

Spiritual Growth and Sanctification



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Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.



Messages on spiritual growth and sanctification by Johan Malan
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1. Extreme Spiritual Polarisation

Johan Malan, Mossel Bay, South Africa (September 2014)

“He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Rev. 22:11-12).

Many Christians are praying fervently for revival and the spiritual growth of believers so that more of the Lord may be seen in our lives, in our churches, and also in society at large. In Revelation 22:11-12, the Lord Jesus gives us an indication that during the period preceding His second coming there will indeed be a movement towards more holiness, but at the same time there will be increased apostatising and wickedness in the world. This spiritual and moral polarisation is now occurring in a much more explicit way than before: apostasy takes on extreme proportions, while the spiritual standard of holiness among the small minority of committed children of the Lord is constantly raised.

According to the Bible, these two opposite groups will each develop towards their uttermost objectives, which on the one hand will be the appearing of the true Christ to His faithful disciples, and on the other hand the appearing of the Antichrist to the deceived masses who have been waiting for a leader such as him. We are therefore faced with a highly polarised situation between light and darkness, or truth and error. The Lord Jesus is the Light of the world, and for that reason His disciples who follow in His footsteps are on a way of increased righteousness and holiness – that is the narrow way; and at the end of this path we will appear before Him in glory. The devil heads up the kingdom of darkness, and he is busy deceiving humanity to follow a false Christ, the Antichrist. They are on the broad way of unrighteousness and sin, and at the end of this road the Antichrist will gain authority over fallen humanity (Rev. 13:7).

These two roads became an obvious reality in the world after the first coming of Jesus Christ. Before that time, the darkness of sin and unrighteousness prevailed all over the world, except for a small group of believing Israelites. But then the Lamb of God came to atone for the sins of all people, after which He commissioned His disciples to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sin in the entire world (Luke 24:46-47). People were challenged to cross over from their sinful past into the marvellous light of Christ.

In all societies where the gospel was preached, it gave rise to a polarisation between light and darkness, i.e. between Christians and the unsaved millions. Paul said to believers in Ephesus: “For you were once darkness, but now *you* are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). To be able to do so they had to take a strong stand against the works of darkness and express themselves unambiguously against it: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather *expose them*” (Eph. 5:11). This opposition causes a great deal of antagonism between children of the light and children of darkness, as there can be no fellowship between Christ and the idols (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

As the light increased, opposition from the forces of darkness became more intense. The Great Commission to all nations has been carried out during the course of many centuries, and at this present stage the two roads of light and darkness have been established in virtually all societies on earth. However, the broad way still draws most people, and as sin increases in intensity, the pressure on Christians also increases – in certain countries much more than in others. But the Lord gives us more grace to persevere and keep on making progress on the way of holiness despite the pressure on us: “But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Rom. 5:20).

Being faced with aggravating attacks on our spiritual lives in the end-time, is an incentive for stronger perseverance on the way of more righteousness and holiness. If we do not practise greater dedication and vigilance we will slowly but surely become cold spiritually and start backsliding. In His Olivet Discourse, the Lord Jesus refers to increased evil in the end-time world, and warns lukewarm and compromising Christians as follows: “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold” (Matt. 24:12; NIV). There is no room for carnal and uncommitted believers. They will have to engage in serious soul-searching and recommit themselves to the Lord if they wish to remain spiritually standing during these perilous times.

The most important incentive for increased holiness however, is to be found blameless when we appear before the heavenly Bridegroom. Peter says: "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness ...? ... [B]e diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:11, 14). Paul prays for a similar blessing to the Thessalonians: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). Complete holiness pertinently refers to higher levels of spiritual maturity to which we should aspire in our relationship with Christ, as that would ensure that we will not need to be ashamed on the day of His second coming.

In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus also refers to the spiritual worthiness wrought by sanctification: "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36). He does not say that we should simply believe without giving further attention to our relationship with Him; no, we should be watchful for attacks by the enemy, and also for spiritual deception, while being vigilant with a view to extended periods of prayer: "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation" (Matt. 26:41). In this way we will ensure that we do not, like the foolish virgins, fall asleep at a critical moment, being oblivious of the fact that we have very little of the oil of the Holy Spirit in our lamps. We are convincingly commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

Furthermore, increased justness and holiness are also in the interest of the quality of our service as disciples of Jesus. His emphasis of these virtues in Revelation 22 are directly related to our appearance before His judgement seat to give account of our lives as disciples: "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Rev. 22:12). In a parable, Jesus says that He gives every disciple a mina, which refers to the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Some of the disciples put it to use and earned ten minas, others earned five, and yet others will stand before Him empty-handed – saved yet so as through fire (cf. Luke 19:12-24; 1 Cor. 13:15). We should not be content with minimum standards in our spiritual life but pursue more holiness and increased fruitfulness. There is the potential of producing fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold or even hundredfold after the seed of the Word has been sown in our hearts (Matt. 13:23). Does your life yield any fruit and will you be able, with boldness, to give account of your duty as a witness for Christ?

As far as the sinners and their evil works are concerned, there is an increase of apostasy which is building up to the point where they will fully embrace the Antichrist. The world is in an advanced stage of spiritual and moral decline, as evidenced by the fact that the satanic doctrine of a multireligious messiah for all faiths is taking root everywhere, also among deceived Christians: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). These people expose themselves to false doctrines, and in the process many of them depart from the true faith.

Paul says the following on the approaching Day of the Lord: "... *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:3-4). When the world has been conditioned through spiritual deception to receive Satan's man of sin as world messiah in the place of Christ, the end of the church dispensation will soon draw to a close, after which the deceived masses will be surrendered to the power of this impostor. They will spontaneously accept and worship him: "And all the world marvelled and followed the beast ... and they worshipped the beast" (Rev. 13:3-4).

The final point in the polarisation between light and darkness will be reached when Christ returns to the earth at the end of the great tribulation to judge the Antichrist and his powers. John says: "I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army" (Rev. 19:19). This confrontation will give rise to the battle of Armageddon, in which the Antichrist and his powers will be destroyed. Christ's kingdom of light will then be established on earth without any further resistance from the opposing kingdom of darkness.

This point has not yet been reached, which means that we are still in the heat of the battle. It is imperative to be spiritually equipped for that which lies ahead, and to this end there are a few pertinent questions which should be asked to every believer: "How intimate is your relationship with the Lord Jesus? How do you acquit yourself of your responsibilities during the increased polarisation between light and darkness? Are you a withholder of the Antichrist and are you still fighting the good fight of faith against the rising tide of deception? Do you seriously consider sanctification and are you filled with the Holy Spirit? Do you earnestly expect Christ's coming and are you ready for it?" If you are ready and well prepared, you will not appear empty-handed before Him but be counted worthy to be a co-heir of His everlasting kingdom.

There is much at stake in our spiritual life, but our highest objective should always be the honour of the Lord and the expansion of His kingdom. If we follow the way of the cross, and are prepared to suffer with Christ in the continued struggle against an apostate world, we will not only experience the peace of God in our hearts which surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:7), but one day we will also share in His unspeakable glory. We have every reason to stand firm in the Lord and to ensure that we do not end up in the ranks of those whose love has grown cold because of the increase in wickedness. Those whose dedication is diminishing have underestimated the stronger polarisation between light and darkness, and will pay a high price for their lack of commitment and perseverance.

We should persevere on the narrow way to the end, and take care not to be spiritually impoverished by the enemy of our souls. The Lord Jesus encourages us to be firmly committed while expecting His imminent second coming: "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Rev. 3:11). He also urges members of another congregation to be faithful to the end: "But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations" (Rev. 2:25-26). It is His desire that all His disciples will be among the overcomers.

2. A Tree That Bears Much Fruit

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Scripture reading: A man whose delight is in the Word of the Lord, “shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper” (Ps. 1:3).

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit” (Jer. 17:7-8).

A Christian is likened to a fruit-tree planted by the water. The reason for this tree’s success is very obvious – it is not to be found in any of its own virtues but in the fact that secretly, deep down where no one can see, it spreads out its roots by the stream. That is the reason why droughts, heat and adverse external conditions cannot overcome it. Its leaves are always green and its continued existence certain. That is also the secret of a dedicated Christian – he is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

The stream of water refers to the Lord Jesus, to cleansing by His blood, and to His invigorating power which ever flows to us through His Holy Spirit. This water quenches our spiritual thirst, it enables us to bear fruit which befits repentance, and empowers us to prevail against all the attacks that we have to endure. The life and invigoration which we derive from this stream is everlasting. Jesus said to the woman at the well: “[W]hoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

The grace of Jesus Christ towards salvation is available to anyone who is prepared to accept it by faith. When we become aware of our spiritual thirst we must simply go to Him to be cleansed from our sins, to refresh our souls and to fill us with His Holy Spirit. His invitation is extended to all people: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38). “But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive” (John 7:39). At the end of the book of Revelation He reiterates His offer of free grace: “I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts” (Rev. 21:6).

Is your life also characterised by the hidden source of power which the grace of Christ provides to you? If so, you will be able to stand firm on your convictions in an agnostic and hostile world. Even if there is a spiritual drought in the world in which thousands of people depart from the faith, you will not be part of the problem. Jeremiah says that the tree which has been planted by the water does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit (Jer. 17:8).

Nature provides us with a practical illustration of such a life. The shepherd’s tree (*Boscia albitrunca*) is a protected evergreen tree which grows in large areas of Southern Africa – also in the driest parts of the Kalahari and other semi-desert areas. Despite changing weather conditions this tree is always green, also during the worst droughts. Its secret is that its roots penetrate deep into the ground until it reaches a subterranean watercourse. A Wikipedia article, *Boscia albitrunca*, says: “A specimen found in the central Kalahari in 1974 had roots extending to 68m deep, making it the plant with the deepest known roots.” When extreme droughts and heat waves occur, leading to the withering and even dying of other trees, the shepherd’s tree remains green. Its branches are often cut so the leaves can serve as fodder for animals when it is very dry and no other grazing is available.

We should also have depth in our spiritual lives, and an unbroken connection with the fountain of living water; then we will never wither away spiritually and become the victims of harsh circumstances. Our faith should be determined by our relationship with the Lord Jesus, and not by external circumstances in the world, or by the changing opinions of other people. That is why Paul could say, even when he was confronted by the most forbidding circumstances: “I have

fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). He did not perish in the struggle, even though he died as a martyr for his faith in Rome. His faith did not diminish but, to the contrary, it was strengthened and he completed the ministry which he received from the Lord. God was his power and strength, and that carried him through every crisis – despite how humanly impossible the challenges appeared to be.

The most important condition for success in our spiritual life is to maintain a close relationship with Jesus Christ. That connection should always be open. Jesus prepared His disciples to stand spiritually firm in a hostile world, and to keep on bearing abundant fruit. The condition for a life of this nature is to abide in Him. He said: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5).

The fruit of the Spirit

The metaphor of the tree which yields fruit in season fixes our attention on the fact that the Lord expects fruit from our lives. However, that does not refer to human works which we do in our own strength, but to the fruit of the Holy Spirit – i.e. works that He does through us. Before that can happen, our entire personality and character need to be changed by the Holy Spirit, so we can have the correct disposition to please the Lord. When our motives are pure the Lord will work through us and achieve a great purpose with our lives. The propensities and guiding principles which the Lord wishes to instil in our hearts are described as the fruit of the Holy Spirit: “[T]he fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

These principles determine the deepest inclinations of a person’s heart, they shape the values which he pursues and determine his entire way of living as well as the nature of his actions. The nine fruits of the Spirit are clearly divisible into three groups, which reflect the believer’s nature and relationships on three levels of his life. The first three fruits describe the nature of your relationship towards God, the next three determine your relationships with other people, and the last three describe your basic characteristics as a person.

The first three fruits are love, joy and peace. God is **love**. During and after your rebirth the love of God is poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). You are rooted and grounded in it and it becomes part of your whole life. You love the Lord with all your heart because he saved your soul and accepted you as His child. You are no longer in rebellion against Him because of your sin, hence you no longer despise, blaspheme and avoid Him. To the contrary – you desire His presence, sing His praises, honour Him and call upon His Name. There is great **joy** in your heart for what the Lord Jesus has already done for you when He entered your name into the book of life, and also for what He will still do for you in the ages to come. Under all circumstances, even during times of sorrows and testing, you rejoice in the Lord and look forward to a wonderful future. In your heart there is **peace** which surpasses all understanding since the Lord Jesus is your peace. He said: “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (John 14:27). His peace is a deep, inner knowledge that your sins have been forgiven because you are reconciled with God. There is no fear for the future as you will not come into the judgement of the sinners. You also know that no hostile powers, distress, persecution or any other adverse circumstances will ever be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:35-39).

These first three fruits, i.e. love, joy and peace towards God, should also be put into action in your relationships with other people. That is precisely what happens when God’s *agape* love which reaches out to a lost world, fills your heart and mind and prompts you to bear the fruit of the second group, namely longsuffering, kindness and goodness. You are no longer vindictive and judgemental but **longsuffering** towards people. You have compassion with them and pray for their salvation, even for many years, without losing faith and writing them off. You are a **kind** and hospitable person who does not only live for himself, but has time for others and also reach out to them. You demonstrate **goodness** to people by sharing the gospel with them, and also help to alleviate their physical need as far as possible. Paul says: “And let us not grow weary

while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:9-10).

The third group of fruits, namely faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, are personal characteristics which are developed with the help of the Holy Spirit as well as the practising of self-discipline. You are **faithful** in all your commitments, above all in your quiet times, and not a careless and disorganised person who neglects his duties. You are also **gentle**, which means that you are benevolent. You are not harsh and unapproachable, but a meek person who is compassionate towards those who suffer hardships. Gentleness also means that you have a tender heart that does not resist the Word of God. You have a teachable spirit and are open to be admonished by the Word of God and by other people. Lastly, by the grace of God, you also have **self-control**. That means that you do not act impulsively by doing or saying things for which you later have to apologise. You do not, in a fit of anger, say bad things which originate from your uncrucified flesh, as that is definitely not the fruit of the Spirit. How do people experience you in everyday life? Solomon says: “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. ... He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit” (Prov. 16:32; 17:27). In the New Testament this wonderful disposition, together with the others which are mentioned, are described as the fruit of the Spirit. Only by the grace of God will you be able to show these fruits in your life, and not because of your own attributes, as they are all expressions of the divine nature of Christ with which we must be clothed. “[P]ut on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14; cf. Gal. 3:27).

Is that a description of your life as a Christian? If not, then confess the fact that you often grieve the Holy Spirit by your thoughts, desires, dispositions, words and actions. Put things straight with the Lord and surrender yourself completely to the authority of the indwelling Spirit of God. He will guide you along the path of righteousness. When this relationship is in order you will be like a tree which spreads out its roots by the stream. If you abide in Christ, His Holy Spirit will fill and control your life. When this relationship is disturbed the Holy Spirit will convict you of any wrong dispositions, intentions or actions in your life. Immediately have the obstacles removed through prayer and confession, thereby ensuring that you can proceed without any interruption to bear fruit which is worthy of repentance.

Humbling of the heart

It is not merely a once off experience in a Christian’s life to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to quench your thirst at the fountain of living water, as this often has to be renewed during times of crises. The disciples who were endued with power from on high in Acts 2, were again filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 4:29-31 and 13:50-52. Often when there was a major crisis and serious hostility they earnestly called upon the Lord to again strengthen their faith and give them boldness to continue with their commission of preaching the gospel.

There may be sin or carnality in a person’s life which disturbs his relationship with the Lord. That would cause a blockage which will prevent the stream of living water to freely flow through him to others. Humbling of the heart and soul-searching are needed to identify and remove the obstacle. Pray with David: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if *there is any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23-24). The backslider has to return to the Lord’s way of righteousness from the detour of sin on which he has strayed, for then only will his broken relationship and lack of fruit be restored.

After their exodus from Egypt, Israel arrived at Rephidim in the wilderness where they were overcome by thirst. Moses struck the rock, it was cleft and a stream of water flowed out from which all the people could drink. The cleft rock was a symbolic reference to Christ who was struck and crucified, causing the stream of God’s grace to flow to us. Paul says that Israel “drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:4). We can also, like Israel, bow down at the cleft Rock to drink. He is the Rock of the Ages who was cleft for us.

True humbling of the heart calls for continuous prayer. "... you do not have because you do not ask" (Jas. 4:2). If we bow down in prayer before the cleft Rock we will have times of refreshing in the presence of the Lord. He will reveal Himself to us, cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and endue us with power to live victoriously. David said in his prayer: "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence *is* fullness of joy; at Your right hand *are* pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11).

Confession of faith

It demands an intimate knowledge of Christ to abide in Him, to continuously drink from the stream of His grace and to daily walk in the light of His presence. We must exactly know who and what He is, as a vague and incomplete knowledge about Him cannot form the basis of a sound relationship. During this time of great falling away it is imperative that we fully realise and again confess Christ in His uniqueness, deity and glory. Many people are so ignorant of divine revelation that they actually confess "another Jesus" who is foreign to Scripture. Paul says that ignorance and distorted views are the consequences of demonic deception: "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted – you may well put up with it!" (2 Cor. 11:2-4). Such people think that they derive their wisdom from the true fountain of living water, but what they say and do are much more typical of the spirit of error.

In the Christian church it is customary to read a confession of faith during certain occasions. However, confessions of this nature are usually very brief and rather incomplete so that they do not do justice to the Person and basic attributes of the wonderful Saviour whom we serve. Because of this, many people have an inadequate comprehension of the Lord Jesus. The following is a more complete evangelical confession of faith:

- **Jesus descended from heaven to be incarnated.** I believe that, as man, Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary (Matt. 1:20); consequently, He is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. The angel Gabriel told Mary that the Child who would be born would be great and would be called the Son of the Highest (Luke 1:32). At His birth in the royal lineage of David and during His life on earth He only temporarily laid down His heavenly glory, but did not relinquish His essential deity (Col. 2:9). After His ascension He was highly exalted and given a name which is above every name (Phil. 2:9-11). During His second coming He will be revealed in power and majesty as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:6), and also be recognised as such.
- **He is God.** I believe that Jesus is Lord and God. Every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2:11). John says that He is "the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20). Paul says He is "our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13), and Thomas exclaimed in awe: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). He truly is Immanuel – God with us.
- **His eternal self-existence.** I believe that the Lord Jesus, as God, is eternal and self-existent. It was only at His incarnation that He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7-8). As God He exists from all eternity, therefore He could say: "[B]efore Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58). He is the eternal I AM (Ex. 3:14), who also said to the Jews: "If you do not believe that I AM, you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24; MKJV).
- **The Trinity.** I believe that Jesus Christ is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He Himself said: "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). John said, "For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one" (1 John 5:7). I believe that Jesus is the Word who is both God and man. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14).
- **Co-Creator.** I believe that the Lord Jesus, the Word, is the glorious Creator who, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, created the universe: "[God] has in these last days

spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Heb. 1:2). “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3). Paul says, “He is the image of the invisible God ... For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth” (Col. 1:15, 16).

- **The Re-creator of all things.** I believe that the Lord Jesus is also the Re-creator as He spiritually quickens and regenerates all lost sinners who receive Him as their Saviour. We are alive to God through Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:11). At His coming for the faithful church He will give all believers immortal resurrection bodies (1 Cor. 15:22; Phil. 3:20-21). After the final judgement He will create a new heaven and a new earth; and in view of that He says: “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5).
- **His atoning death and mediatory role.** I believe that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is a ransom for the sins of all humanity, i.e. all tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations on earth, and that it offers the only possibility of reconciliation with God (John 1:29; Eph. 1:7). Only those who accept the offer of salvation in faith become participants of the new life in Christ. There is no other way of salvation, “... for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). I also believe that Jesus Christ, after His death on the cross, arose from the dead and ascended into heaven to intercede for us and also to prepare a place for us in His Father’s house (John 14:2-3; Heb. 7:25).
- **His second coming.** I believe that the Lord Jesus will come again to take us to heaven and introduce us to the eternal glory of His kingdom. At the marriage supper of the Lamb we will have Holy Communion with Him in remembrance of His death on the cross, and bring praise and honour to Him for saving us by grace. If we follow Christ now on the way of the cross by denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following Him in a hostile world, we will eventually reign with Him (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12). The battle will then be over, and the faithful witnesses of Christ will share in His triumphant revelation.

Can you see how exceedingly worthy and absolutely divine is the fountain of living water which is freely offered to us? In the very last chapter of the Bible the friendly invitation is repeated to all spiritually dying people to drink from this fountain: “[L]et him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

We should never leave this fountain because the Lord said that we should be like trees planted by the water. There, in the shadow of the cross close to the cleft Rock, our whole life should be lived. To wander away from our Saviour and failing to abide in Him, will end up in us walking on dark paths where one will soon be overcome by spiritual thirst. But we who remain close to Him and abide in Him, will have life and have it more abundantly. The stream of living water must flow out of our hearts, enabling us by the grace of Christ to reach out to a dying and sick world with the message of salvation.

3. Justification and Sanctification

Johan Malan, Mossel Bay, South Africa (September 2014)

Scripture reading: “For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:9-16).

Paul uses the parable of the building of a house to demonstrate the two basic aspects of our spiritual life, i.e. justification and sanctification. The foundation is absolutely unique and indispensable: “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). He is the rock on which a wise man builds his life (Matt. 7:24). Therefore this rock is also called “the foundation of repentance” (Heb. 6:1). Already in the Old Testament David referred to the Lord as his rock and deliverer (2 Sam. 22:2).

When Paul says that he has laid the foundation, he speaks of people who were led to repentance and salvation in Christ. We must believe in Christ our Saviour in whom we receive a new, born again life. This refers to our justification, while the subsequent erecting of the house refers to sanctification and the enablement by the Holy Spirit towards our commitment in serving the Lord after conversion. It is in this context that things may go horribly wrong, resulting in some Christians being failed disciples who will appear before the judgement seat of Christ empty-handed – only just saved but nothing more than that.

Justification is a work of grace which the Lord Jesus alone can do for us. Paul says that when we were still sinners we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son (Rom. 5:10). It is a perfect salvation which we must only accept by faith, thereby becoming born again. The new life which we receive from Christ may be described as imputed righteousness since it is graciously offered to us as a gift without any works or merit on our side – we can only appropriate it by faith. All that the Lord Jesus expects of us is to turn around on the path of sin, confess our sins and receive Him as our Saviour. The foundation of the new life is then laid.

However, we should not let the matter rest there but immediately proceed to pursue the experience of sanctification in our new life: “Therefore let us go on and get past the elementary stage in the teachings *and* doctrine of Christ (the Messiah), advancing steadily toward the completeness *and* perfection that belong to spiritual maturity. Let us not again be laying the foundation of repentance *and* abandonment of dead works (dead formalism) and of the faith [by which you turned] to God” (Heb. 6:1; *Amplified Bible*). There must be progress in our spiritual life, and we should not make a half-hearted start in which we again and again try to lay the foundation of repentance. We should continue to pursue the upward call of God for our lives.

Every saved person is commanded to live holy and to please God in everything he does: “... as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct” (1 Pet. 1:15). All Christians should heed this command after conversion as this phase of our spiritual life is on the level of co-operative righteousness: “For we are God’s fellow workers” (1 Cor. 3:9). We should give our full co-operation to work out God’s plan for our lives.

This commitment in no way implies that we should try to serve the Lord merely through human works. No, we cannot sanctify ourselves and truly serve the Lord in our own strength, even if we think we can. Only the Lord can cleanse our hearts and fill us with His Holy Spirit. This experience is described as complete sanctification as opposed to initial sanctification which is received at the first purging of our sins (2 Pet. 1:9). Paul says regarding the second experience: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you *is*

faithful, who also will do *it*" (1 Thess. 5:23-24).

To be able to receive this blessing we should first confess and forsake everything of which the Holy Spirit convicts us, including the carnal state in which we still remain after conversion. The old, sinful nature of man is firmly established through the force of habit, and it opposes the Holy Spirit who regenerated us: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:17). If we fail to make a complete surrender to conquer the flesh and its lusts, we will continue to build with wood, hay and straw on the foundation of our repentance. In the process of sanctification it is therefore expected of us to fully put down and mortify the old man who was only in principle surrendered at conversion, but who subsequently still maintained a large measure of control over our lives.

Paul says to saved members of the church in Ephesus: "... that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, *'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour,'* for we are members of one another. *'Be angry, and do not sin':* do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:22-30).

Christians can indeed grieve the Holy Spirit if they continue to harbour the flesh with its sinful inclinations in their hearts, thereby allowing it to keep on exerting its influence. They should realise that they cannot fully be endued with the new nature of Christ before they have dealt with all spiritual blockages. Every person has his own peculiar inclinations and weaknesses, of which the indwelling Holy Spirit will convict him. In Paul's exposition to the Ephesians quite a number of typical sins are specifically mentioned. He also gives the same teaching to the Colossians and emphasises that the sins which they confessed and repented from at conversion, should be followed up by the putting down of the remaining sins in their lives when they fully surrender themselves to the control of the Holy Spirit. He says to them:

"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. [That was before their conversion]. But now [after being saved] you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Col. 3:5-10).

There were revivalists such as Charles Finney who suggested that we tackle this problem in a very practical manner by compiling a list of all the sins, weaknesses and problems of which the Holy Spirit convicts us. Work systematically through the list and settle your case with the Lord. Also become reconciled to people whom you have harmed in any way. Forgive those who have injured you, as only in this way you can overcome evil with good.

Can you see that in complete surrender we should again search ourselves and absolutely forsake everything which grieves the Holy Spirit? Without this action, sanctification will never become a reality in our lives. We certainly have the promise of sanctification, but we should adopt a state of mind which will make it fitting for God to fulfil these promises: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). After our hearts have been cleansed the Spirit of God will fill and control us.

As far as the process of sanctification after a full complete surrender is concerned, we should realise that we are involved with a lifelong process of more holiness and increased conformity to the image of Christ. We will never achieve the objective of perfection but we should nevertheless

move in that direction. Paul says: “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (Phil. 3:12). Furthermore, we must also be mindful of the fact that for as long as we are still in a human body, there is always a possibility of fleshly actions. Although we are no longer in a carnal state, we can nevertheless still be tempted to act in a fleshly way and to sin because of our human weaknesses.

If a Spirit-filled Christian fails to immediately confess and forsake sins which have been committed by him, it can potentially lead to a dangerous situation of backsliding since the flesh would then gain a measure of control over that person. We should also sincerely admonish fellow-believers if we notice that one or other sin is gaining a foothold over them: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). We should daily take up our cross by which we have been crucified to the world and the world to us (Luke 9:23; Gal. 6:14). In this way we can ensure that the congregation remains spiritually sound and thereby fulfil its commission to make the light of the gospel shine in a dark world.

What will happen if believers neglect their duty to honour the command towards holiness? In that case they would allow the sinful nature of the flesh to continue living and paralysing them spiritually. The flesh will oppose the Spirit, leading to a situation in which the particular persons will not become spiritually matured and never have the boldness to serve the Lord. To the contrary – they will cause many problems in the congregation, and that was exactly what Paul’s problem was with the church in Corinth: “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive* it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere men*?” (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

The more immature, carnal Christians there are in a congregation, the lower the spiritual standard is and the bigger the need for holiness, revival and spiritual growth. Paul was greatly concerned about the spiritual condition of the church in Corinth. He even asked them if they realised that they were a temple of God in which the Holy Spirit dwells. It was with a view to this fact that he reminded them that everyone should take heed how he builds on the foundation Jesus Christ – carnal members who build with wood, hay and straw, i.e. perishable things with no value for eternity, will appear in a deceived and disappointed state before the judgement seat of Christ with empty hands, saved yet so as through fire.

Dr. Andrew Murray also warns in his book “Die Goddelike Geheim” against a spiritually fruitless life: “As long as we fail to subject ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the flesh will keep on controlling us.” Dr. John Rice, a former revivalist in the US, encountered problems with carnality in various American churches and expressed himself as follows on the great significance of sanctification and filling with the Holy Spirit:

“Being filled with the Holy Spirit was a very important thing throughout the New Testament; yet it is much minimized in the modern pulpit. ... I want to remind you again that this is commanded. This is not to be left up to your judgment. Anyone who is not filled with the Holy Spirit just is not in the will of God. Anyone who is not filled with the Holy Spirit is living a life of disobedience, a life more or less of fruitlessness. The reason you are not winning souls is that you are disobedient, is that you are not seeking and not having upon you the fullness of the Spirit of God. ... You have churches that are filled with everything else but the Holy Ghost. That is the trouble. Your children are going to Hell because you are not filled with the Holy Ghost. You talk to people; it does not do any good. Why? Because you are not filled with the Holy Spirit. Year in and year out Sunday School teachers have unsaved children in their classes but never get them saved. Why? Because they are not filled with the Holy Ghost. Your own children grow up to the years of accountability, and year in and year out you never win them. Why? Because you are not filled with the Holy Ghost.

“We preachers, God forgive us preachers – I am for the preachers; I do not mean to be critical of them – do you know what is wrong with us preachers? We have nearly everything in the world;

we have good training; we have degrees; we have good organization; we have good literature; we have good equipment; we have everything except the important thing, that is, the power of God!

“Do you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit? If you really want to, the conditions of God must be met. One of them is obedience. ... Are you ready to lay self on the altar, count self dead, crucified? And when self is crucified, will you come and follow Jesus, do what He says about soul winning? That is the kind of obedience the Bible is talking about. If you are not setting out to win souls with a holy passion, you do not mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You may want some ecstasy, but you do not want what God wants to give you. You are not going to have it unless you are after what God is after, and that is the conversion of sinners and the power of God to witness to them. The thing that God said He wanted you to have He will give to you if you will use it for what He wants you to do. He commanded you to go and preach the gospel, to go carry the gospel to sinners, to get people saved.” (Source: *Fullness of the Spirit*, by John Rice, 1945; Sword of the Lord Publishers, Tennessee).

The more Spirit-filled children of the Lord there are, the more evangelistic and missionary work will be done, and the more prayers will go up for the spiritual awakening of lukewarm, fleshly and worldly-minded church members who are uninvolved with the work of the Lord on earth. In answer to these prayers, God will work mightily in the hearts of those for whom we intercede. Paul writes about such an intercessor to the Colossians: “Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col. 4:12). The will of God does not only include our conversion but also our sanctification: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification. ... For God did not call us to uncleanness but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 4:3, 7-8).

The key to revival is that individual Christians would trust the Lord for the blessing of sanctification, firmly believing that they will receive this blessing if they comply with the conditions set out in God’s Word. When they do receive this blessing their lives will bear witness of it and send out a strong message to people close to them. In their conversations they will often refer to justification as well as sanctification, and in this sense the saints themselves will become preachers, despite the fact that they may not be full-time, ordained pastors.

It was Paul’s expectation that young Jewish believers would soon become mature in sanctification and the knowledge of the Lord so that they could minister to fellow-Jews. However, he was disappointed with them because the converts did not proceed to seek the blessing of sanctification, thereby confining themselves to being babes in Christ. Because of this, their discernment was weak and Paul blamed them for this state of affairs:

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ, let us go on to perfection” (Heb. 5:12–6:1).

There should be growth and progress, so that newly saved Christians could become spiritually mature, able to assist those who are still unsaved or only at an early stage of their spiritual pilgrimage. The fact is that, apart from basic evangelisation, definite actions should be taken to confirm young believers in the doctrine of holiness. “Babes in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1) cannot be surrendered to their own fate, arguing that they will by themselves reach the stage of the victorious life. They are still ignorant on these matters and need to be instructed on spiritual growth.

More than a century ago, Andrew Murray was at the forefront of a revival ministry in South Africa. He did basic evangelistic work, followed up by explicit preaching on filling of the Holy Spirit. His books on sanctification as a further work of grace after repentance are still read in many parts of the world. He does not associate sanctification with ecstatic experiences, signs

and wonders, but with a pure heart and to being endowed with power from on high.

Other well-known revivalists from the 18th and 19th centuries followed the same approach. John Wesley's converts assembled in halls where they received teaching on higher levels of spiritual dedication. Eventually there were more than 500 such groups. In America, DL Moody was a well-known evangelist. After he conducted an evangelistic rally in which many people turned to the Lord for salvation, these meetings were followed up by preaching on holiness. Dr. RA Torrey, who was later appointed principal of the Moody Bible Institute, was often requested to preach a week-long series of services on the filling of the Holy Spirit. These messages gave rise to a big change in the lives of many believers. His sermons were published and subsequently often reprinted. The book is titled: *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*.

From all these examples it is obvious that evangelistic work should be followed up by well organised programmes for spiritual growth, as that is the only way to ensure that converts do not stagnate by failing to fulfil their calling. The objective with preaching should be that, as far as possible, those who witness of salvation should also be able to witness about sanctification. Only under these circumstances will lasting and durable work be done in the expansion of God's kingdom on earth.

From prophecies on the second coming of Christ it is also evident what the roles of justification and sanctification are. As far as their salvation is concerned, the glorified church in heaven will sing to the Lamb: "... You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). Their salvation is solely based on Christ's atoning work on the cross – they accepted it by faith and God gave them a new life which is built upon the Rock, Jesus Christ.

The role of sanctification is more specifically reflected by the marriage garment of the Lamb's bride: "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:7-8).

The righteous acts of the saints refer to the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of those who are already saved and belong to Christ. The righteous acts represent the fabric of the wedding garment. That is the reason why Paul says: "Pursue ... holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). The bride of Christ should be adorned with a fitting wedding garment to be worthy to appear before the Bridegroom, and that is related to her sanctification. She cannot sanctify herself, but Christ can do it if she seeks after it with her whole heart: "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). The Lord Jesus is not only our redemption but also our sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30).

Only those who can testify about sanctification are building with gold, silver and precious stones on the foundation, Jesus Christ. They are working on their wedding garment. Those who persist with their carnality build with wood, hay and straw and spend their lives in pursuit of earthly things which have no value for the kingdom of God. It is therefore not self-evident that every saved person will necessarily build with the appropriate material on the foundation of his repentance. Many of them don't do it, and because of that their humanly-inspired works will be rejected and they will stand empty-handed before the Lord – merely saved and without any testimony of sanctification.

Many of these carnal people are not even aware of their calling to be a temple of the Holy Spirit, and because of that they conceal the light of their testimony so that most of their friends do not even know that they are Christians. Because of this, they feel very comfortable in the company of worldly people. In times like these, a very clear call should be extended to carnal believers to seek the Lord with all their heart and to trust Him for the blessing of the filling with the Holy Spirit. Those who confess their sins and carnality will be cleansed by the Lord from all their unrighteousness; He will then fill them with His Holy Spirit and entrust to them a message of salvation and sanctification which they will be able to proclaim with boldness.

To those who have already taken the step of sanctification, the message is addressed that there are more exceptional heights to reach in their spiritual life. The Lord wishes to continue with His work of cleansing our lives so that we can bear more fruit – not only thirtyfold but sixtyfold and even hundredfold. The good seed of the Word which has been sown in a pure heart will yield much to the expansion of Christ's kingdom on earth. The Lord calls all believers to reach their full potential.

4. Ministries of the Holy Spirit

Johan Malan, Mossel Bay, South Africa (September 2014)

Scripture reading: “And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ So they said to him, ‘We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.’ And he said to them, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ So they said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.’ When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:1-5).

This group of twelve disciples in Ephesus did indeed believe that Jesus is the Messiah and Saviour, but they had no testimony of rebirth through the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist, who baptised them, had said: “I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt. 3:11). Only confessing their sins and being baptised could not save the people. Belief in Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who would pay the penalty for the sin of the world was needed to be saved. John’s intermediary ministry had to come to an end after he had prepared the people for the coming of the Messiah and had pointed Him out to them. That is why he told them that “He must increase, but I *must* decrease” (John 3:30). People had to stop being disciples of John and become disciples of the Messiah as only He could change them spiritually.

Firstly, Jesus brought an atoning sacrifice to cleanse people from their sins by His blood. Subsequently, He poured out His Holy Spirit to convict all those who hear the gospel of their sins, of the righteousness which Christ wrought on the cross, as well as the judgements which await those who are unrepentant. The water of baptism cannot cleanse people from their sins. Only the grace of Christ which is ministered by the Holy Spirit to a repentant soul can do that. Jesus said: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38). “But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive” (John 7:39).

The Holy Spirit convicts people of their sins. If they react positively to the conviction by confessing their sins and receiving Jesus as Saviour, the Holy Spirit will regenerate them and instill the new life of Christ in their hearts. That is the baptism of Christ which is ministered by His Holy Spirit. Paul says to the church: “For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). How can the Holy Spirit change us inwardly and render us members of the body of Christ if we are not even aware of His existence? On what divine intervention do people base their position as Christians if they are not even aware of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit? A mere mental acceptance of Christ without a deep spiritual conviction will not bring about any real change, even if it is outwardly confirmed by a church ritual such as water baptism.

It is evident that the small group of believers that Paul met in Ephesus had not yet made the transition from an outward Christ in their minds to Christ within them. They accepted the testimony of John the Baptist that Jesus is the Messiah, but that did not lead to a personal encounter with Him. They only confessed the Saviour with their lips but their hearts remained cold and spiritually unchanged. The Lord Jesus often met such heartless and formalistic people in Israel and said to them: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honour Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:8-9).

Human doctrines, creeds and lip-service are not enough to bring about a change of heart. Our hearts must be regenerated by a spiritual rebirth. Jesus also conveyed this message to Nicodemus, who was one of Israel’s prominent spiritual leaders: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). However, Nicodemus could not understand how a person could be born a second time, since he did not know anything about a spiritual birth. Jesus reprimanded him for his ignorance: “Are you the teacher of Israel,

and do not know these things?” (John 3:10).

The following was the most important command which God gave to Israel in the Old Testament: “... you shall be holy, for I *am* holy” (Lev. 11:44). This command equally applies to us in the New Testament: “... as He who has called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct” (1 Pet. 1:15). True holiness which reflects the image of God can only come from the inside, from a changed heart, after the principles of God’s righteousness have been written on the tablets of a believer’s heart (2 Cor. 3:3). These principles determine your values, change your personality and behaviour for the better, and render you suitable to act as a mouthpiece for the Lord. Holiness cannot be artificially pasted on from the outside to function in conjunction with a depraved heart, as that can only lead to hypocrisy. Such a person is a whitewashed tomb which appears beautiful from the outside but on the inside it is void of any true life. He may even be regarded as very religious but because of his spiritual deadness his outside appearance is false, he covers his sins, maintains double standards, and does not convey the Lord’s truth in his conversations. In fact, he does not even understand the things of the Lord as he has a very limited and distorted understanding of God’s Word.

There were various prominent believers in the Old Testament whose hearts were changed by the Lord. Hebrews 11 contains an honorary list of heroes of faith from this time. They could all bear witness of a changed heart, which the Lord alone could bring about: “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut. 30:6). They received, by way of speaking, a spiritual heart transplant. The Lord says: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*” (Ezek. 36:26-27).

It is incredible that Nicodemus did not realise the necessity of a changed, regenerated heart. No wonder that the ordinary members of his society only paid lip-service to the Lord while their hearts were far removed from Him. The most important reason for their fatal lack of understanding was ignorance on what God says in His Word. The poor insight of this teacher is still prevalent among some of the religious leaders of today: “You are the spiritual leaders of your church communities and yet you do not know that only the Lord can give a sinner a changed heart through rebirth?” Likewise the rebuke of formalistic Israelites reverberates throughout the centuries and still is applicable to church members of today: “It is in vain that you try to serve the Lord by only observing the commandments of the church leaders without true spiritual motivation and loving the Lord your God with all your heart.” Lip-service alone is not enough to please God; that is why Jesus said: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). The Lord’s will should be done with regard to a reborn heart and a changed life, as this is the only way in which a person can be spiritually and morally renewed from the inside.

The disciples whom Paul met in Ephesus were the victims of ignorance; that is why they said without hesitation that they had never heard of the Holy Spirit. That means that they were unaware of His work of conviction or any of His other ministries. Although they had heard about Jesus and decided to become His disciples, they did not know the conditions of discipleship, and neither were they conscious of the role of the Holy Spirit to guide them into these truths.

The same problems of ignorance regarding the basic principles of the gospel of Christ existed throughout the church age, and that explains the wide occurrence of a mere form of godliness in the world. Paul refers to nominal believers and describes them as people “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5). He then commands Timothy to turn away from such people and to have no part in their dead religious practices. Church members who today are also unable to testify about the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, should be questioned and taught: “Do you know the Holy Spirit and did you trust Him to convict you of your sins and lost state? Only He can regenerate you and make you share in the new life of Christ. Only He can make Jesus Christ a reality in your daily life and guide you into all the divine truths without which you will not be able to correctly understand the Bible.”

Modern preachers should consider the following questions: “Do you appreciate the key role of rebirth in the salvation of sinners, i.e. that nobody can inherit the kingdom of heaven without being born again? Did you personally have an experience of rebirth when you came over from darkness to the marvellous light of Christ? Or do you only rely on the doctrine of predestination and the application of covenant signs to render people saved children of God? How can these things change a person in the core of his being without regeneration?”

Further ministries of the Holy Spirit

The spiritual growth of believers in Ephesus – and in many cases their lack of growth – has a very direct message to the end-time church, as the same principles also apply to us. During his third missionary journey in the middle fifties of the first century AD, Paul stayed in Ephesus for more than two years while giving meticulous instruction to believing Jews and Greeks. His extensive teaching emphasised the fact that there is a long process of spiritual growth which follows upon the rebirth of a person. The role of the Holy Spirit in this regard is of cardinal importance. After a sinner repented, accepted Jesus as Saviour and was quickened by the Holy Spirit, he must also be filled, empowered and guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit while he grows up to spiritual maturity.

Even among reborn Christians there is great ignorance on the further ministries of the Holy Spirit, and that is the reason why so many of them stagnate spiritually and eventually become involved with deceptive teachings. It is in this context that revival is of great importance, as this experience alludes to new life and dedication among people who are already spiritually alive. Christians who lost their vision and became spiritually lukewarm, prayerless and materialistic, who start justifying sin, losing their discernment, exposing themselves to spiritual error, and gradually withdraw from evangelistic work, should be challenged to search themselves and make a new commitment to serve the Lord. When they are again cleansed and endued with power from on high (i.e. revived), they will start witnessing and then the salvation of souls will be the fruit of revival. Only a spiritually healthy congregation in which believers walk in and by the Spirit can be used by the Lord to make a difference among unsaved people, and also among carnal and deceived Christians.

Paul dedicated himself towards training young believers to become disciples who have a good knowledge of all aspects of God’s will, and who fully understand what it involves to walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. At the end of his stay in Ephesus he said: “... I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). He offered thorough expositions of the doctrines of justification and sanctification, and also ensured that believers realised that the dispensation of the law had been replaced by the dispensation of grace. As part of this transition he established the practice of meeting together and celebrating the Lord’s Supper on Sundays, which is the resurrection day of Christ: “Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul ... spoke to them” (Acts 20:7).

Only the full truth of God’s Word can protect believers against spiritual deception. Jesus Himself said: “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). However, not even all the elders in the church of Ephesus were fully grounded in all the aspects of divine truth, and Paul was aware of this problem. In his farewell address to the church counsel he said: “... take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20:28-31).

Paul did not only warn them against deception that would be imposed upon them from outside the church, but also against deceptive teachings that would originate in the inner circles of the congregation. The same phenomenon is also characteristic of the modern church, as the big enemy of the true church still uses every possible channel to deceive Christians. According to the Bible, the devil will continue unabated with his efforts until the multireligious false christ, the

Antichrist, has gained control over the entire world. The fact that the spirit of the antichrist is already exerting a strong influence in various Christian churches and theological seminaries, renders proof that the great falling away of the last days is in an advanced stage: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). Ravenous wolves are still engaged in perpetrating their destructive work in the lives of nominal believers as well as those members of Christian churches who are carnal and hence spiritually immature.

Further instruction by Paul

In 60 AD Paul sent an epistle from the prison in Rome to the church in Ephesus. According to this letter he prayed God that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened to fully understand the gospel message (Eph. 1:18). He also prayed that they might be strengthened with the Spirit of the Lord in the inner man, be firmly established in the love of Christ and be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:14-19). To practically experience the fullness of God we need to grow in our dedication and filling with the Holy Spirit, "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:13-14). We must have the spiritual insight to be able to discern between right and wrong, and also the strength to prevail against temptations and sin.

Paul reminds the Ephesians that children of the Lord are involved in a war against the devil and his evil works, and that they should strongly resist and not "give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer. ... Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth. ... And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*" (Eph. 4:27-29; 5:11). When believers are guilty of these things they would grieve the Holy Spirit, and such situations should be avoided at all cost (Eph. 4:30). Deception and moral sins are at variance with a life which is filled with the Holy Spirit and cannot be reconciled with it: "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).

The doctrine of sanctification as a deeper work of grace is offered to the congregation as the only solution to domination by sinful lusts. They are reminded that their former, sinful life was established through the force of habit, and that it should be put down in a definite step of full surrender. In its place, believers must trust the Lord that the Holy Spirit will enable them to fully put on the new life in Christ. He challenges them, "that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24).

The subject of holiness is of such great importance that Paul reiterates it in the same epistle and also explains its significance in terms of complying with the requirements that the bridal congregation have to appear before the heavenly Bridegroom in a clean robe: "... Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). After the first purging of our sins Christ wishes to sanctify us completely so that we can appear before Him without blemish at the wedding of the Lamb.

What was the reaction to Paul's instruction, admonitions and encouragement to members of the church in Ephesus? It was a mixed bag. Some of the members proceeded with their dead, formalistic practices without having a personal encounter with the Lord. Others were truly born again but not filled with the Holy Spirit. They lived carnally, morally permissive, and were inclined towards forms of spiritual deception from which certain benefits could be derived. Contrariwise there was also the minority of Spirit-filled children of the Lord who took a strong stand for the truths of the Word, and because of their strict standard of holy living they were unpopular among the majority of church members.

Eventually, a form of godliness in association with spiritual deception became prevalent, and the congregation started apostatising. The Name of Jesus was still confessed, but a holy walk and spiritual fruitfulness became very rare. In AD 95, when John was banned to the isle of Patmos,

the glorified Christ in heaven dictated a letter to John which was addressed to the church in Ephesus. In this letter the congregation is praised for their dedicated service to the church of Christ, and also for the fact that they resisted extreme forms of deception that was promoted by certain sects. However, in the secret, spiritual sphere of their lives they failed the test. They still confessed Christ with their lips, but their hearts were not focussed on Him and were instead filled with other kinds of love, e.g. love for their church. They did not have a personal relationship with Christ, and because of that He was on the verge of withdrawing His Spirit from them. He says to them: "Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent" (Rev. 2:4-5).

The lampstand with its oil symbolises the Holy Spirit who makes the light of Christ shine in the church. When the Lord removes this lampstand, spiritual darkness will prevail in the church, which will allow deception and dead formalism, as well as various other works of darkness, to proliferate. Apart from a small group of faithful believers, the church however also failed to respond to this warning of Christ, and ultimately the church as a whole ceased to exist.

Forty years after Paul had met the twelve disciples in Ephesus who knew nothing about the Holy Spirit, virtually the entire congregation had left their first love and could no longer testify about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Members of the upcoming generation were no longer faced with the challenge of rebirth and were therefore not established in the fear of the Lord. Because of this serious deficiency, the backslidden congregation not only grieved the Holy Spirit but also resisted and quenched Him.

In the light of the lessons which we can learn from the experiences of the church in Ephesus there are a number of probing question which we should ask ourselves:

- Are we aware of the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin, as well as His power to regenerate, or do we only pay lip-service to Christ without His presence in our lives on a spiritual level?
- Are we conscious of the dangers related to a carnal Christianity consisting of people who are saved but not filled with the Holy Spirit?
- Do we realise that babes in Christ (immature believers) do not have any insight in the doctrine of sanctification, neither a clear concept of sin?
- Do we understand the doctrine of sanctification and all the commands that go along with it, i.e. the putting down of the old nature and all the inclinations associated with it, and to also put on the new nature of Christ?
- Are we mindful of the danger posed by divisions in the congregation which are the inevitable consequence of deception that is not exposed and resisted?
- When will we discover that a church which is spiritually sick cannot, in a convincing way, reach out to carnal Christians as well as the heathendom around it?
- Are we really prepared to comply with the demand of holiness, thereby living up to God's standard, so that He can use us effectively in His service?
- Have we already made the discovery that a feeble prayer life, poor knowledge of the Bible, as well as insufficient exposure to good preaching, can spiritually incapacitate us to be used by the Lord in His service?

The Lord is immutable, His love for sinners boundless, and He is always prepared to equip true servants to be His witnesses. Even though sin has abounded, grace abounded much more. Christ is mighty to forgive and also to protect us against the increased attacks from Satan and his kingdom. He is also more than willing to revive anyone who desires it and prays for it, even though the majority may remain backslidden and indifferent. Accept the challenge to be among the faithful minority who do not hesitate after receiving the blessing of justification, but strive after holiness with their whole heart. There were a few committed men and women in Ephesus, and hopefully there is also a healthy core group in our time who are trusting the Lord for complete sanctification. They should come forward and report for duty in the expansion of His kingdom.

5. The Fulfilment of Peter's Calling

Johan Malan, Mossel Bay, South Africa (September 2014)

When considering Peter's life as a disciple there are two distinctive phases which can be discerned: Firstly, there was the inconsistent and self-centred phase of his life between his conversion and filling with the Holy Spirit, but after the experience of Pentecost we see Peter as the Spirit-filled disciple of Jesus who had the power and insight to act consistently according to the will of God and to do great things in the establishment of the Christian church. During the first half we see a Peter with limited knowledge and fluctuating loyalties, in whose life the Spirit and the flesh were strongly opposed to each other (Gal. 5:17). In the second half we see a Peter in whose life the flesh is crucified, with the Holy Spirit in full control to guide, equip and use him as never before.

It is obvious that all believers pass through these two stages in their spiritual life: It starts with their conversion and initial spiritual awakening when they still have to learn many things – including how to prevail against temptations and the flesh with its lusts. When the commitment to growth is not taken seriously and pursued to the crisis point of sanctification, spiritual stagnation sets in which prohibits the person from reaching the second phase. Such believers confine themselves to a spiritual nursery school like the one described in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 and Hebrews 5:12-14. To those who fully surrender themselves and trust the Lord for complete sanctification (1 Thess. 5:23-24), carnality is replaced by a Spirit-filled life and they achieve victory over the stumbling-blocks which formerly choked them spiritually. The battle and temptations do not end, but these believers know how to handle it without limping along from one defeat to another.

We can learn much from the two phases in Peter's life, as most of their characteristics are experienced by disciples of the Lord Jesus throughout the church dispensation.

His calling, training and inconsistent life

Peter was a fisherman at the Sea of Galilee when he was called to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus: "And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.' They immediately left their nets and followed Him" (Matt. 4:18-20). Peter left everything to follow the Messiah – his work and his family – and stood at the beginning of an intensive period of training.

Peter received important revelations from the Lord, and was the first disciple to openly declare that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God. He said without any hesitation: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). To this testimony Jesus replied: "... you are Peter [*Petros* – a small rock] and on this rock [*Petra* – a large rock] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). The large rock refers to Peter's testimony that Jesus is the Christ. In His pronouncement the Lord Jesus confirmed four key principles with regard to the New Testament church:

1. He Himself would establish His church (the *ecclesia*, or called-out ones) in the world, and He would be the Head of the church – not Peter or any of his so-called successors.
2. As Saviour He would be the rock or foundation upon which the church would be built.
3. The church would experience immense spiritual opposition as all the evil powers of Satan would be harnessed against the church in an effort to deceive or destroy it.
4. The true church will not be destroyed, but will survive all the attacks against it.

During the time when Peter received the important revelation on Jesus as the promised Messiah and Son of God, he was not yet a Spirit-filled believer and did not know the whole counsel of God. He was not at all aware of the fact that Jesus would come twice, and that, during His first coming, He would be the suffering Messiah who would lay down His life as a ransom for sinners. Because of his carnality and poor knowledge Peter could not understand why Christ had to suffer and die, and he strongly resisted any notion to this effect.

The Lord Jesus said that He would “suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day” (Matt. 16:21). Peter reacted to this statement in utter negation: “Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men’” (Matt. 16:22-23).

Shortly after Peter had made a statement on a great truth with regard to the Messiahship and deity of Jesus, the devil exploited his poor knowledge about God’s counsel and deceived him into outright rejecting the possibility of Jesus’ crucifixion. Many Christians who are spiritually immature and ignorant on certain aspects of biblical doctrine, also act like this. The one moment they confess a great truth from Scripture, and the following moment they deny a core principle of the Bible and proclaim one of Satan’s many lies. Despite their distorted view of Scripture they are usually fully convinced that they entertain the correct view on the Bible. Christians should be mindful of the fact that they do not necessarily always act in the Spirit. Sometimes they act in the flesh, and then they can even be a mouthpiece for the enemy to deny biblical truths and proclaim lies.

After Peter was corrected it was still not the end of his carnal arrogance. Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus said to His disciples: “‘All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night.’ ... Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’ And so said all the disciples” (Matt. 26:31-35). Peter was so self-complacent and sure of himself that he in effect said to Jesus: “You can leave this matter in my able hands, because I know what I believe and I will stand with You to the end – come what may!” By this carnal attitude he also influenced the other disciples to trust in their own power and integrity.

A person can have the best and most noble intentions to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus and not deviate from them, but without the enabling power of the Holy Spirit which He gives to us, all our efforts will come to nought. When Jesus was on the verge of being condemned to death through crucifixion, and His disciples under real pressure of persecution, Peter was not even able to confess to a humble servant girl that he was a follower of Jesus. He was overwhelmed by fear and uncertainty, and in self-defence he later even denied with an oath that he knew Jesus (Matt. 26:69-74).

Peter quickly realised his mistake: “And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ So he went out and wept bitterly” (Matt. 26:75). When one’s best intentions end in defeat, you feel very disappointed, ashamed and sorry for your cowardly action. Your view of yourself is shattered and your testimony as a Christian is destroyed. You wonder how it was possible to be such a weakling. However, Peter did not abandon the struggle; he had bitter remorse over his defeat and decided to try again.

At this stage, Peter was still not filled with the Holy Spirit, so it was unlikely that his effort to restore his integrity and image as disciple would be successful. Shortly after the crucifixion of Jesus he joined the other disciples and tried to mend his broken spiritual life. However, the disciples were all fearful after the execution of Jesus and went into hiding behind a locked door. The Sunday when Jesus rose from the grave they were still in the locked-up room: “Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace *be* with you’” (John 20:19).

During this meeting the disciples received the Great Commission for the first time, and Jesus also breathed on them, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (cf. John 20:21-22). Although at this stage they already had the peace of the forgiveness of sins through the Holy Spirit, they were not yet endued with the power of the Holy Spirit and could therefore not start heeding the command to evangelise the world. They first had to be spiritually equipped to do so: “Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His

name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:46-49).

Before the filling with the Holy Spirit Peter and the other disciples realised that they did not have the spiritual power and motivation to confront an apostate, hostile world with the gospel of Christ. They were fully aware of their inability to do so and consequently backed away from this big challenge. They decided to keep a low profile and return to their secular professions for the time being. Peter said: “‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We are going with you also.’ They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing” (John 21:3).

The Lord Jesus fully understood their lack of knowledge, spiritual power and dedication, and tangibly showed to them that they would not be happy if they returned to the world. He went to the Sea of Galilee to meet them there, and through a miracle ensured that they caught an abundance of fish, thereby demonstrating that only He could make a difference in their lives. He could also make them fishers of men. This event shocked Peter back into reality, and for the first time he fully realised the mighty power of the Saviour. Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to confirm three times that he really loved Him. In this way he made amends for the three times he denied Jesus. He was then commanded to act as shepherd for His flock by feeding and protecting them: “Feed My lambs. ... Tend My sheep. ... Feed My sheep” (John 21:15-17).

Among the ranks of carnal Christians there are also various persons who, after a time, decide to quit following and serving the Lord, and to fully involve themselves with their secular work in the world without giving much attention to the kingdom of heaven. They no longer seek the Lord and only serve Him in a half-hearted way. Such people will never be happy because they exchanged their spiritual calling for something which is temporary, inferior and unfulfilling. To backslidden and disillusioned disciples of Christ there is only one way and that is the way back to the Lord Jesus, to renewed cleansing by His blood and filling by his Holy Spirit. They should read Psalm 51 and, together with David, again surrender themselves to the Lord.

However, this does not mean that a disciple of Jesus should not do secular work, as the principle stands firm: “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). Only a minority of disciples are called to fulltime ministry, and they are usually so deeply involved with the work of the Lord that there is no opportunity for secular work. Peter was one of these believers who was called to fulltime service, and he only decided to again become a fisherman when he could no longer face up to the challenge of his spiritual calling. What he needed was to be endued with power from on high.

His filling with the Holy Spirit and fruitful service

Peter was among the group of 120 disciples and other believers who waited in Jerusalem on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit so that they could be endued with power from on high. In Acts 1:8 the Lord Jesus said: “... you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” The commission was superhuman, but likewise also the enabling power of the Holy Spirit which is available to all disciples.

A time of waiting on the Lord was needed before the promised blessing was received. Peter, who earlier repeatedly denied Jesus when he succumbed to the pressure of hostile people, humbled himself for ten days together with the other disciples to confess his sin and fleshliness. He fully confirmed his faith in Jesus and waited on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to empower him for service. On the day of Pentecost the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and the “new Peter” with great boldness proclaimed the gospel of Christ to the deceived Jewish nation. He was only then able to fulfil his calling to be a fisher of men. This disciple, who was overcome by human weaknesses less than two months earlier, delivered a powerful message under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and three thousand people were led to the Lord for salvation.

Peter was not only an evangelist, as the Lord Jesus also entrusted a threefold pastoral ministry to him (John 21:15-17). He had to feed the Lord’s lambs, which refers to his duty to do follow-up

work among young converts with a view to firmly establishing them in the Christian faith and ensuring their spiritual growth. Furthermore, he was commanded to tend the Lord's sheep, which emphasises his responsibility to care for the entire congregation by protecting them against deception and also strengthening them spiritually to endure tribulation. In the last instance, he also had to feed the sheep, which means that mature believers should regularly get spiritual food to build them up as worthy disciples and witnesses of Christ. Milk should be served to the lambs and solid food to the sheep, so all of them can spiritually become stronger.

Peter wrote two epistles in which he evangelised fellow Jews and also ministered to congregations pastorally. In this way he ensured that young believers desired the pure milk of the Word that they might grow thereby (1 Pet. 2:2). The congregations were also prepared on persecution for the sake of their faith, so that they would not be discouraged when it happened but rather would emerge stronger from their trials and tribulations: "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Furthermore, he strongly warned against spiritual deception as deceived members of the church cannot be worthy witnesses of Christ. An entire chapter (2 Pet. 2) is devoted to false teachers and the danger of their false teachings. Deceived teachers promise to people liberty while they themselves are slaves of corruption (2 Pet. 2:19). The only solution to this problem is vigilance and watchfulness against deception, as well as an increase in the knowledge and grace of Christ: "You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:17-18).

During the entire phase of Peter's life after Pentecost he always knew what it was to walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit and to look far beyond earthly enticements to our eternal home in heaven. From his own experience he knew what it was to be a carnal believer who disappointed and denied the Lord Jesus in various ways, but by the grace of God he earnestly considered the command to wait on the Lord until he received the power of the Holy Spirit. After that he never faltered or looked back, not even at the end of his life when he was faced by a martyr's death through crucifixion.

Do you also walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit? If so, you will receive the power to be a witness for Christ, to stand firm in your faith and never, not even under the most trying circumstances, become despondent and consider turning back to the world. You will also be strong in the Lord to successfully resist the attacks of Satan. Furthermore, your knowledge of the Lord and His Word will increase until you will be able to fully comprehend with all the saints the boundless love of Christ for us, and to be rooted and grounded in it.

Peter pursued his Christian ministry with great fervour and dedication. He had a strong passion for evangelisation, and called on believers to "proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). He reminded them that he and his fellow apostles proclaimed real, historically verifiable facts: "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16).

The young congregation were also reminded that they were sojourners and pilgrims in an evil and perishing world in which everything possible should be done to abstain from evil and to serve the Lord with undivided hearts (1 Pet. 2:11). This call was also made in the light of the approaching second coming of Christ: "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of *persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet. 3:11-12).

Holiness unto the Lord was an important theme in Peter's epistles and preaching. He reiterated the command to Israel in Leviticus 11:44, thereby confirming its universal applicability to people of all ages: "... as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, because it is written, '*Be holy, for I am holy*'" (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Man was created in God's image of holiness,

but this divine image was destroyed by the Fall. However, we are called upon to become spiritually quickened and put on God's image of holiness, without which it is impossible to please Him. He made this new life possible through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3).

His martyr's death

Peter lived during a time of severe hostility towards the church of Christ. The opposition did not only come from the Jewish Council due to their militant rejection of Jesus as Messiah, but also from the apostate Roman Empire. These two powers both plotted together to condemn Jesus and have Him crucified as a criminal. During the trial of Jesus, Peter and the other disciples did not yet have the spiritual strength, insight and motivation to understand what was going on and to stand by Jesus to the end. They were overcome by fear of the Jewish leaders and fled. However, this fear completely vanished when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, and after that they did not even shy away from a threatening martyr's death.

Peter would never again deny Jesus, and he did not even fear Nero's power when he was confronted by crucifixion in Rome. Jesus had earlier predicted the unhappy end to Peter's earthly life when He said to him: "Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry *you* where you do not wish.' This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, 'Follow Me'" (John 21:18-19). He did not only proclaim the gospel of the cross, but also physically followed Jesus on the way of crucifixion.

According to *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* Peter was sentenced to death and was crucified in Rome: "Nero sought matter against Peter to put him to death; which, when the people perceived, they entreated Peter with much ado that he would fly the city. Peter, through their importunity at length persuaded, prepared himself to avoid. But, coming to the gate, he saw the Lord Christ come to meet him, to whom he, worshipping, said, 'Lord, whither dost Thou go?' To whom He answered and said, 'I am come again to be crucified.' By this, Peter, perceiving his suffering to be understood, returned into the city. Jerome saith that he was crucified, his head being down and his feet upward, himself so requiring, because he was (he said) unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as the Lord was."

It is only when one's eyes are fixed on your eternal destiny in heaven that you will unconditionally follow and serve the Lord Jesus – regardless what the cost may be. Filling with the Holy Spirit is an absolute requisite for a life of unwavering service to the Lord, as well as fearlessness regarding the consequences of doing so – even if it means a martyr's death. Peter had a vivid experience of filling with the Holy Spirit after conversion. Although the Holy Spirit was poured out in the first century once and for all, every believer first needs a time of humbling and soul-searching to have his heart purified and cleansed from all sin and fleshliness – only then will the Holy Spirit take control of him in all His fullness.

Can you also testify to the filling of the Holy Spirit and do you still walk in the Spirit? Without that you will not have firm convictions, you will be carried about with every wind of doctrine, you will easily succumb to the smallest resistance, and above all you will not be fit to act as a witness for the Lord Jesus while He tarries to come. We should also, like the 120 faithful followers of Jesus in the upper room, wait on the Lord until we are endued with power from on high. Then alone will we be able to engage in the difficult commission which He has entrusted to us.

6. Underway to the Promised Land

Johan Malan, Mossel Bay, South Africa (September 2014)

Scripture reading: "... brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. ... Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:1-6, 11).

Paul urges the New Testament church to heed the lessons of God's dealings with Israel, and to also learn from their mistakes, as we are all on a journey to eternity. Israel's exodus from Egypt is an example of this pilgrimage. They departed on a journey which started during the slaying of the paschal lamb and eventually brought them into the Promised Land. Only a small group of them took to heart the spiritual lessons of sanctification and deeper dedication which the Lord had taught them on this journey. The great majority of the nation faltered spiritually and often sinned grievously.

Israel's liberation from Egypt and their exodus from the land of their sinful past to move out and serve the Lord away from their oppressors, is a type of the salvation of sinners and their subsequent separation from spiritual bondage in order to live a new life of serving the Lord without any compromise with the world. The journey on which Israel embarked from Egypt to Canaan is a type of the New Testament way of holiness. The spiritual callousness of Israel and their repeated refusal to subject themselves to God's guidance, foreshadowed the attitude of New Testament Christians who persist with their fleshliness and love for the world, thereby failing to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 7:1).

Paul says that we must take to heart the warnings about Israel's apostasy, particularly in view of the fact that so few Christians persevere on the way of holiness and complete surrender to the Lord. If we continue to pursue bad, fleshly lusts we will retard or even completely block our spiritual growth.

Israel's journey of redemption started right inside Egypt where the people were powerless slaves of Pharaoh. The paschal lamb which was sacrificed in Egypt prophetically foreshadowed the Lord Jesus as the spotless Lamb of God who was sacrificed for the sins of the whole world. Paul says: "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). "In Him we have redemption through His blood" (Eph. 1:7). Peter says that we were redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (cf. 1 Pet. 1:18-19). The glorified church will sing out to the Lamb around His throne: "You were slain, and has redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

After Israel had been saved from Pharaoh's power, they immediately moved out of Egypt towards a new destination. When we have been delivered from Satan's power and crossed over from spiritual darkness into God's marvellous light, we are on a journey to fulfil God's purpose with our lives. We are called to walk the way of increased holiness, on which we often meet with new challenges from which we should emerge stronger in the Lord every time. Our salvation is only the beginning of a long journey of spiritual growth, on which we should persevere until all the wonderful promises of the Lord have been fulfilled in our lives.

Shortly after Israel had been liberated from Egypt, they were confronted and attacked by another enemy, i.e. the Amalekites. Armed horsemen of Amalek overtook and killed Israelites who moved slowly and lagged behind. In this case the enemy penetrated the migrating nation and attacked those who trailed behind the main group as they were the easiest target. Amalek is a type of the devil who attacks God's people from the inside, and as such he depicts the innate sinful nature which needs to be conquered. Pharaoh is a type of the devil who attacks from the outside, thereby trying to rule over people, enslave them and kill them. After the Lord had saved Israel from Pharaoh's domination and broke the power which he wielded over them, they

urgently also needed to conquer this other enemy who operated from within.

In the New Testament, we as believers are in the same situation. After a person has been saved from Satan's power, the devil still has an ally in this person's life which is his old, sinful nature or the old man. The devil therefore works from the inside through the flesh to attack a believer spiritually, to incapacitate him and render his life fruitless. We also need to prevail over this enemy from the inside if we wish to make spiritual progress.

Israel arrived at Rephidim where water flowed from the rock. This was not only the beginning of a peaceful phase after gaining victory over Amalek, but they were also inwardly refreshed. God cleft a rock for His people and availed them with a stream of water from which they could drink. After this uplifting experience there was a positive turn of events in the war against Amalek, and Israel achieved a resounding victory. The clash with Amalek was very intense. When Moses raised his hands in blessing, Joshua and his men prevailed over the forces of Amalek. But when Moses lowered his hands, Amalek prevailed. This is a typical situation of falling and rising again. As a solution to this problem, Aaron and Hur supported his hands to keep them up, and so Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. Aaron, the priest, personifies prayer while Hur (Whiteness or Purity) personifies holiness. We cannot gain victory in the struggle over the flesh without continuous prayer and wholehearted surrender towards holiness.

In 1 Corinthians 10:4 Paul says that the cleft rock points to Christ. The stream of water alludes to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Christ was "struck" on the cross and subsequently raised from the dead. He invites all of us to drink from this stream and become spiritually revived: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive" (John 7:37-39).

Through the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus and the filling of the Holy Spirit we can prevail over the innate sinful nature. This struggle must go hand in hand with continuous prayer and a holy walk. Persevere with spiritual warfare until Amalek has been utterly defeated. After this victory you can also rest in the Lord and in His strength as the inward conflict between the Spirit and the flesh has been settled. Amalek will again return to try and revive the flesh, but if your relationship with the Lord is sound the evil one will never again achieve his purpose to control you. Only persevere on the way of prayer and holy living and give no place to the devil (Eph. 4:27).

It is important to note that the struggle against Amalek never ends but continues throughout all generations: "The Lord *will have war with Amalek from generation to generation*" (Ex. 17:16). Every new generation of people has to be delivered from their indwelling, sinful nature. After that, the resistance against the flesh should not be diminished as it must remain in a crucified position and not be allowed to be revived and regain its lost control. The Lord Jesus emphasised that a daily commitment is needed to this end: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). After Amalek has been defeated and we have entered into the victorious life, we should continuously be conformed to the crucified Christ in order to keep on walking by the Spirit and not by the flesh.

When the Holy Spirit in His fullness has gained control over a person's life and endued him with power to prevail over sin, He will also guide the person to more thoroughly understand the Word of God. The Lord Jesus said: "[W]hen He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). The same principle also applied to believing Israelites, which enabled them to say: "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Ps. 119:11).

The liberated people of God arrived at Sinai on the 50th day after their exodus from Egypt, and sojourned there for about a year. A new life awaited them as the Chosen People, and for this purpose new principles of life had to be instilled in them. They needed to have a thorough knowledge of the laws of God, and conscientiously walk in accordance with His precepts. If they would have fully embraced the lessons of faith, prayer, holy living as well as victory over evil forces, Sinai would have been a marvellously fulfilling experience to them. Unfortunately, with only a few exceptions, the contrary is true. Most of the Israelites only had an outward form of

godliness as their hearts still yearned for the pots of meat in Egypt. When Moses stayed too long on the mountain to the people's liking when he received the laws of the Lord, they made a golden calf, danced before this abominable image and honoured it as their god who had led them out of Egypt (Ex. 32:1-6). This is completely unthinkable but it nevertheless happened. That is why the Lord says that Israel's lusting after evil things has been written as a warning to us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. If we backslide and start insulting God by our actions, we will also ignite His anger over us. We cannot bow down before idols such as Mammon and think that God will be tolerant of our blasphemous behaviour.

The spiritual meaning of Sinai is that the Word of God should be written in our hearts. Paul says: "... clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:3). We should grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour (2 Pet. 3:18), so we can have a working knowledge of God's Word. We should dedicate ourselves to continued Bible study after we have surrendered ourselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Whether we conduct a formal Bible study by enrolling for one or other course or whether we gain this knowledge through self-study does not really matter. The basic fact is that we need to do systematic Bible study as then alone can we be used by the Lord. Have you studied the Word of the Lord so your footsteps can be firmly anchored to it? "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16), then you will be able to proclaim it to others with good results.

The challenge of a life of fullness

Israel did not positively react to the spiritual lessons which they had learned during their journey through the wilderness, and were therefore not well prepared to face the challenges that awaited them on the border of the Promised Land. Moses sent out twelve spies to explore the land and then report back. Joshua was one of them (Num. 13:17-20). The great majority of these explorers (ten of the twelve) became terrified at the sight of the inhabitants of the land and advised Israel not to try and occupy the land. After 40 days of investigating they reported as follows to Moses:

"We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan. Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it. But the men who had gone up with him said, We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are. And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored" (Num. 13:27-32; NIV).

However, Joshua and Caleb encouraged the people and tried to restore their faith in the omnipotence of God: "Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, He will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them. But the whole assembly talked about stoning them" (Num. 14:6-10; NIV).

Moses also confirmed what Joshua and Caleb said: "The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place. Yet, for all that, you did not believe the LORD your God" (Deut. 1:30-32).

The large majority of Israelites who did not believe that God could give them the land of Canaan, forfeited God's promises because of their unbelief, and that generation perished in the wilderness. Only members of the young generation, who put their faith in the Lord under the leadership of Joshua, were worthy to take possession of the land. The exploration of the

Promised Land was an important turning-point on Israel's journey from Egypt. If the nation had accepted the Lord's instructions by faith, they would have been well prepared and spiritually strong enough to accept the big challenge of crossing over into the land. However, unbelieving Israel preferred to permanently stay in the wilderness rather than, together with the Lord, taking possession of their inheritance across the Jordan. Many of them were even prepared to return to Egypt and again become slaves of Pharaoh. They chose the easy way of the least resistance, and because of that they impoverished themselves to the point where they were unworthy to inherit the promises and rich blessings of the Lord.

Modern Christianity is in precisely the same situation. We regard ourselves as Christians who have already been delivered from the "Egypt" of our sinful past. As in the case of Israel, many of the members of Christian churches only have a form of godliness without a testimony of rebirth. They are hangers-on who are far from saved and mostly behave contrary to what the Bible teaches. Some of the others are truly saved but still in the infant phase of their new life of faith. Only a small group is spiritually mature because they are able to testify about sanctification after repentance, and they proceed resolutely by faith to appropriate the promises of the Lord.

The spiritual problems and lack of insight associated with the majority of believers incline them to be overly dependent on religious leaders, and they trust solely in them to inform them on how to live as Christians. Like Israel, they also rely on explorers to survey the road ahead and then advise the people of God on the appropriate way to take. These explorers, the religious leaders, claim that they have the knowledge to correctly advise people on how to reach their spiritual destination. They probe the theological landscape by studying the Bible, offering guidelines on how God's promises in His Word should be interpreted, compiling doctrines, and suggesting solutions on how crises should be solved. The enormous influence which the teachings of some church fathers like Origen, Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Wesley, and others, have had over the centuries, cannot be overlooked – some of them proclaimed biblical truths while others promoted unbelief and deception.

It is especially in the field of theology where the devil has been very active to deceive millions of people by robbing them spiritually and inducing them to take the wrong road, and this onslaught is becoming more intense. As in the case of Israel, the majority of modern explorers offer completely wrong advice to the people. They do not focus on the salvation of Christ, hence they regard the victorious Canaan life as an unattainable ideal and tell their followers that they are weak people who will never prevail over sin and fleshliness. The enemy is perceived as being too strong for them; consequently they should reconcile themselves with the idea that they are destined to be wilderness sojourners – nothing more. They have been liberated from Egypt and should be content with their present position. Christians should not strive after the victorious life as that will not be realised.

Do you recognise this type of language which is not only fatalistic but also reveals unbelief in various biblical promises? Such theologians, and church fathers, undermine the credibility of the Bible because they are mainly inclined towards denial. Not all of them renounce all biblical doctrines, as some of them do recognise the doctrine of salvation as depicted by Israel's salvation from their Egyptian bondage. However, they are contented with this fact, and deny that there is a further transition to the Promised Land, thereby depriving themselves from a large number of biblical promises. Because of their self-imposed theological limitations they deny the following doctrines and promises in the Bible since they boldly declare: There is no further work of grace related to sanctification and the filling of the Holy Spirit as all Christians have already received the Holy Spirit in His fullness; there is no such thing as carnal Christians who walk by the flesh; there is no rapture, no personal Antichrist or a literal tribulation of seven years; Israel is no longer God's people, and the restoration of modern Israel has no bearing on the fulfilment of biblical prophecies; the throne of David will not be restored in Jerusalem, and there will not be a thousand-year reign of peace after the second coming of Christ. This group of theological explorers do recognise Jesus as Saviour but they are not Spirit-filled, they do not understand the whole counsel of God, and are completely stuck in the wilderness life with its spiritual poverty and precarious existence. Their knowledge of biblical eschatology is also very scant.

As apostasy increases, the list of theological denials becomes longer and the falling away from the truth increases in its extent. The following are new additions to this list, and with these heretical statements the basic foundations of the Christian faith are destroyed (cf. Ps. 11:3): According to modern apostates there is no such thing as rebirth as people are saved in a ritualistic way during baptism; Christ was not born from a virgin; He is not God; His crucifixion was a political act which has nothing to do with the forgiveness of sins; He did not rise from the dead and therefore did not ascend to heaven; He is not the only Saviour as there are many other messiahs in the world religions; the Bible is not the inspired and inerrant Word of God; there is no heaven or hell and also no devil; sin is a relative concept and every person can decide for himself what is right and wrong. This group of theological explorers are of the opinion that it was a mistake for Israel to move out of Egypt, thereby confining themselves to a miserable wilderness life. They favour a return to Egypt and the embracing of a multireligious orientation. Religious thinking of this nature represents a transition from a weak faith to no faith at all. According to the Bible, extreme apostatising is the consequence of demonic-inspired deception, and that is particularly characteristic of the end-time shortly before the second coming of Christ (1 Tim. 4:1).

Contrary to the large group of deceived explorers there is a small group of faithful ones who give sound counsel from the Word of God. They do their best to promote faith in the power of God and the truth of His promises. There is in fact a Promised Land to take possession of, and it amounts to unbelief in God if we refuse to accept His promises by faith and to trust Him for full salvation and complete sanctification (cf. 1 Thess. 5:23). Why would He promise a land (or life) to us wherein we can live free from domination by our enemies if it were impossible to achieve victories in His Name? We will spiritually impoverish ourselves beyond measure if we fail to humble ourselves while waiting to be endued with power from on high, as that is the only key to victory over all our enemies.

The two reliable explorers were rejected by Israel, and there were even calls to kill them. It is the same today, and that is the reason why there is so much antagonism and negative emotions among members and leaders of different denominations. Preachers who stand firmly on evangelical principles, which include sanctification as a deeper work of grace, are in most cases not popular spiritual leaders. In their exploration of the spiritual landscape they are fully aware of the extensive power of the enemy. However, this awareness do not negatively impact on their view about the road ahead, because they are also aware of a still bigger truth – that is the power of God to fulfil His Word and all His promises to us. He can and also wishes to make all of us more than conquerors.

The church of the end-time is divided into three different groups. Some of its members only mentally identify with Christianity but they are still in Egypt and not yet redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Another group has already been saved from their sinful past but find themselves in the precarious existence of the wilderness life because they have not yet had the experience of sanctification. Only a smaller, third group find themselves in the Promised Land of a victorious spiritual life. In many cases there are representatives of all three these groups in the same congregation – unsaved members, carnal members, and spiritual members.

Because of the low spiritual standards which are so prevalent in the world, many of the dedicated Christians pray earnestly to the Lord that He will revive the church – that the spiritual ones among them will again be filled with power from on high to serve the Lord with greater commitment; that the carnal ones will make a complete surrender to experience the victory which the Lord has promised to us all; and that the unsaved ones will be saved. We live in a time in which those who are unjust become more unjust, but in which those who are holy are called to higher levels of holiness (Rev. 22:11).

Because of the strenuous demands which are imposed on Christians in the end-time due to more widespread apostatising, children of the Lord should take care that their enthusiasm for the cause of the Lord does not dwindle. It is for good reasons that the Lord Jesus warned us against the rising tide of unrighteousness: “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold” (Matt. 24:12). We must not, like Peter in the stormy sea at night, become frightened

at the sight of the dark and threatening waves, but keep our eyes fixed on Jesus while expecting His coming: “And everyone who has this hope in Him [the second coming of Christ] purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

While we are waiting on the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom we should make very sure that we are not spiritually wayward and roaming around in the wilderness of a carnal or worldly way of living. To be in the Promised Land in a New Testament sense, implies that we have accepted all the promises of the Lord Jesus on salvation and sanctification, and daily follow Him (1 John 2:6). That will enable us to become mature Christians who prevail over our spiritual enemies. The key to a life of victory and fruitful service is to remain true to our Saviour. John says: “Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 1:8-9).

May the Lord help us to abide in the doctrine of Christ by always confessing His deity, power and grace, and to daily increase in His grace and knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18). When we experience more of Him in our hearts, our lives and in our churches, we will be able to more convincingly reach out to carnal Christians who are still in a purposeless journey through a spiritual wilderness, and also to an unsaved world who are the victims of their own unbelief.