¹⁰*The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!*

11. To live by faith, obedience, and dependence on God

God's purpose has always been that His people would **totally trust Him**; **walk in obedience to Him**; and be **dependent on Him for all things**. When you look at it from an overall biblical perspective, God's purpose is that these three concepts work together. They are of huge importance in the purposes of God; but they are also challenging, and in opposition to the independent nature which we all possessed from the day of our birth. Our failure to live by faith, obedience, and dependence on God, has been a trait of humanity since the time of Adam's sin.

a. Humanity's failure right from the beginning

The story of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden is pretty well known, and was given a brief summary in chapter 2 of Part One – 'To Redeem us Back to Himself'. But in the context of this chapter there are some other points that need to be emphasised – so there may be a little bit of repetition.

One important thing we need to take note of before we proceed, is that God created Adam and Eve with the freedom of choice, as seen in this command:

"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." **Gen 2:16-17 (NIV)**

God did not create Adam and Eve as robots without freedom of will; and He had very good reasons for doing so, as we will see.

The consequence of their eating the forbidden fruit seems pretty serious, but we mustn't overlook the real significance of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; the eating of which signified **their personal choice** to be **independent of God** and **make their own decisions about which was right and wrong** (the knowledge of good and evil).

b. God's purpose in giving the command to Adam

God's clear purpose in giving Adam and Eve the command about not eating the forbidden fruit, was that He wanted to test them to see if they would have a **reverential respect for God** (The fear of the Lord) which would be evident in their **obeying** His command; **trusting** in Him; and **depending** on Him to continually provide them with all they needed.

Not only is it clear from **Gen 2:16-17** (see above), but also from the whole of Scripture, that God created humanity with **a free will – the power of choice**. It is

also clear that His reason for doing this is that **His strong desire is to have a people of His own who choose to be committed to seeking God with all their heart; walking in His ways; and being submissive to, and dependent on Him.** And the end result of living such a life will be an eternity of unimaginable blessings in God's heaven.

Having a proper understanding of this Garden of Eden scenario is of vital importance in the purposes of God for His people. Yahweh graciously put His sovereign power and love on display right from the beginning of time so that people would recognise His awesome greatness, and give due honour to Him.

But sadly, throughout the OT record, there were only a relatively small number of people who actually recognised Yahweh for who He really is, and who honoured Him – at least to some degree – in the ways that He had chosen. The failure of the majority of people to revere Yahweh, was, and still is, caused by the self-centredness and independence of the sinful nature which all humanity inherited as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve.

c. Israel's failure to trust, obey, and be dependent on God

As you look back over the history of God's chosen people (Israel) in the Old Testament, you see how God was always wanting to provide for their needs and bless them – **provided they listened to God; obeyed His commands; trusted Him; and depended on Him for all their needs.** These were God's obvious conditions for His people. But for the most part God's people failed to recognise His prominence, or take notice of His requirements, and hence they suffered the consequences.

A good summary of Yahweh's purposes in allowing Israel to go through times of testing is found in the following portion of Moses' God-given instructions to His people as they were being prepared to enter the Promised Land:

Deut 8:1-3 *"The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that Yahweh swore to give to your fathers.²And 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."*

This is a clear principle for God's people which stands for all eternity. God's Word is the foundation of our faith; the means by which God conveys His requirements to which we must be obedient; and the many encouragements for us to depend on Him for all our needs.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul refers to Israel following their deliverance from Egypt; being set apart to God and Moses; and favoured with spiritual food from heaven, and spiritual drink poured out from a rock (**1Cor 10:1-4**). *Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. (1Cor 10:5)*

Paul then goes on to say:

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 1Cor 10:11-12

The point is that Israel was a God-given example of the tendency of humanity to live according to their own selfish desires; and more importantly, the failure to live by faith, obedience, and dependence on our Maker.

d. Examples of people who were faithful, obedient, and dependent on God

We find these examples in the records of people such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, and the prophets – to name just a few. Elsewhere in these booklets we have looked at illustrations of them, and how God showed His pleasure with their faithfulness to Himself. The Scriptures highlight them as examples of how Yahweh longed for His people to live.

➤ **Enoch**

There is very little said about Enoch, but what was written emphasises God's pleasure in the fact that Enoch had walked with God. Such a pleasing walk would no doubt have included faith, obedience, and dependence on God.

Heb 11:5-6 *By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. ⁶And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Also **Gen 5:24**)*

➤ **Noah**

When the wickedness of humanity had grown so great, and every inclination of their thoughts were only evil all the time, Yahweh regretted that He had made

people. His heart was deeply troubled and He chose to wipe mankind off the earth (**Gen 6:5-7**). But –

Gen 6:8-9 (NIV) *But Noah found favor in the eyes of Yahweh. ⁹...Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.*

At that time of devastating wickedness, Noah was the only righteous man whom God could choose to build an ark for the purpose of saving Noah's family, and two of every living creature on the earth. Even though it was a huge project which would take a number of years to complete, and was nowhere near the sea, Noah believed what Yahweh had said and remained faithful to the task.

Gen 6:22 (NIV) *Noah did everything just as God commanded him. (Also 7:5; 9 & 16)*

Noah is an enduring example of a righteous; blameless; faithful man who 'walked with God'.

➤ Abraham

The example of faith that is particularly highlighted in the Bible is that of Abraham, whose faith in what God had promised was credited to him as righteousness.

*Abram believed Yahweh, and he credited it to him as righteousness. **Gen 15:6 (NIV)***

In his full explanation of the gospel in Romans, the apostle Paul refers back to this incident and emphasises the importance of faith as the basis on which God credits righteousness to all true believers in Christ.

Rom 4:20-24 (NIV) *Yet (Abraham) did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²²This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." ²³The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, ²⁴but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.*

Please read through Romans 3:21 to the end of chapter 4, and also Galatians 3:6-8; and James 2:23.

These are just a few examples of men whose faithfulness to Yahweh was seen in their fear of the Lord, and their obedience and dependence upon God.

e. Jesus as our ultimate example

In the Gospels, it becomes clear that Jesus was **fully obedient** to His Father, and lived out His life and ministry in **total dependence** on Him, and with **absolute faith in God** to do whatever He led Him to do.

The gospel of John makes it very clear that Jesus only did what the Father showed Him to do, or spoke as He was led by the Father:

***John 6:38** For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.*

***John 8:28** So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.*

***John 12:49** For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken.*

Remember – **Jesus is the example of how we should live by faith** and run the race with perseverance – the One on whom we are to always be fixing our eyes. After writing chapter 11 of Hebrews which is all about examples of men and women of faith in the Bible, the author strongly encourages the readers:

*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. **Heb 12:1-2a** (NIV)*

So, not only is Jesus our supreme example, but He is also the **pioneer** – the one who **initiated our faith** – and **perfected** it through His faith, obedience, and dependence on God.

Q. As you stop and think about this, how would you explain the ways in which we can grow in our faith so that we are more like Jesus?

Not only is Jesus commitment to obey His Father seen in the day to day events of his ministry, but even more so when it came to the time of His crucifixion. Just before He was arrested and taken before Roman governor, Jesus went to pray at the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew exactly what was going to happen, and particularly how He was going to suffer the wrath of God as He was being punished for all our sins. What made it so serious for Jesus was that He is holy – totally perfect in His whole being – and yet He was going to have to take all our imperfections – our sins – upon himself as He hung on the Cross.

2Cor 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

As He was praying at Gethsemane, Jesus asked the Father that if it was possible – could He remove the suffering from Him. But He also said – “...yet not my will, but yours be done.” (Luke 22:42). So even though Jesus knew what He was going to suffer, He was still committed to being obedient to His Father.

Jesus' crucifixion was the ultimate example of faith, obedience, and dependence on His Father. Does that mean that we will suffer to the same degree? Obviously not! But as born-again children of God, the Scriptures do tell us that suffering for Christ's sake is a condition of being full heirs with Christ.

Mat 16:24-25 *Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

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.*

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.*

f. Faith in God

Although the word 'faith' itself does not appear very much in the OT, the concept of faith in the living God is very much conveyed to us in the lives of many of God's chosen people; and also by the use of other words such as 'believe' and 'trust'. The psalmists and some of the prophets give us a good indication of the nature and attitude of 'faith' particularly in the use of the word 'trust'.

Psa 37:3-5 *Trust in Yahweh, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. ⁴Delight yourself in Yahweh, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵Commit your way to Yahweh; trust in him, and he will act.*

We can have complete trust in Yahweh because He is totally faithful – He is trustworthy and dependable. Therefore we can delight ourselves in Him; we can commit our way to Him; and He will give us the desires of our heart.

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 Yahweh the Lord is an everlasting rock.*

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."*

These verses are wonderful inspirations to trust in Yahweh. One of the interesting points in the Jeremiah verses is that our trust can go deeper than trusting in Yahweh, to **Yahweh Himself being our main point of trust**. Look at the wonderful blessings of having Yahweh as the center of our trust.

In the NT 'trust' is rarely used, but 'faith' becomes the predominant word when it comes to our daily walk with the Lord. The broader meaning of faith is conveyed primarily in **Hebrews 11** – the 'Faith chapter'.

➤ The meaning of faith

In **Heb 11:1** 'faith' is described as *'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.'* (ESV); or *'the confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.'* (NIV); and *'Now faith is the assurance that what we hope for will come about and the certainty that what we cannot see exists.'* (ISV). Then a few verses further on in we see that the focus of faith is on God Himself, and that He will reward those who diligently seek Him.

Heb 11:6 (NIV) *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

In terms of our relationship with God, faith in its fullness can be explained as **'absolute confidence in who God is, and all that He has said in His Word'**. If we have even a little bit of doubt, then our faith is weak and will not be effective. Faith has 'assurance'; 'confidence'; and will compel us to earnestly seek Him.

Faith is a growing thing, with its beginning at the point of believing in Jesus and accepting Him as Savior and Lord. But faith must grow for it to become effective in the ways that God has purposed for us; and that takes place as we deliberately commit ourselves to giving God first place in our lives, primarily by seeking to know Him through His Word, and by His Spirit.

Rom 10:17 *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

➤ The importance of faith

People's faith in God has always been of immense importance. The Scriptures are full of God's promises, but they are only fulfilled as people trust in God and are obedient to His commands.

In Jesus' time of ministry, He didn't hold back from telling people about their lack of faith; even His disciples.

Mat 8:26 *And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.*

Mat 14:31 *Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

But there were many cases where people who needed to be healed or delivered from demons came to Jesus, fully believing that He could heal them.

Mat 9:22 *Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.*

Mat 15:28 *Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.*

Jesus also encouraged His followers to ask in faith, and they would receive.

Mat 21:22 *And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."*

Luke 11:9-10 *And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*

➤ **The apostle Paul also highlights the importance of faith.**

Firstly, in Romans where he speaks of the obedience of faith, and of righteousness being credited to us when we place our faith in Jesus and what did for us through the Cross. (**Rom 1:5; 15:18; 16:26; 4:22-25**)

Secondly, when he emphasises: '*...but the righteous shall live by his faith.*' **Rom 1:17 & Gal3:11** (Originally from **Hab 2:4**)

Thirdly, when he underscores the need to walk by faith and not by sight. **2Cor 5:7** '*... for we walk by faith, not by sight.*'

'Sight' means the things we see as part of normal day to day living, and in which we tend to put our trust.

'Faith' is believing in the things of God that we cannot see, and in the promises that are written in God's Word but which seem impossible to be fulfilled. **It is having a total confidence in God and all that he says He will do.**

Paul communicates this principle in other ways as well:

2Cor 4:18 *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Rom 8:24-25 *For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

'Hope', in this context, is the expectation; the anticipation; the longing for what God has promised that will transpire when we are taken to be with Christ – particularly the transformation of our bodies, and the magnificence of spending eternity with Him in His perfect heaven.

➤ **God tests our faith because it is precious to Him**

'Faith' in the lives of God's people is of huge importance to God; even to the point where He tests our faith to see if it is genuine.

1Pet 1:5-9 *...who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

Q. From what we have suggested so far, and from your personal understanding, how would you explain what faith in God means?

➤ **Faith gives us assurance about things we cannot see.**

This is where faith becomes a challenge. We believe in a God we cannot see, and in promises that He has made when we have no proof that they will happen. But as our faith grows, so will the confidence and assurance in the unseen things of God grow.

Faith, confidence, and assurance – often coupled with 'hope' – are concepts that appear frequently in the book of Hebrews. Following are a couple of passages encouraging us to hold fast our confidence, hope, and faith.

Heb 3:6 *but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. (Also v.14)*

Heb 10:35-38 *Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶For 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."

It seems that at the time when we first made a genuine commitment to Jesus and accepted Him as Saviour and Lord, we were excited and had a real confidence in what had happened and in what Jesus would do for us. The change in our lives became obvious to those who knew us.

But often as time went on, that confidence seemed to have declined and we had more doubts about what God might do for us. One of the main reasons for this, is that the devil will do all he can to make us doubt what God says He will do for us. This is most likely if we are spending less time seeking God through His Word and prayer. The more time we spend building our personal relationship with God – the greater will be our confidence in the God who exists; who has drawn us to Himself; who has given us the free gift of salvation; and who rewards those who diligently seek Him:

Heb 11:6 (NIV) *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

Faith cannot really grow unless we earnestly seek Him. It is our personal relationship knowledge of God that builds our faith, confidence and hope.

➤ Scriptures encouraging us to have faith in God

The more common phrase for 'faith' in the OT is 'trust in the Lord'. There are many such verses in the Psalms; some in Proverbs; and some in the Prophets. In addition to the ones mentioned on p.12, these are just a few more examples:

Psa 56:3-4 *When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. ⁴In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?*

Psa 62:8 (NIV) *Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.*

Psa 115:9-11 (NIV) *All you Israelites, trust in Yahweh-- he is their help and shield. ¹⁰House of Aaron, trust in Yahweh -- he is their help and shield. ¹¹You who fear him, trust in Yahweh -- he is their help and shield.*

Pro 3:5-6 *Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*

Isa 7:9 (NIV) *... If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.*

Isa 12:2 (NIV) *"Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. Yahweh,*

Yahweh is totally trustworthy and will always fulfill His Word and His promises; He abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness (**Exod 34:6; Psa 108:4;**)

On the negative side, there are many scriptures showing the results of a lack of trust in Yahweh. These are just a few examples:

Psa 78:21-22 *Therefore, when Yahweh heard, he was full of wrath; a fire was kindled against Jacob; his anger rose against Israel, ²²because they did not believe in God and did not trust his saving power.*

Psa 118:8-9 *It is better to take refuge in Yahweh than to trust in man. ⁹It is better to take refuge in Yahweh than to trust in princes.*

Jer 17:5-6 *Thus says Yahweh: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from Yahweh. ⁶He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.*

Heb 3:12 *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.*

Heb 11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

➤ **In the NT there are many 'faith' encouraging verses.**

Jesus frequently encouraged His disciples – and of course all who are His followers – about the importance of faith; and also the expectations that they could have if they would ask in faith.

Mat 17:19-20 *Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁰He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."*

Mar 11:22-24 *And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. ²³Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. ²⁴Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*

Paul was also an encourager of faith – a faith which has its foundation in Jesus Christ and all that He achieved for us on the cross. And it is by this 'faith' that we are declared to be 'righteous' in God's sight.

Rom 3:21-22 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it -- ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction...

Rom 4:5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...

Rom 5:1-2 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Phil 3:8-9 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith--

➤ The righteous shall live by faith

The righteous can only truly live as God wants them to, by faith in God.

This prophetic statement made by the prophet Habakkuk is quoted 3 times in the NT:

Hab 2:4 ... but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Rom 1:16-17 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. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (Also **Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38**)

The main point being made here is that our faith; our trust in God – who He is; all that He has done for us; and all the promises He has given us – is of huge importance to God.

g. Obedience to God

As noted, faith in God is the result of a more intimate relationship with Him which will encourage us to live our lives fully as He desires – in other words – to put our love for God into practice and live in obedience to Him. We cannot say that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, if our lives are not focused on knowing Him and His purposes for us, and diligently applying the desires of His heart which are clearly expressed in His Word.

Following the 'Fall', the driving force of humanity was their self-centred sinful nature. And while God gave had given advice and directions to selected people, He didn't set out His Commandments until Israel was on its journey to the Promised Land. Towards the end of the 40 years of testing in the desert, they were being prepared by God to enter the Land. The book of Deuteronomy is all about this preparation; with a substantial content being the repetition of God's laws; including a recurring emphasis on the call to obedience; the fear of the Lord; and loving God with their whole being. This is just one example:

Deut 6:1-7 *"Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that Yahweh your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, ²that you may fear Yahweh your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. ³Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as Yahweh, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.*

⁴"Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one. ⁵You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

Perhaps the most extensive passage addressing both the blessings resulting from their obedience, and the curses from their disobedience, is found in Deuteronomy ch.28. The introduction to the list of 'blessings' is:

Deut 28:1-2 *"And if you faithfully obey the voice of Yahweh your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ²And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God.*

And the introduction to the list of 'curses' is:

Deut 28:15 *"But if you will not obey the voice of Yahweh your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.*

The sad thing is that there were 54 verse in the curses list, and only 15 in the blessing list. It is clear that Yahweh knew how stubborn and rebellious the people

were, and that He wanted to give them a clear emphasis of His hatred of their self-centred sinfulness and disobedience, especially when it came to them worshipping idols. Exodus ch.32 is one of many examples of Israel's rebelliousness and worship of idols.

Please read **Deuteronomy 30:15-20** which is a summary of the dominant theme of the whole book.

The lesson for God's people was that obedience, together with worship of Yahweh Almighty, is one of the basic requirements for His people. This is at the heart of God, and He doesn't change. But we also need to point out that we are no longer under the legalistic law system, as were the Jews. Rather, we have died to the law through Christ Jesus, and now we serve in the new way of the Spirit. So now the issue is not a matter of obedience to the written law, but obedience to the 'righteous requirements of the law'. And the means which God has now provided for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus is explained by the apostle Paul.

Paul introduces the transition from serving in the old way of the law, to the new way of the Spirit in Romans 7.

Rom 7:4-6 *Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. ⁵For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. ⁶But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.*

Then he continues by giving us a typical example of what it is like to attempt to obey God in the old way of the law. His failure to actually accomplish what he was striving for led him to a deep sense of frustration – *"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24)*. But praise God, Paul immediately follows with an introduction to the remedy – *"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."* (**Rom 7:25**)

He immediately follows this by expanding on the means which God has provided through Jesus Christ for us to be able to live in obedience to God. It is no longer the written law that we focus on with our minds, but the 'righteous requirements of the law', which we are able to fulfil as we 'walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh'.

Rom 8:2-4 *For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³For 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.*

What we see up to this point is that God has always required obedience from His people, but that generally they fell well short of His holy standards because they are too perfect for us to achieve with our limited human capabilities. But because of His great compassion and love for humanity, and by His grace, He has provided another way – through Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of Life who will lead us on the right path, to the point where we can fulfill the righteous requirements of God's law as we walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh.

To walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh is of crucial importance in the purposes of God. As such we will give further attention to it in chapter 16.

➤ Faith and obedience

The apostle Paul shows us that there is a definite connection between faith and obedience. In fact, the goal of the gospel is not only to bring people to faith in Jesus, but also to bring about '*the obedience of faith*'.

Rom 1:5-6 *...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ...*

Rom 16:26 *...but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith ...*

Faith in Jesus is meant to be followed up by obedience to Him. If our faith does not lead to obedience, then there is something wrong, and we need to give serious attention to it.

➤ **1John 2:3-4** *And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him...Jesus is our example of a life of faith and obedience*

1Pet 2:21 *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*

1John 2:5b-6 *By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*

Heb 5:7-9 *In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him...*

h. Dependence on God

As noted, mankind's failure to be completely dependent on God was originated with Adam and Eve when they partook of the fruit of tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Unwittingly, they had chosen to be independent of Yahweh and make their own decisions about what was right and wrong. The outcome was that they were separated from their Maker, and had a limited lifespan in which they had to make the choice to be God-focused, or self-focused and make their own decisions as to how they would live. Unfortunately, all their descendants – all of mankind – have been born with the same inherent sinful, independent nature, which very often makes it hard for us to be totally submissive to God and His purposes for humanity.

But throughout the Scriptures God has been drawing His people's attention to the need to be dependent on Him as their guide and their provider. One of the standout examples was when Moses was addressing God's chosen people Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land after wandering in the desert for forty years. Through Moses, God was saying that He deliberately let the people go hungry, and then supplied them with an unknown food that came down from heaven, so that they might learn that their real need was not earthly food, but the spiritual food which comes from Yahweh Himself.

Deut 8:3 *And 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. (Quoted by Jesus in **Matt 4:4** etc.)*

From the time of Israel's delivery from captivity in Egypt; then the crossing of the Red Sea; the forty years in the desert; and their entrance into the Promised Land; Yahweh was putting on full display His almighty power to protect; to deliver from their enemies; and to provide for their daily needs.

If only the people had realised all that God was doing for them! If only they had realised the necessity of their dependence on Yahweh to lead them in the

right direction and to provide them with everything they needed for life! But sadly, as we have often pointed out, their self-centered independent natures blinded them to what their powerful; compassionate; and loving God longed to do for them.

In total contrast to Israel – Jesus – our supreme example of what a godly life should look like – was fully submissive to, and dependent on His Father to empower Him; to provide for His needs; and to reveal to Him whatever He should be doing or saying. The Gospel of John highlights this aspect of Jesus' daily life.

John 5:19-20 *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. ²⁰For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.*

John 5:30 *"I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.*

John 12:49-50 *For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment--what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."* (There are also a number of other verses in John emphasizing the same point)

Hopefully, through what we have been seeing up to this point, we will all recognize two important issues.

1. Our natural tendency to be independent right to the core of our being.
2. The crucial importance of being dependent on God for all things – including whatever we need to be able to serve Him in His Kingdom.

Submitting our lives to dependency on God for all things is not an easy mission, and we will only make progress as we daily commit ourselves to walking in His ways. But the starting point is recognizing its importance – firstly from God's perspective, and then for us personally as we commit ourselves to live for Him and not for ourselves.

Even though the word 'dependence' does not appear in the Scriptures, there are many other expressions which convey the principle of dependence on God. The following verses are good examples.

Prov 3:5-8 *Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your*

paths. ⁷Be not wise in your own eyes; fear Yahweh, and turn away from evil. ⁸It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

Jer 10:23 (NIV) Yahweh, I know that people's lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps.

John 15:4-5 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

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.

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

These are a selection of scriptures showing us that Yahweh is the maker and provider of all things; that we are not our own; that we need to learn to trust in God for all things; and submit ourselves to daily abiding in Christ and relying on His strength and provisions. Our sufficiency is from God who makes us competent. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me!

Even with the most basic needs of living, we are to learn to be dependent on God. Jesus made it very clear that we need not be anxious about our daily needs, but that by faith we can be dependent on our heavenly Father to provide us with all our needs.

Luke 12:22-31 And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.

²³For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?

²⁷Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! ²⁹And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.

³¹Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

Verse 31 above is the key solution to the anxiety we tend to have when we find ourselves short of basic necessities – seek the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to us. The Kingdom of God can be described as the whole realm of everything Yahweh has made – whether physical or spiritual – and which is under His government and authority. And in His Kingdom, Yahweh has purposes in everything He does, and all that He allows to happen.

So it comes down to where our focus is. Is it on our own needs or wants – or is it on God and the things of His Kingdom? The 'Kingdom of God' is one of the primary issues in the Lord's Prayer. *'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'* **Mat 6:10**

Let's take on board the encouragement of Jesus to 'seek His Kingdom' – to be dependent on our Maker to provide us with our basic necessities of life.

➤ The Church's dependence on the Holy Spirit

The formation and development of the Church was dependent entirely on the power of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus first introduced the coming of the Holy Spirit, the apostles would not have understood the real significance of His soon coming presence with them. But Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the 'Helper'; the One who would teach them the Truth; and remind them of all that Jesus had said. The Spirit's function as their 'Helper' was to be much broader than what Jesus initially said when He first spoke about Him – as is seen in the book of Acts.

Then when Jesus was about to leave this earth, He said to His apostles:

"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." **Acts 1:8**

It was by the power of the Holy Spirit that the apostles were enabled to be Jesus' witnesses, starting in Jerusalem and then on into the whole world. The Day of Pentecost saw this coming of the Spirit in such a dramatic way, and He empowered the apostles, and grabbed the attention of the crowds of people around. Then throughout the book of Acts we see the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, and the apostle's dependence on Him to effectively proclaim the Kingdom of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Then, adding more to the empowering of the Holy Spirit – upon which the Church is supposed to be dependent – are the gifts of the Spirit as revealed to the apostles.

For the Church to function and grow as God intends it, we are dependent on the gifts of the Spirit which God imparts to the Church. If we continue to rely on

the natural giftings of people – as is often the case in the contemporary Church – then we are placing limitations on God's agenda for the Church to function as He originally intended. It was by God's grace that 'gifts' have been given to men.

Eph 4:7-8 *But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."*

Those gifts are the spiritual gifts enabled by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of building up the body of Christ; attaining unity of the faith; unity in the knowledge of the Son of God; and spiritual maturity matching that of Jesus Christ. The goal is that we will no longer be spiritual children, but will grow up in every way into Him who is the Head – Jesus Christ.

Eph 4:11-16 *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, ¹³until 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, ¹⁴so 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.*

¹⁵*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.*

There are certainly more comments to add to the subject of spiritual gifts for the Church, and this will be addressed in chapter 13 – 'To be Filled With the Power of God's Spirit'.

➤ The apostle Paul's dependence on the power of the Spirit

The apostle Paul, through his time of serving the Lord, came to appreciate his total dependence on the power of the Spirit to enable him to fulfil his appointed ministry of proclaiming Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. He could confidently say:

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

2Cor 3:4-6 *Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant...*

2Cor 12:9-10 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Eph 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

➤ The conclusion of this chapter -

- is that faith, obedience, and dependence on God for all our needs, and for the spiritual development that God is looking for in us, are some of God's most important purposes for us; and for which we will be rewarded if we are faithful.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Take time to praise and worship

This scripture lines up perfectly with this section on 'Dependence on God', and is also a wonderful expression of praise to Yahweh.

1Chron 29:11-14 Yours, Yahweh, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Yahweh, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. ¹²Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. ¹³Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. ¹⁴"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

Psa 72:18-19 Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. ¹⁹Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!

12. To Pray

Prayer is an essential aspect of the Christian life – it is the means which God has graciously given us to personally commune with Him; to make our requests to Him; and to stand against the forces of evil as we pray in the Spirit for all the Lord's people. Often we find it difficult – we don't know how to pray – but the Holy Spirit prays for us, and Jesus also intercedes for us.

Rom 8:26-27 *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

Heb 7:25 *Consequently, (Jesus) is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*

Also **Rom 8:34; Heb 9:24**

a. The importance of prayer

Both from God's perspective, and for our necessity – the importance of prayer is seen in its widespread inclusion in the Scriptures from the beginning to the end. The first indication of prayer in the Bible was back in the very early stages of history. Adam was the father of Seth, and Seth the father of Enosh; and about that time 'people began to call upon the name of Yahweh.' (**Gen 4:26**)

Then as we progress through the Bible we read the accounts of many men and women of God who walked faithfully with God and called on Him in prayer. The list of these faithful people is to a large degree addressed in Hebrews ch.11; but I would like to briefly mention a few of them here.

➤ **Moses, Aaron, and Samuel called on Yahweh** and He answered them.

Psa 99:6 *Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon his name. They called to Yahweh, and he answered them.*

Exod 17:10-11 *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.*

¹²*But 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.*

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

➤ **David** was certainly a man of prayer as is seen in many of the Psalms:

Psa 3:4 NIV *I call out to Yahweh, and he answers me from his holy mountain.*

Psa 4:1 *Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!*

Psa 5:2-3 *Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray. ³O Yahweh, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.*

This is just the beginning of many instances of David crying out to God in prayer, knowing that Yahweh alone was his salvation and deliverance.

➤ **Daniel** was another man of God whose prayer life is highlighted in the Book of Daniel. In spite of Daniel being cast into the den of lions because he was seen as a man of prayer, Yahweh protected him and kept him from all harm.

Then soon after that, Daniel realized that the seventy years of the desolation of Jerusalem was coming to an end, and he earnestly prayed.

*Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. **Dan 9:3***

Please read Daniel's prayer in **Daniel 9:4-19**; which is then followed by the appearance of the angel Gabriel and his answer from the Lord in verses **20-27**.

➤ **Jesus**. I'm sure you will be aware that Jesus regularly spent time in prayer with His Father, from whom He received all that He needed to carry out His ministry on earth.

Mat 14:23 *And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone...*

Luke 6:12 *In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.*

Jesus most agonizing time of prayer was in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to His crucifixion. He pleaded with the Father to save Him from the suffering of the cross – yet – as He also said: *"My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."* **Mat 26:42**

b. God-given Scriptural encouragements to pray

Beyond Jesus giving us a broad overview of the nature of prayer, including what we call 'The Lord's Prayer' (**Matt 6:5-15**), He gives us both the encouragement to pray, and also the powerful effects of prayers grounded in real faith.

Following are some of the important aspects of prayer.

➤ Asking in Jesus' name

John 14:12-14 *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."*

John 16:23-24 *... Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ²⁴Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.*

Asking in Jesus name is not simply a matter of using Jesus name in our prayers. Rather, from a biblical perspective it means to ask according to Jesus' nature, and **to ask in harmony with His will.**

➤ Persistence in prayer

Matt 7:7-11 *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"*

A Bible commentator appropriately suggests that the threefold expression – ask, seek, and knock – implies earnestness, diligence, and perseverance. There is also the implication of an increasing intensity in such prayer requests.

➤ Faith

Faith is certainly a fundamental aspect of prayer, founded on our relationship with Yahweh and His Son Jesus.

Matt 21:21-22 *Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. ²²If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."*

Mark 11:24 *Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*

Mark 9:23 *And Jesus said to him, "'If you can!' All things are possible for one who believes."*

As our faith becomes stronger, our confidence in God and what He says He will do will increase, and we will be bolder – more audacious – in our prayer requests.

➤ Audacious praying

Mat 17:20 *He replied, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."*

John 14:12-14 *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."*

This has always been a challenging proclamation by Jesus; one which believers tend to place limitations on because it seems to go way beyond what we believe God will actually do through His people. But the only limitations are the ones we place on ourselves by not applying the conditions as noted above – praying in **faith**, and **according to His will** (i.e. in Jesus name).

*And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. **1John 5:14f***

➤ Praying with authority

Luke 10:19 *NIV I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.*

Christ, by His death and resurrection, has destroyed – rendered powerless – the works of the devil (**Heb 2:14-15; 1John 3:8b**). As members of Christ, united with Him through living faith, we may participate in His victory – not for ourselves only, but for fellow believers around the world. Making use of Christ's authority delegated to us, through prayer we can be instrumental in binding the strong man, and spoiling his goods (**Matt 12:29; Luke 11:21-22**)

➤ Abiding in Jesus

John 15:7-8 *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

As cited elsewhere – 'To abide' means to remain in constant communion with Jesus; to remain united to Him by living faith; and to live in total dependence on Him. We are as closely connected to Jesus as the branches of a vine are

connected to its stem; and as we thus abide in Him, we can '*ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*' The wonderful outcome of this is that the Father will be glorified as we bear much fruit.

➤ Unceasing prayer

1Thess 5:17 ...*pray without ceasing...*

Eph 6:18 ...*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...*

➤ What about unanswered prayer?

Well, that can be a mystery! There are times when it is due to a lack of faith; or when our prayer is only one of hope, or even despair:

Matt 17:19-20a *Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?"* ²⁰*He said to them, "Because of your little faith.*

Maybe it is because we have asked amiss:

James 4:3 *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*

Or maybe we are secretly cherishing sin in our heart!

Psa 66:18 *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*

But **the most important thing** is that maybe God is waiting for the most appropriate time to answer; or that He is testing our faith to see if we will trust in Him and wait patiently for His answer.

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

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

These are just a couple of the many verses encouraging God's people to wait for Him, and we will enlarge on this in the next chapter.

In conclusion, it should be very clear from what God has conveyed to us through His Word, that prayer is of vital importance in our relationship with Him, and is also an incredible privilege – that as mere mortals, we can commune with Yahweh Almighty – the Maker of heaven and earth; the high and exalted One who inhabits eternity; the Holy One who is so absolutely perfect in His whole being. What an awesome God we have!

13. Be Still, and Wait for the Lord

The principle of waiting for the Lord appears frequently in the Scriptures; and is clearly linked to God's purpose for us to live by faith and dependence on God.

All Christians will have experienced delays in their prayers being answered; or in times of difficulty when they were expecting God to provide, protect, deliver, or heal. This in part is for the purpose of testing our faith to see if indeed we will trust in Him to help us in such circumstances. God's expectation is that we learn to wait for Him in faith and dependence upon Him.

Yahweh is gracious, merciful, and loving, and will provide, lead, or assist us, if we will but wait.

Psa 130:5-6 *I wait for Yahweh, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; ⁶my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.*

Since there are many God-given scriptures encouraging us to wait for Him, we will include a number of them in this chapter.

Isaiah 40 is a well-known scripture which combines the challenge to be consistently looking to the Maker and sustainer of all things in the universe, along with the encouragement to wait for Him to give strength in time of need:

Isa 40:25-31 *To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. ²⁶Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing.*

²⁷*Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from Yahweh, and my right is disregarded by my God"?*

²⁸*Have you not known? Have you not heard? Yahweh is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. ³⁰Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; ³¹but they who wait for Yahweh shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*

How encouraging is that – Yahweh Almighty; Creator and sustainer of the whole universe; is always there, waiting to strengthen us – provided we wait in expectation, with confidence that He will indeed strengthen us to do His will.

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

Psa 37:7 *Be still before Yahweh and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!*

Psa 40:1-4 *I waited patiently for Yahweh; he inclined to me and heard my cry.*

²*He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.*

³*He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in Yahweh.*

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!*

These verses from Psalm 40 reinforce the connection between 'waiting' and 'faith' – we trust in Him as we wait.

Lam 3:24-26 *"Yahweh is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." ²⁵Yahweh is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.*

²⁶*It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of Yahweh.*

'Hope' is also another aspect of waiting on God by faith; and as noted in p.29, it is the expectation; the anticipation; the longing for what God has promised. The 'salvation' in verse 26, and frequently elsewhere in the OT, has the notion of being saved from the various afflictions that one might have to endure.

This next verse also emphasises the correlation of 'hope' and 'waiting'.

Rom 8:23-25 *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Waiting on the Lord is a principle that we need to be constantly aware of, as is confirmed by the scriptures above, and many more – including some which we have included below, showing the various ways in which it is applicable.

i. Waiting upon God for:

➤ **Mercy**

Psa 123:2 *Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to Yahweh our God, till he has mercy upon us.*

➤ Salvation

As noted on p.47, 'salvation' in the OT refers predominantly to the notion of being saved from various afflictions that one might have to endure.

Psa 62:1b-7 *For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.*

²*He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.*

³*How long will all of you attack a man to batter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence?*

⁴*They only plan to thrust him down from his high position. They take pleasure in falsehood. They bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse. Selah*

⁵*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.*

Also **Isa 25:9 & Isa 33:2**

➤ Teaching of His Truth

Psa 25:4 *Make me to know your ways, O Yahweh; teach me your paths.*

⁵*Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.*

In order to truly know God and His ways we need to be consistently seeking Him – even to the point of waiting all day long for Him to teach us His ways.

➤ The fulfillment of His Word

Hab 2:3 *For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end--it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.*

God is truly faithful – He will fulfil His Word if we wait with confidence.

➤ The ultimate hope of salvation – the return of Christ

Luke 12:35-37a *"Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.*

³⁷*Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes.*

Rom 8:23-25 *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Titus 2:13 *...waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*

Also **Gal 5:5; 1Thess 1:10**

Hallelujah – what an awesome hope we have as we wait for the return of our Saviour and Redeemer – Jesus Christ. Until that day – being dressed for action; always being 'lights' to the world; and waiting in expectation for His return – are dependent on the closeness of our personal relationship with Him.

ii. Attitudes in waiting

➤ With all your heart (soul)

Psa 31:24 *Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for Yahweh!*

(Also **Psa 27:13-14**)

➤ With patience

Psa 37:7 *Be still before Yahweh and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!*

Also **James 5:7-8**.

➤ With full confidence

Mic 7:7 *But as for me, I will look to Yahweh; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.*

iii. Those who wait for the Lord:

➤ Are blessed

Isa 30:18 *Therefore Yahweh waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For Yahweh is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.*

➤ Experience His goodness

Lam 3:24-26 *"Yahweh is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." ²⁵Yahweh is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. ²⁶It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of Yahweh.*

➤ Will not be put to shame

Psa 25:3 *Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.*

Also **Isa 49:23**

➤ Will renew their strength

Isa 40:28-31

➤ Will have expectations from Yahweh

Psa 38:15 *But for you, O Yahweh, do I wait; it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer. (Also Psa 62:5)*

Isa 64:4 *From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.*

iv. Examples of men of God who waited upon the Lord

➤ Abraham

Abraham is an obvious biblical example of one who had to wait for God to fulfil His promise to provide him and his wife with a son, because for many years Sarah was unable to conceive and give birth. But in the course of time God again confirmed that they would have a son, and that their offspring would be as numerous as the stars of heaven. At this point – '*Abram believed Yahweh, and it was credited to him as righteousness.*' **Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3, 9, 20-22; etc.**

Then 25 years after God first made the promise; Abraham was now 100 years old, and Sarah 90 years old; but Isaac was born! God was faithful to fulfil His promise – He always has been, and always will be, provided we wait for Him with confidence that He will be faithful.

➤ David

The life of David was certainly an example of waiting for the Lord. Even though Yahweh had appointed him to be the king of Israel who would succeed Saul, he waited for God's timing – he did nothing himself to take his place as king; and he endured much persecution and opposition from Saul as he was waiting.

There were two perfect opportunities for David to take Saul's life, but in both cases he refused to do so (**1Sam ch's 24 & 26**). Rather David trusted Yahweh, and waited for His timing and His action to deal with Saul. Then as we read, the appointed time came when Saul actually took his own life when he was being pursued by the Philistines (**1Sam 31**).

David's right attitude of waiting on God to fulfil His purpose stemmed largely from the time he spent seeking the Lord and growing in his personal knowledge of Him when he was the shepherd of his father's flock as a young man.

v. The challenge for us to genuinely be waiting for the Lord

I trust that can see the importance that Yahweh places on our waiting for Him – not only for the provision of our needs, or the changes He will make in our lives, or the directions He will give us in service to Him – but also our being fully prepared for Jesus' return, and waiting with patience and great expectation.

14. To Free Us From the Power of Sin

The power of sin has been a major problem for humanity ever since the Garden of Eden. The first highlighted problem was with Adam's first son Cain who killed his brother Abel out of jealousy. From then on the Old Testament is full of evidence of the sinful nature that humanity had inherited from Adam. The power of sin is very evident.

But as we have seen in chapter 2 (Part One), God always had a plan to redeem us and to free us from this problem of sin. Remember too that God is holy – He is absolutely total perfect in His whole being; and because He is holy, He cannot accept sin in His kingdom. In fact, **the Cross of Christ shows us the seriousness of sin** – the wrath of God is set against sin and He has to punish it. And because of His amazing love, compassion, and grace for humanity, He sent His One and only Son Jesus to take upon Himself the punishment for our sins. Jesus crucifixion has made the way for us to set free from the power of sin.

The apostle Paul wrote quite a lot about being free from the power of sin; but it's not necessarily so easy to understand. His main teaching is in the book of Romans, where the main focus is on the 'Gospel' – God's plan of salvation and righteousness for humanity. Paul very carefully addresses every issue connected with the gospel, including: sin, salvation, grace, faith, righteousness, justification, sanctification, redemption, being led by the Spirit.

In Romans chapters 4 and 5, Paul has written about the righteousness that becomes ours by faith; and by God's grace. At the end of chapter 5 it seems from what Paul has written that an increase in sin will result in more of God's grace. This raises the question: *'What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?'* (**Rom 6:1**). Paul's immediate response was: *'By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?'*

Following on from the emphatic *'By no means'*, Paul continues in chapter 6 to expand on the issue of sin; how Christ has provided freedom from the power of sin; and how we are to apply it in our lives.

Rom 6:2-18 *By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶For we know that our old self was

crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--⁷because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.

¹⁴For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

¹⁵What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

What is often puzzling to many Christians is that Paul states quite strongly in Romans 6 that we have **died** to sin; we have been **set free** from sin; we must consider ourselves **dead to sin** and alive to God in Christ Jesus. And yet he then goes on to say that we must **not let sin reign** in our mortal body; and that we are **not to present our members to sin** as instruments for unrighteousness.

So if we are freed from sin – dead to sin – how come sin can still reign in our bodies; how come we continue to commit sins? It seems quite a paradox! There are a few important points that need to be made in response to these questions.

➤ **Firstly; we have a two-fold problem – 'sins' and 'sin'**

In the first section of Paul's exposition of the Gospel (1:1 to 5:11), the plural word '**sins**' has prominence, while in the second section (5:12 to 8:39) the singular word '**sin**' is repeated, and is the subject mainly dealt with. We need to be aware of both aspects of sin, as it will help us to understand the significance of being dead to sin.

'Sins' (plural) are **the wrong things we do** – the sins that we commit; or the wrong attitudes that we have – things that can be named and listed. Whereas 'sin' (singular) is the **sinful nature** that we inherited from Adam, and that **leads us** to do or think wrong things. It is **the governing principal** at work in our inner being which causes us to be 'self-focussed'; unloving; unkind; prideful; etc. – 'it's all about me'. No matter how many 'sins' I commit, it is always the 'sin' principle – the sinful nature – that leads to them. I need forgiveness for my sins, but I also need deliverance from the power of sin at work within me.

The apostle John makes it clear that we will sin; and that when we do, we need to confess those sins in order to receive forgiveness.

'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.' **(1John 1:8-10)**

Every person is born with a sinful nature. The Bible also calls it our 'old self'; the 'flesh'; or 'carnal' in KJV. It is the sinful nature – the flesh – that Paul is referring to in Romans 6. Before we came to know Christ as Saviour, we were ruled by sin – controlled by our sinful nature – slaves to sin. But now, in Christ, we have the potential to be free from the controlling power of sin.

➤ **Secondly; it is a spiritual issue**

What we need to remember before we proceed; is that **what God does in the spiritual realm is actually real; and is established for all time**. But when it comes to **applying** it to our lives, we have to make the right decisions; to accept it as God's provision for us; and to live it out by faith in the power of God as we submit ourselves to the leading of His Spirit within us.

➤ **Thirdly; God has made the provision of freedom from the power of sin, but there are conditions by which it becomes effective.**

God has made the provision of our freedom from the power of sin through Jesus' death on the Cross; and our faith in our being united with Him as He died and rose again. God has taken us out of Adam (humanity bound up in sin); and placed us in Christ (humanity set free from the power of sin).

Praise God, He has provided us with righteousness; He has crucified our sinful self with Christ; and He has given us newness of life in Christ. He has done all this, and more, '*... in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing...*' God has made the provisions; but as noted, we have a part to play for it all to be effective – **and that is by reckoning; determination; faith; and obedience.**

God has created us with a free will – He has sovereignly given us the power of choice. That is obvious right from the beginning when God gave Adam the responsibility of making the right choice; and if he made the wrong choice, he would suffer the consequences. It is also obvious throughout the history of Israel. In spite of Yahweh's extraordinarily powerful display of His power in delivering his people from Egypt; the Red Sea crossing; and His miraculous provision of their daily needs; His chosen people – for the most part – turned their backs on Yahweh and chose to live as they wanted, including worshipping foreign gods which they were strictly forbidden to do.

Yahweh had repeatedly set before His people **His requirements** for them to obey His laws; to fear Him; to love Him with all their heart; and to walk in His ways. If they did, they would be blessed abundantly; but if they refused, they would suffer the consequences. (*Deut 10:12,13; ch.28*)

God has sovereignly given us the freedom of choice for definite purposes. But let it be said here that we have **to consistently live by faith; obedience; and dependence upon God for all things**. God wants us to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh; to learn to be overcomers of the flesh, the world, and the devil. All this is for the purpose of bringing glory to our God and Saviour; and of our being progressively changed into the likeness of Christ.

So in **reality**; in the spiritual sense, we have been set free from the power of sin. But in the practical; application sense – as Paul goes on to expound in Romans 6, **we** – by faith, and the determination of our will, need to **reckon** ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ; we have to **offer ourselves** to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and to **offer the parts of our body** as instruments of righteousness.

When faced with situations where we are tempted to sin, **we need to declare** – as Paul himself did – that I am '*...dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus...*' (*Rom 6:11*); and – '*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*)

➤ **Fourthly; just as Jesus did, so we too have to learn to be obedient in the face of temptations and trials**

Christ lived a human life, but one that was sinless. In a sense He was 'dead to sin', because He didn't have the sinful human nature that we were all born with. But nevertheless, as a human being He was still subject to temptation as we are, yet without sin.

Heb 4:15 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

Jesus was totally submissive to His Father's will, and was so strongly led by the Spirit of God that He would have more clearly recognised sin than we do.

But He still *'...learned obedience through what he suffered.'* (**Heb 5:8**); He kept His Father's commandments (**John 15:10**); He chose to do only the will of His Father (**John 6:38**); and He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death (**Phil 2:8**). Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith; He is our example – the one on whom we should keep our eyes fixed. (**Heb 12:1-3**).

As our example, Jesus had to learn obedience through what He suffered; and so do we. Obedience is still a major part of the Christian life – but not obedience to the written law – for we are free from the law because we have died to it in Christ; but rather it is **'the obedience of faith'** (**Rom 1:5; 16:26**) and fulfilling the **righteous requirements of the law** as we live according to the Spirit (**Rom 8:4**).

Because we were born in sin, we have become all too familiar with sinful tendencies and habits; and we continue to be aware of them; and to be tempted by them. We need to be consistently aware of this so that we don't continue to walk that way – to walk according to the flesh. Rather, we need to more aware of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us; who is here to guide and lead us on the straight and narrow path – **we are to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh**. This is the only way by which we are enabled to fulfil the righteous requirements of the law (**Rom 8:4-14**); and it is the only way by which we can **work out the freedom from sin that God has provided** by uniting us with Christ in His death and resurrection.

Therefore, because we are now dead to the power of sin, we have to walk in obedience as did Jesus; we need to choose to do the will of the Father; we have to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus; we have to offer ourselves to God, and the parts of our body Him as instruments of righteousness.

➤ It is for discipline we have to endure

Heb 12:1-8 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

³*Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*

⁴*In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.* ⁵*And 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.* ⁶*For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."* ⁷*It 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?* ⁸*If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*

➤ **We are now to be slaves to righteousness**

To be a 'slave' in this context does not mean being forced to work; or dominated by a master. Rather it implies that we are to make a **definite choice** to be **totally committed** to righteousness (v.18).

After making the statement about being slaves to righteousness in **Rom 6:18**, Paul continues to explain the significance of it:

Rom 6:19-23 *I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.* ²⁰*When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.* ²¹*What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!* ²²*But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.* ²³*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

So, rather than serving our own selfish and sinful desires, Paul is saying that we ought to be **fully committed to the righteousness that God has freely given us** because of His compassion, grace, and love. The **benefit** of this commitment to pursue righteousness is holiness; and the end result is eternal life.

The apostle Paul has given a lot of attention to God's purpose for **us to be freed from the power of sin**. Jesus made a huge sacrifice to make it possible for this to be real in our lives. So our obligation to being freed from sin and becoming wholeheartedly committed to righteousness, should not only be for the benefits we receive, but **because of our 'fear of the Lord' – our total reverence and respect for what God has done through Jesus to rescue us from sin, and make us children of God.**

Take time to praise and worship

Psa 103:1-22 *Of David. Bless Yahweh, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!*

²*Bless Yahweh, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,*

³*who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,*

⁴*who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,*

⁵*who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

⁶*Yahweh works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.*

⁷*He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.*

⁸*Yahweh is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

⁹*He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.*

¹⁰*He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.*

¹¹*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;*

¹²*as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*

¹³*As a father shows compassion to his children, so Yahweh shows compassion to those who fear him.*

¹⁴*For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.*

¹⁵*As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field;*

¹⁶*for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.*

¹⁷*But the steadfast love of Yahweh is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children,*

¹⁸*to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.*

¹⁹*Yahweh has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.*

²⁰*Bless Yahweh, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!*

²¹*Bless Yahweh, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will!*

²² *Bless Yahweh, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless Yahweh, O my soul!*

15. To be Filled With the Power of God's Spirit

This is another very important purpose of God for us; but one which is sometimes not very well understood; or often not correctly applied in the body of Christ. Perhaps we tend to gloss over it because we don't feel that we really need the 'power' aspect of the Holy Spirit. Most of us in Western culture are 'smart', we have all that we need, and life is pretty comfortable. So we become complacent about it – as we do with many of the purposes which God desires to be working out in our lives as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

But the power of God's Spirit is highlighted in God's Word, so don't take it too lightly. The pouring out of God's Spirit was prophesied firstly in the OT.

Joel 2:28-29 *"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. (Also Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 39:29)*

Then in the NT John the Baptist introduced the coming Messiah who would baptise people with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Luke 3:16

Then it was in Jesus final discourse with His disciples, before he was arrested and crucified, that He introduced the coming of the Holy Spirit. But at that point He didn't speak of the power of the Spirit.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. John 14:15-17

It wasn't until after Jesus crucifixion and resurrection, as His was about to ascend to His throne in heaven that He told His disciples:

"And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Luke 24:49

This promise was fulfilled ten days later on the Day of Pentecost when they were all baptised with the Holy Spirit. They were '*clothed with power from on high*', and powerful things began to happen. The book of Acts is filled with

accounts of such Spirit empowered events as the church spread and rapidly grew in numbers; with Acts chapter 5 being a summary of these wonderful events.

Act 5:12-16 *Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.*

The preaching of the apostles and other men of God was also empowered by the Spirit, arousing forceful opposition from the religious Jews. A standout example was Stephen; 'a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit' (**Acts 5:5**)

Act 6:8-10 *Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. ¹⁰But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.*

After Stephen had proclaimed the Word of God, and strongly criticized the religious leaders for crucifying the Messiah, he was stoned to death. One of the Jews who gave approval to his death was Saul. From that time on a great persecution broke out against the church; notably led by Saul. But what followed was an amazing example of the grace of God and His power to change people.

Jesus confronted Saul while he was on his way to Damascus to put Christians in prison. Acts chapter 9 dramatically explains the powerful effect this encounter had on Saul; who in the course of time became known as 'Paul'. Saul had always been passionate about his traditional Jewish beliefs; and God would have known that. God also knew that he would become a passionate follower of Jesus, and one who would be totally committed to proclaiming Christ and Him crucified.

a. The power of God's Spirit in all believers

As a result of the powerful experience that Paul had, he became very aware of the power of God's Spirit in his life. And also, as he saw this power at work in the spread of the gospel and the growth of the church, he sought to highlight the

need for believers to be aware of the greatness of the power of the Spirit in the lives of believers with a variety of consequences.

It was mainly in Paul's letters to the Corinthians and Ephesians that he emphasises the power of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 1, in his **first prayer** for the believers, he introduces them to the '*immeasurable greatness of His power*':

Eph 1:18a-20 *...having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know...¹⁹what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might²⁰that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places...*

The power that is work in us is **the same power that raised Jesus from the dead** – the unlimited power of Yahweh who created all things in the universe by the word of His mouth and the power of His Spirit.

We too need to be aware of this unlimited power of Yahweh in our lives; and we too should be praying this prayer – for ourselves, and for our brothers and sisters in Christ, so that we will be more effective in serving Him by His mighty power; including being more effective in proclaiming the gospel, which is '*The power of God for salvation...*' (**Rom 1:16 & 1Thess 1:5**)

In Paul's **second prayer** for the Ephesians he prays: '*...that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being...*' (**Eph 3:16**)

And then in His **final prayer** note on the power of the Spirit, Paul gives glory to God with a very thought-provoking declaration:

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

We know that Yahweh is all-powerful and able to do anything; but **do we really believe that this same power is at work in us?** The power of God's Spirit '*...is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine...*' (NIV)

To what degree do we limit the power of God in our lives because of our lack of faith in what God's Word tells us that He will do? Have we really come to terms with what Yahweh has purposed for us as His children? Or is our Christianity limited to believing that we are on our way to heaven simply because we believe in Jesus as our Saviour? That's certainly the first step of the journey, but as we are seeing throughout these booklets, God has many purposes for us that He clearly wants to work out in our lives.

In addition to Paul's prayer requests for the Ephesians to know the power of the Spirit in their lives; he also writes elsewhere:

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

'May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy...' (Col 1:11)

..."My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2Cor 12:9)

b. In what ways should we expect to see the power of the Spirit?

In a general sense all believers should have experienced the transforming power of the Spirit when they committed their lives to Jesus as Saviour and Lord. At that point of repentance, forgiveness, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, we experienced an inward change; a peace, a freedom, and a joy that we have been redeemed from our old way of self-centred living, to a new Christ-centred way. For some, the transition was more powerful than others; a transition from being deeply involved in evil things; to being set free, and filled with the Spirit of Life.

Also, in essence, **all believers** should be aware of the need for the power of God's Spirit to be at work in us **to transform us into the likeness of Christ** (See chapter 9, page 6). This is a major purpose of God for us, but one which we cannot achieve on our own. It is the Spirit who will enable us, and change us – **provided we are playing our part in seeking Him** with all our heart; **submitting ourselves to Him** continually; and **walking by the Spirit and not by the flesh**.

In addition to these fundamental aspects of the Spirit's power in our lives, He is also at work in the lives of God's people in many other ways.

➤ **The Gospel is the power of God for salvation**

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.*

1Thess 1:4-5a *For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.*

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.*

- **The power of the Spirit will do powerful works when by faith we make our requests in Jesus name**

This aspect of prayer has been addressed in the 'Prayer' chapter on p.40

- **The power of the Spirit is at work in the foolish, the weak, the low and despised – who have committed themselves to proclaiming Christ**

1 Cor 1:20-29 *Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

²⁶For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

1Cor 2:1-5 *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

Is this not a challenge for us to lay aside our natural tendency to use human wisdom and eloquent speech, and instead to rely on the Spirit of God to do His powerful work, both in our lives, and in the lives of the listeners? Unfortunately we are all too inclined to get in the way of the Holy Spirit; but thankfully He will use those who humble themselves and choose to be 'weak' – even 'foolish'!

- **The Spirit of Yahweh will give strength to the weak who wait for Him**

Isa 40:28-31 *Have you not known? Have you not heard? Yahweh is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹He gives power to the faint, and to*

him who has no might he increases strength. ³⁰Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; ³¹but they who wait for Yahweh shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

➤ **The power of the Spirit is made perfect in our weakness**

2Cor 12:7-10 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2Cor 13:3-4 He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. ⁴For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

➤ **The power of the Spirit is our sufficiency, and He protects and empowers us to be competent as ministers of the new covenant**

2Cor 3:4-8 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ⁷Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, ⁸will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?

2Cor 4:7-10 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

➤ **It is by the power of the Spirit that we can be strengthened to know with confidence that Christ is living in us**

The outcome of that strength and confidence is that we will grow to know the love of Christ to a much greater level; and that we will be filled with all the fullness of God.

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

➤ **It is by the power of God's Spirit that the Church will grow**

It's not by the plans of man, nor by the natural abilities and talents of pastors, teachers, or elders, but by their total submission to; and reliance upon the power of God's Spirit to enable them; to teach them the Truth; and to speak to the hearts of the hearers. This was powerfully evident on the Day of Pentecost, and the period of church-planting from there on.

Acts 2:41 *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls... v.47 ... And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

Acts 4:4 *But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. (Also **Acts 5:14 & 9:31**)*

How exciting it would have been back in those days to see the rapid growth of the Church by the power of the Spirit in the lives of the apostles and their disciples. Maybe, if we had the same total consecration of our lives to the extension of God's Kingdom by the power of His Spirit, we would see the same things happening in our day!

Can I suggest that you read through the book of Acts, with the view to seeing the amazing things that the Lord was doing as the Church was growing so rapidly, and ask yourself – why are we not seeing the same things happening now? Have we become too complacent about the things of God and the growth of His Kingdom? Have we become too distracted with our life-styles; or the things of the world? I know these are common problems in the lives of so many Christians!

➤ **The power of the Spirit enables us to be victorious against the forces of evil**

While this is something we will be addressing in Part Three, chapter 19 – 'To be Overcomers', I have mentioned it here because we need to realise the importance of the power of the Spirit to enable us to be overcomers of the

forces of evil. Following are a couple of important passages which show us our need to rely on His power to enable us to win the battle.

2Cor 10:3-5 *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. ⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...*

Eph 6:10-13 *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.*

c. The Holy Spirit imparts spiritual gifts to the body of Christ

This is yet another way in which we should see the power of God's Spirit at work in the Church for very important reasons. God has gifted each of us with different gifts – for building up the body of Christ, and for service in the Church.

But unfortunately, they have been subject to misuse and abuse – as they were in the early church of the Corinthians – and sadly in our own era – including the limitations that many place on the exercise of some of those gifts. But the biblical teaching on the necessity and exercise of the gifts for the building up of the body of Christ is pretty clear.

Some teach that some of the gifts are not valid today because the full provision of the Scriptures has made them unnecessary. I have to say that this is only a presumption, as there is no biblical evidence that there was going to be any cessation of the gifts until the return of Christ. We accept that all of Scripture is inspired by God for all His people, and should continue to be so. If we start to draw a line as to what biblical principles were only valid for the early church, but not for today; where do we stop? It is only human presumption to do so!

The devil been all too effective in influencing Christians to misuse; abuse; and even refuse some of the gifts of the Spirit; and he has also been too effective in limiting the working of the power of the Spirit in the body of Christ.

The apostle Paul addresses the important issue of spiritual gifts for the Church in **Romans ch.12; 1 Corinthians ch's 12-14; and Ephesians ch.4.** Many

books have been written on this subject, but here I would like to focus on Paul's letter to the Ephesians where he addresses the fundamental purposes of the **leadership gifts** that Christ has assigned to the Church.

Eph 4:7-16 *But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."*

⁹*(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)*

¹¹*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, ¹³until 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, ¹⁴so 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.*

¹⁵*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.*

➤ **Firstly, it is important to note from these words of Paul that:**

'...grace was given to each one of us...', and '...he gave gifts to men...'. Christ didn't just give gifts to those early church leaders, but to each one of us – to men (The original Greek word for 'men' refers to mankind, not just males)

The NASB version translates v.11 as: *'And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers...'* He gave 'some as'. In other words, different people were chosen to be gifted with these primary gifts for the leadership of the Church.

➤ **Then it's important to see the two primary reasons why He gave these gifts, and also their objectives.**

i. '...to equip the saints for the work of ministry...'

This is one of the primary reasons why such people are gifted to lead the Church – to equip the saints. The word 'equip' signifies 'preparing, and equipping' (NASEC), or 'complete furnishing' (Strong's). The 'work of ministry' involves all the different functions, or 'ministries', in the church, carried out by different

members of the body according to how they have been gifted by the Holy Spirit. This is not referring only to the leadership gifts spoken of in the letter to the Ephesians, but also the others as listed in the letters to the Romans and the Corinthians.

The role of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers, is to perform this **equipping role** by planting churches; proclaiming the gospel; prophesying; shepherding (guiding – counseling); and teaching the Word of God – all as enabled by the Spirit of God.

An **apostle** is 'one sent with a particular purpose', or, 'one commissioned'. The NT implication is that an apostle is commissioned by Christ – who of course still commissions people to go and establish churches, with leaders who are totally committed to serving and proclaiming Christ.

A **prophet** is one who gives specific words from the Spirit of God applicable to a need; circumstance; or perhaps a particular call of God to someone to carry out a particular task. The role of a prophet no longer involves new scriptural revelation; or new things about God and His general purposes for humanity; because these are already revealed in the Scriptures.

But there are times when the Holy Spirit will inspire a prophet to reiterate words which have already been spoken in the Scriptures, but which have been forgotten; overlooked; or ignored. This often happened in the OT when God used different prophets to powerfully reinforce words that He had already given to His people through another prophet.

There were prophets in the NT Church whom the Holy Spirit used to give direction to other believers.

Acts 11:27-28 *Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world*

Acts 13:1-3 *Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*

Paul's advice to the Thessalonians should still be applicable today:

1Thess 5:19-21 *Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise prophecies, ²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good.*

Paul wrote much about the gifts of the Spirit, enlarging particularly on prophecy in **1Cor 14**; with the following verses highlighting such encouragement:

1Cor 14:1-4 *Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.²For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.³But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.⁴Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.*

1Cor 14:39-40 *Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.⁴⁰But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.*

Having said all the above, we need to be aware of **the danger of false christs and false prophets**. Jesus Himself warned His disciples, and us, to be aware of such people who will seek to lead God's people 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. (Also **v.4-5 & 11**)*

Such things were actually happening in the early church.

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. (Also **1John 2:18-19 & 26; Jude 1:4**)*

Because of these false and deceptive people, John warned his readers:

1John 4:1 *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

Testing the spirits is always going to be necessary, and can only be done as we genuinely walk by the Spirit, and always submit ourselves to Him and allow Him to make us aware of false spirits and false prophets.

ii. '...for building up the body of Christ...'

This is not building up numbers of attendees in a church, but **'building' spiritually**. It's about spiritual maturity. And this is obvious from the words that follow **Eph 4:12** which give us the **objectives** – the goals – the purposes for 'equipping'; and for 'building up'. These goals are so crucial for the Church of Christ if it is to become what God has purposed for His people; and which can only happen by the power of the Spirit as we totally submit ourselves to His working in our lives.

iii. ... the objectives in 'equipping' and 'building up...'

➤ '...unity of the faith...'

This is something of crucial importance to God which we will address more fully in Part Three, chapter 17.

But briefly, what is 'unity of the faith'?

'**Unity**' is the unanimity; the harmony that all believers should have in their beliefs and their relationships with each other.

'**The faith**' is another phrase for the whole body of true Christian belief – founded on the finished work of Christ for salvation; then being filled with the Holy Spirit; and living a life of obedience and complete reliance upon God and His promises.

Unfortunately the Church is falling well short of this God-ordained purpose for His people. And in the context of these verses, it is because the Church is not really submitting itself to allowing the Holy Spirit to do His vital work in the life of the Church.

This 'falling short' is obvious from the diversity of understanding; or interpretation of the Word of God; and the divisions within the body of Christ as seen in the range of denominations. This is far from God's purposes for His people, and something we should be concerned about, and really seeking the Lord to see what part He wants us to play in restoring unity within the body.

➤ '...unity...of the knowledge of the Son of God...'

Again, the Church is falling short in its true knowledge of the Son of God, and is the primary reason why there is such diversity and disunity within the Church. A true, intimate knowledge of Yahweh and His Son Jesus is a fundamental aspect of what eternal life is all about. We have frequently pointed back to this key verse **John 17:3** - *And this is eternal life, **that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.***

If a true, personal, relationship knowledge of God is so fundamental to Christianity, why is the Church not focusing on it? Well, there are a number of reasons, most of which stem from the devil's misleading tactics. But rather than looking into the negative side, I want to encourage you to be focused on seeking to know God in a much closer way, as this is what will lead us to the place of understanding and applying the '*...all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him...*' (**2Pet 1:3**); including having an awareness of, and victory over the works of the evil one.

Just by way of reminder – this whole series of booklets is focused on the importance of **truly knowing God** in the personal intimate sense; and on **His purposes for humanity**. Knowing God is the most important thing in life; and the first of these booklets gives plenty of biblical evidence of its importance, and also encouragement to be diligently seeking God with all your heart. In this way you will come to know how wonderfully awesome He is; and to know the things that our Maker has purposed for us in our time on earth, including the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people.

➤ **'...until we all attain ... to mature manhood...'**

God's purpose for His people is that we mature spiritually; applying in our daily living all that we learn as we grow in our knowledge of God. This spiritual maturity arises from the previous objectives addressed above – unity of the faith; and unity in the knowledge of the Son of God.

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

➤ **'...until we attain...to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...'**

As I have noted elsewhere in these booklets, there is a 'wow' factor to this goal of God for us as His people. We have addressed this awesome aspect of our relationship with God in chapter 9, page 3 – 'To be Transformed into the Likeness of Christ'. And 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.

There is certainly more to be said about the gifts of the Spirit, but in this section I have sought to focus on those aspects which the Church in general is falling short of, and which can only be fulfilled by the power of God's Spirit. It is as God's people recognise His purposes in this respect, and as we humbly submit ourselves to His powerful working in the Church, that we will see the wonderful results that Paul has written about in his letter to the Ephesians.

d. Are there things that will hinder, or restrict the outworking of the power of the Spirit in our lives?

Of course there are! And while the list may be too long, I have presented here eight common restrictions.

➤ **1. The limitations that many believers place on their understanding and acceptance of the necessary work of the Holy Spirit in our lives**

Sadly, in the church of this age, there is an unwillingness to truly submit our whole being to the Lordship of Christ and the working of His Spirit within us. Too many Christians believe that when they put their trust in Jesus as their Saviour, they received 'a ticket to heaven', and from then on they don't really seek to know God and His purpose for them, or to work out those purposes by the power of God's Spirit.

But if we fail to recognize the purposes that our Maker has decreed for us, including growing in our understanding and acceptance of the work of the Spirit in us; then we will be placing serious restrictions on His activity in our lives. If we don't understand or accept our real need to be empowered and led by the Spirit, then we will only be living according to the flesh – our natural self-life.

As believers, we very much need to understand and accept the indispensable work of the Spirit in our lives.

➤ **2. The restrictions we place on knowing the Truth of God's Word by focusing on an academic approach to understanding His Word**

This is very common in the church worldwide, where there tends to be a focus on an academic approach to understanding the Word of God. But this places restrictions on our understanding of the 'spiritual truth' of the Word. God is a Spirit being, and He communicates His character and His plans and purposes by His Spirit of Truth. The message of God's Word to us is primarily 'spiritual', not intellectual. Our understanding of the heart of God will be very limited if we place our priority on a historical; grammatical; and hermeneutical interpretation of the Scriptures. I'm not suggesting that these resources should be totally dismissed; but rather that – while they can be helpful to some degree – they need to **subservient to the leading of the Spirit of Truth**.

The Bible is like no other book that has ever been written. It is inspired by God Himself, and **conveys His thoughts in ways that cannot be fully comprehended by human understanding**. In fact the 'thoughts' and 'expressions' of God are often confusing to our limited understanding; and the true message of Scripture can only be grasped by those who seek Him with all their heart; and who purposely ask Him to guide them, and lead them into the Truth.

Psa 25:4-5 *Make me to know your ways, O Yahweh; teach me your paths.*

⁵*Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. (Read also vv. 8-9 & 12)*

Only the Spirit of God can instruct us in His ways, and Jesus made it very clear that it is the Spirit of Truth who will lead us into all Truth – that is – the Truth that emanates from God and is contained in His Word – the Bible.

John 14:16-17a *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷even the Spirit of truth...*

John 16:13-14 *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (Also **John 14:26 & 15:26**)*

These instructions by Jesus to His disciples were a new revelation about the means by which God will reveal His Truths to His people; that is – by the Holy Spirit – now also revealed as **the Spirit of Truth**. Therefore, we dare not rely solely on academic means to discern the Truth of God's Word. **God will reveal Himself and His purposes to those who humble themselves before Him and seek Him with all their heart; relying on the Spirit of Truth to make Him known.**

The apostle Paul also wrote very clear instructions about the importance of understanding the 'thoughts of God'; 'the things freely given us by God'; 'spiritual truths' – all revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

1Cor 2:7-16 *But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"-- ¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. ¹⁴The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*

Paul also makes a concise statement about the difference between the 'letter' of the Word and the 'spirit' of it.

2Cor 3:5-6 *Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, **not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.***

Paul's primary reference here in the use of the word 'letter', is to the old covenant; that which was written on 'tablets of stone' (**vv. 3 & 7**). But there is also a principle which Paul is conveying here; and that is that the new covenant is '**of the Spirit**'; and '**the Spirit gives life**'. The covenant of 'letter' was a '**ministry of death**'. The ministry of the new covenant is **the ministry of the Spirit; not the letter**. And a vital component of the ministry of the Spirit is that He will reveal the Truth of God's Word to us, which the 'letter' cannot fully reveal.

2Cor 3:7-8 *Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, ⁸will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?*

The writer to the Hebrews gives us another slant on this important subject. The Word of God is 'alive' and powerfully 'active'. It is 'of God' and therefore it pierces to the dividing of soul and spirit; it discerns the thoughts and intentions of the 'heart' – **not** simply the mind. All this is by the power of God's Spirit.

Heb 4:12-13 *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

These God-inspired verses highlight the spiritual aspect of the Word of God. So let's not restrict the power of God's Spirit in our lives by confining our knowledge of the Truth of God's Word to an academic approach. Rather, submit your 'minds' to the Spirit of Truth, and allow Him to do His work.

➤ 3. The restrictions that human wisdom and pride place on our comprehension of the things of God.

But those who are childlike; weak; even low and despised; are the ones God chooses to reveal Himself and His purposes, and to use for the extension of His Kingdom by the power of His Spirit.

Luke 10:21 *In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.*

1Cor 1:26-29 *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*

➤ **4. Restrictions due to a very limited knowledge of God and His purposes for our lives.**

God's provision of **all that we need** for life and godliness comes to us **through the knowledge of God** – a matter we have addressed a few times already. But it is of such great importance that it is worth considering again. The key verse which clearly states this wonderful principle is **2 Peter 1:3**

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

Looking at that from the negative side – a limited personal relationship knowledge of God, will place restrictions on the things that God wants to grant us, including the way He wants to work in us by the power of His Spirit. We need to know God in increasing measure in order to grow in our true knowledge of His heart and His purposes for us as His children. And in fact, truly knowing God and Jesus is the essence of eternal life.

John 17:3 *And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

These verses point us in the right direction, although there is much more to be said. But rather than repeat the notes already made on this vital issue within the purposes of God, I would suggest – if you haven't really absorbed it – that you review pages 18 to 22 in Part One to refresh your understanding before continuing with the other restrictions to the power of the Spirit as follows.

➤ **5. Restrictions due to our lack of faith in the power of God to fulfil His promised provisions.**

Genuine faith in God is absolutely vital for us as His people. In fact, **without faith it is impossible to please God**. Enoch was highlighted in the Scriptures as

one who 'walked with God' – a statement that is twice repeated in **Genesis 5:22-24**. He was commended as having pleased God (**Heb 11:5**), because by faith he walked with God. Following that declaration, the writer of Hebrews gives the general statement, for all believers, that '*without faith it is impossible to please Him.*' (**v.6**)

It was a lack of faith on the part of the Israelites that deeply disappointed God, and also what put restrictions on the blessings that Yahweh had promised them, to the point that God had to punish them by sending them into captivity.

Num 14:11-12 *And Yahweh said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? ¹²I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."*

Psa 78:21-22 *Therefore, when Yahweh heard, he was full of wrath; a fire was kindled against Jacob; his anger rose against Israel, ²²because they did not believe in God and did not trust his saving power. (Also **v.32**)*

The history of Israel and their predominant self-centredness and lack of trust in the Almighty One who had done such powerful things for them, stands as a warning of the natural tendency of humanity – and dare I say – even of Christians, to be too self-reliant, rather than living by faith in our Maker; our Saviour and Deliverer; and our Provider of all that we need for life and godliness.

Such faith in God is of vital importance for us to live a life that is pleasing to Him. It is of such importance that God is always testing our faith to see if it is in fact genuine, so that ultimately we will receive the outcome of our faith – the salvation of our souls.

1Pet 1:3-9 *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, ⁵who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

➤ 6. Restrictions due to lukewarmness about the things of God, leading to spiritual poverty

Jesus strongly expresses His disapproval of such half-heartedness in the church in Laodicea. In fact He says '*So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.*' **Rev 3:16-17**. If you are not familiar with Jesus message to the Laodiceans, please read **Revelation 3:14-22**.

If we are in that state of lukewarmness towards the things of God, then we need to repent, and to 'open the door' so that Jesus can come in and commune with us and we with Him (**Rev 3:20**). Jesus wants us to be overcomers of our tendency to be self-focused and self-reliant; and rather be God-focused and totally dependent on Him. And as we do, we will learn – among many other things – that God wants to be at work in our lives by the power of His Spirit.

➤ 7. Restrictions because we all to easily remain self-focused, and distracted by the things of life and of the world

The tendency to be self-focused is a common feature in of all humanity due to the 'fall', where Adam and Eve chose to disobey God's command. But, as we have been learning, God has made the way for us to be freed from the power of sin; to become a new creation in Christ; and to be transformed into His likeness.

The more we become Christ-focused – the more clearly we will recognise our 'self-life' and make the appropriate responses. This will include asking for forgiveness; putting off the old life and putting on the new – which is Christ; seeking to know Him more intimately; and committing ourselves to being led by the Spirit and not by the flesh. The wonderful result will be that:

Life will become all about Him – not about us!

The distractions of the things of life and the world are issues which we tend to be less aware of; but which are real. The normal things that we all have to live with as we progress through life – things that we can't necessarily avoid – all too often take our attention away from living a Christ-centred life.

In addition to those normal things in life, are the distractions of the world with all of its enticements and traps. Some of the most subtle issues are those of **the world's entertainment system and social media**. The former is an issue because '*the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*' (**1John 5:19**). The latter is an issue because of the time that so many of us spend engaging in social media. Let me briefly explain what I mean.

The word **'world'** has different connotations depending on the context in which it is used. In the context in which we are addressing it here, it is best described by Vine's NT Dictionary as: the *"present condition (or state) of human affairs, in alienation from, and opposition to God..."*

It seems that it is all too easy for Christians to remain attached to the 'world' to some degree. Related to this are the things that our 'flesh' – our natural sinful nature – wants to hold on to, or be involved with for our own self-interest or satisfaction. So often it's just the natural thing we do – after all, most other Christians do the same kinds of things don't they? And what's so bad about it anyway?

Scriptures which are clear examples of the use of 'world' as described above:

John 12:31 (NIV) *Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.*

Ephesians 2:1-2 *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...*

1John 2:15-16 *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.*

1John 5:19 *We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.*

James 4:4 (NIV) *You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*

Also **Galatians 6:14**

The challenges for us personally

The whole **entertainment industry** (apart from Christian movies) is part of the **'world'**, and therefore under the power and control of the evil one (**1John 5:19**). This includes worldly movies and TV programs, and worldly music and discos. 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 real challenge for many of us. But even though worldly entertainment is so attractive, and fun to be part of, we should hate the idea of being entertained by stuff that comes from the devil. Even social media, which can have its good side,

can be an instrument of the devil by influencing many people in the wrong direction.

The response of many people to this is that they carefully check out the content of what they are watching. But **the real issue** is not whether **the content** appears to be quite harmless, but that **the source** of the entertainment is **the devil himself**. The devil's works can appear to be so harmless, but he always has underlying and deceitful motives for the purpose of leading people astray, and to 'steal, kill and destroy' (*John 10:10*). He even used the Word of God in his efforts to tempt Jesus. But Jesus knew his motives and responded with "It is written..."

As well as the seriousness of the devil's control over the things of the 'world', is the concern that entertainment is a '**passion and desire of the flesh** (our sinful nature)' (*Galatians 5:16-18 & 24* etc.). It is a '**thing of the world**', a '**desire of the flesh**' and of '**the eyes**' (*1 John 2:15-16*).

However, a **true believer** is supposed to have been crucified with Christ (*Gal 2:20*), and also crucified to the world (*Gal 6:14*), – which means that they are meant to be **dead to the world** and all its self-satisfying influences. **Therefore our attention should rather be on that which pleases God, and glorifies Christ.**

Rom 13:14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

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

Also 2Cor 5:14-15

Then of course, closely connected with danger of remaining connected to the 'world', is **the amount of time** where we spend – either watching the world's entertainment; or engaging with social media. The latter can be a great means of keeping in touch with friends and family; but as you are probably aware, there is a lot of bad stuff going on through social media. That's perhaps not so hard to recognise and avoid; but what we often don't realise is that we can be spending so much **time** with social media that we are **missing the time we ought to be spending with Yahweh; the high and exalted One; and with Jesus our Saviour.**

Is He not worthy of much more of our attention? And shouldn't we be spending much more time seeking to know Him and His purposes for us? Are we not supposed to love the Lord our God with ALL our heart; with ALL our soul; and with ALL our mind?

➤ **8. Finally – restrictions because of our independent spirit; and our failure to be dependent on God for all things.**

Our need to be totally dependent on God for all things has been extensively addressed in chapter 11 of this booklet. But I have mentioned it here from the perspective that our lack of dependence on God results in restrictions on the activity and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Our natural drive is to be independent; making our own decisions about everything really, without relying on God to lead us in the right direction. But God's purpose has always been that His people would be **dependent on Him for all things** – to totally trust Him; to walk in His ways; and to be led by His Spirit. The latter is the focus of chapter 16 in Part Three.

We will continue with God's purposes for humanity in the next booklet in this series – 'God's Purposes for Humanity, Part Three'.

There is much in these booklets that we need to be aware of and apply as we walk through our lives with God at the forefront. We cannot necessarily absorb it all in a short space of time, but God is graciously and patiently at work to lead us day by day as we commit ourselves to being led by His Spirit and not by our own self-life.

As a conclusion to this booklet, let's remind ourselves that Yahweh Almighty is the Maker of all things and He has purposes in everything He does, and all that He allows to happen. His all-inclusive plan has eternity in view, and He has given each one of us a life-time of opportunities to discover, and to apply those purposes in our lives – both for our eternal benefit, and for His glory.

Yahweh and His Son Jesus are so worthy of all glory and honor; they are so high and exalted; so majestic and glorious; and so holy – so absolutely perfect in their whole being. But human beings are so self-centered; so imperfect; prideful; and separated from God because of sin. But God's love, compassion, and grace are so huge that He has gone to such extreme lengths to save us from our sins and to redeem us back to the relationship which He originally created us to have with Himself.

Let's honor our Maker – our Saviour and Redeemer – by worshipping Him in Spirit and in truth; by giving our whole body as a living sacrifice – holy and acceptable to God; and by seeking Him with all our heart, for the purpose of knowing Him more intimately, and living our lives according to His plans and purposes for us.