



JESUS CHRIST

and

Our Life in Him

Johan Malan

Jesus Christ and our Life in Him

Johan Malan, Mossel Bay, South Africa (September 2011)

All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV), unless otherwise indicated. References from the King James Version are designated KJV, from the Modern King James Version MKJV, from the New International Version NIV, from the Living Bible LB, and from the Amplified Bible AB.

Other Abbreviations:

NT : New Testament

OT : Old Testament

Eng. : English

Heb. : Hebrew

Gr. : Greek

Research documents on the deity and sonship of the Lord Jesus were kindly supplied to the author by Bernard Reeves of London, while very fruitful discussions were also conducted with him during his visits to South Africa in the late 1990's.

A Jewish Publisher in Jerusalem, Victor Smadja, kindly presented author with a copy of a book by Risto Santala (1992), which contains a thorough examination of Messianic prophecies in the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament. At the time, the Hebrew version of this book was already in its 5th edition. The author found the information especially valuable from the viewpoint of the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah.

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For a wide range of the author's Christian articles and books in various languages please access his website at www.bibleguidance.co.za

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Contents

Foreword

1. God Incarnate
2. The Sonship and Deity of the Lord Jesus
3. The Atoning Death of the Lamb of God
4. The Centre of our Existence
5. Love as a Principle of Life
6. Commands and Promises
7. Our Life in Christ
8. The King who Comes Again
9. Marriage of the Lamb
10. Excellence of the Messiah

References

About the Author

Back Cover

Foreword

This book was compiled from a number of articles which, during the course of several years, were made available on the author's website, www.bibleguidance.co.za. The motivation for this present publication is to offer a systematic, evangelical doctrine on the Person and works of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first aim with the book is to bring honour to the Name above all names; secondly, to help believers, with the advantage of improved knowledge, to offer resistance against the rising tide of theological deception on who Jesus Christ really is; and thirdly, to help people meet the true Christ of the Scriptures, to receive Him as their Saviour and develop a more intimate relationship with Him.

Like Paul, we should endeavour to say: "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, ... and [to] be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, ... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Phil. 3:7-10).

What important discovery Paul had made! The excellence of the knowledge of Christ is so profound that nothing can be compared to it – no earthly treasures, no form of self-righteousness, and no moral justification based upon law-observance. He discovered the secret that we should accept the remission offered to us by Christ and, with Him, die to the world and to sin, so we can share in His resurrection life. The more we die to the old life, the more we will be able to identify with the life of Christ and become conformed to it.

There is no other secret for a successful Christian life. We must daily glory in the cross of Christ, reckon ourselves to be dead indeed to sin (Rom. 6:11), and also consciously put on His holy and overcoming life. If we surrender ourselves like this, the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth (John 16:13-14); He will glorify Jesus Christ and make Him a greater reality in our lives.

If there is one important discovery which I have made after studying the Bible for many years, it is that all biblical doctrines are linked to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The more clarity we have on His Person and works, the better we will understand all other matters of faith. In His light we see the light. But when He is no longer the central focus of our spiritual life and ministry, we lose a great deal of discernment, are inclined to raise minor issues to the level of major issues, and do not arrive at prudent and lasting solutions to the spiritual problems of individuals or nations.

Presenting topical studies has become a very popular approach in many Christian ministries, particularly also on the Internet. These people occupy themselves almost exclusively with discernment type ministries in order to investigate and expose certain forms of spiritual deception, but they seem to have hardly any success in changing the minds of deceived people. Why? Because they give more attention to the lie than to the truth.

We indeed have a problem if we produce more reading-matter on the Antichrist than on Christ, more on sin than on righteousness, more on a humanistic new world order than on Christ's kingdom, more on the church fathers and their doctrines than on the Head of the church and His doctrine, more on religious rituals and ecstatic experiences than on rebirth and walking in the Spirit, more on law-observing than on a life of holiness and liberty in the Lord Jesus, and also more on Israel and their restoration to the land than on the consequences of their severed relationship with the Messiah. Some of the ministries among Israel have decided, in the interest of good relations with orthodox Jews, to not even mention that Jesus is the Messiah and King of Israel and the whole world. This approach is a cul-de-sac as it does not lead to the only biblical solution of Israel's problems, i.e. to become a truly Messianic people.

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. If we proclaim Him with greater dedication, all forms of deception will be clearly revealed in the light of His truth: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. ... Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be

free indeed” (John 8:32, 36).

When the truth about Christ and His doctrine is proclaimed to its full extent, everything which is at variance with it will be clearly exposed as deception. The basic truths about Him, as the Word that became flesh, have a liberating power and will reveal and counter all misconceptions about Him.

In our reflection on Jesus Christ we should also focus on the spiritual life of His followers, as they are the work of His hands who are described as the members of His body. Paul says to the church: “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Cor. 12:27; cf. Rom. 12:5). Under the guidance of Jesus Christ, His Spirit and His Word, it is our duty and calling to promote the proper functioning of this body to the glory of the Lord and the “equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). That will only happen if He is always our highest and first love.

The love of the Lord Jesus urges us to love Him with all our heart, and also our neighbour as ourselves. Do we really care enough about other Christians? We should minister to one another and build others up spiritually: “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. 4:10).

May you experience the reading of this book as a journey to spiritual fulfilment in Christ Jesus. If we sincerely love Him for the sake of Himself and His everlasting kingdom, great value will be added to our Christian life and witness.

Johan Malan

1. God Incarnate

Amid all the false religions originating from the kingdom of darkness, the counterfeit Jesuses emerging from distortions of Christianity, the deadness of many apostate churches, and the deceiving spirits that lead millions of nominal Christians astray, the Lord Jesus Christ still stands out as the only shining light of a morally and spiritually dark world. He is the only real and lasting solution to an increasingly depraved human race that lies under the sway of Satan. Only in Jesus Christ and His unique gospel of salvation is true life to be found for all who are spiritually dead and slaves to sin:

- He is “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6) to all who find themselves on the broad way that leads to destruction, and who cannot escape the alluring deceptions of Satan who blinds their mind and spirit. To all who come to Him He offers deliverance and life abundant.
- He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. You do not need to continue struggling with the bondage of your sins and iniquities, and to make futile efforts to rid yourself of the increasing bondage to sin which ultimately leads to death and hell.
- He is the eternal and immovable Rock of the Ages upon whom we can build our lives. The decadent nations of the world are challenged to come to Christ in these troubled times and base their constitutions, social systems and moral norms on the Bible.
- It is of vital importance to know the Lord Jesus Christ *personally* – not only as Lord and Saviour, but also as the true Friend who will never forsake you, the Shepherd who will lead and guide you, the Bridegroom who will come again to take you to heaven, the world’s coming King and also the many other roles in which He is revealed in the Bible. After the life-changing day in which you confess your sins and invite Him into your heart, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour (2 Pet. 3:18).

The apostle Paul was firmly determined to gain more knowledge of and an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, and dedicated himself to realising this objective. That should be the great motivating power in our lives, “... till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, 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).

The Lord Jesus Christ reveals Himself in all His fullness through His personal and descriptive names recorded in the Bible. If we already know Him as Lord, Saviour and Lamb of God, a study of the meanings of His other wonderful names will lead us into a deeper knowledge and greater appreciation of the Man of Calvary. To behold the glory of the One who has a Name above all names will enrich your spiritual life and motivate you to love Him with all your heart.

The translation of names

Before the names of the Lord Jesus are discussed, the question on the desirability and/or correctness of translating the original Hebrew names pertaining to the Godhead should first be considered as it also has theological implications. A movement back to these names usually also coincide with a movement back to Old Testament practices which have already been fulfilled and do not apply to the New Testament church.

Such a movement is gaining ground today. This movement, which is also referred to as the “Sacred Name Movement”, is openly committed to the Judaising of Christianity. They take a strong stand on the exclusive use of Hebrew names for God and the Lord Jesus. But their ideas are based mainly upon ignorance and false suppositions. Some of them even go so far as to contend that Greek names for God and Jesus Christ, which have been used in virtually all Bible translations, refer to idols. It is, for instance, alleged that *Jesus* is derived from *Je-Zeus*, which means *Son of Zeus* (a well-known pagan god in Greek mythology). In order to clarify this controversy we need to investigate the use of different languages in biblical times.

During the Assyrian and subsequent Babylonian captivity of Israel, and also during the ensuing period, most Jews had lost their knowledge of Hebrew. They started using Aramaic and Greek as colloquial languages. Aramaic was the *lingua franca* in the entire Middle East, being used by many different peoples. It was a mixture of Syrian and Hebrew. The biblical name for Syria is “Aram”. During the time of Jesus, Aramaic was the common language in Israel. Jesus and His disciples spoke a Galilean dialect of Aramaic. Knowledge of Hebrew was confined to educated Jews, e.g. the rabbis and the scribes.

Jesus Christ was referred to in Aramaic as *Eashoa Msheekha*, in Hebrew as *Yashua* (or *Yeshua*) *Ha Mashiach*, and in Greek as *Iesous Christos* (*Iesous* being pronounced as *Yesous*). All books of the New Testament were originally given in Greek by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21), and in these books God is rendered *Theos*, Lord is described as *Kurios*, and Jesus Christ is referred to as *Iesous Christos*. To allege that these are the names of idols derived from a non-Jewish culture is heretical. The Greek names for God (*Theos* and *Kurios*) had already been established for more than two centuries by then and were also generally used in Israel. They were never controversial.

The nouns *God* or *gods* can, however, be used as generic terms to refer to *idols*, *other gods* or *foreign gods*, depending on the context in which they are used. The devil can, for instance, be described as the god (*theos*) of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). The same rule also applies to Hebrew, where *Elohim* may both refer to God and to *idols* or *other gods*. In Exodus 20:2-3 God says: “I am the Lord (*Yahweh*) your God (*Elohim*) You shall have no other gods (*elohim*) before Me.” Both the Greek and Hebrew personal names and nouns were originally used by the Holy Spirit while inspiring the authors of the Bible, and it is wrong to allege that the Greek names are poor translations of the Hebrew names.

In the time of Jesus, Aramaic was the common language in Israel. The statement in Acts 21:40, that Paul addressed the people “in the Hebrew tongue” (KJV), should have been translated more accurately as “in the Hebrew dialect” – in this case Aramaic. The Amplified Bible and the Modern King James Version say: “... he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect.” The rendering of the NIV is as follows: “... he said to them in Aramaic.” Stanley Toussaint (1983:417) says: “When Paul was granted permission to speak to the mob, he addressed them in Aramaic, the common language of Palestinian Jews, used throughout the Middle East at that time.” Many of those were also able to speak Greek.

The Septuagint is a Greek version of the Old Testament which was translated in the third century BC in Alexandria, Egypt, for use by Greek-speaking Jews. It was widely used by Hellenistic Jews who were spread throughout the Greek empire and who gradually left off using their Hebrew language. This translation also gave many non-Jews insight into Israel’s history, culture and religious development. *Septuaginta* is the Latin word for 70 and refers to the 70 Jewish scholars who did the translation. For this reason it is sometimes abbreviated LXX. Other sources state that there were 72 translators – six from each of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Following this tradition, all the books of the New Testament were originally written in Greek. For this reason we often find expressions like: “... which is translated ...” (see Matt. 1:23; Mark 5:41; 15:22; 15:34; John 1:38; 1:42; Acts 4:36; 9:36). Reference is made to certain Aramaic and Hebrew words which were translated into Greek. The authors mostly quoted from the Septuagint, and occasionally from the Hebrew or Aramaic. There is extensive evidence in the Gospels that quotations were made from the Septuagint, and not from the Hebrew text of the OT.

Hebrew text contains no vowels, and was vowelised very much later. That is one of the reasons why the so-called “Bible codes” cannot work. Aramaic words are also encountered in the NT, such as *Pharisee* and *Abba*. Authors quoted from the Greek Septuagint, as that was the medium of instruction during the writing of the NT.

General consensus among scholars of the original languages is that the authors of the NT mainly quoted from the Septuagint. The OT sections from which Romans 3:13-18 and

Hebrews 1:6 quote, do not even appear in the Hebrew texts and are only found in the Septuagint. The following, among other comments by him on Hebrews 1:6, is said by Zane Hodges (1983:782): “The reference is to the Second Advent when the kingly prerogatives of the Son will be recognized with open angelic worship (cf. Ps. 97:7 where the LXX rendering ‘angels’ correctly renders the text).”

In light of these facts it is not possible that the sacred names should only be used in Hebrew. In any case, nobody knows exactly how God’s Name should be pronounced in Hebrew. The Tetragram YHWH can, in vowelised form, be pronounced in many different ways, e.g. Yahweh, Yehowah and Yahuweh. Consensus is also lacking on how the name of Jesus should be pronounced in Hebrew – Yeshua, Yahshua or Yahushua.

Theologically we are on safe ground when using the names God, Lord, and Jesus Christ, which were derived from the Greek words. The Hebraic rendering of names and religious terminology often leads to a theological orientation where aspects of the OT law and covenants with Israel are emphasised at the detriment of the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ and His work of grace in the NT. Whenever the church or any group of believers see themselves as Israel, theological room is made for erroneous teachings of this nature.

God the Son

Before discussing the names and offices of the Lord Jesus, it might be expedient to first make a very clear New Testament statement on His deity and eternal self-existence. The exposition in Hebrews 1 is very useful for this purpose. The Epistle to the Hebrews was most likely written by Paul to Jewish believers who were under strong pressure from other Jews to relinquish their Christian beliefs and return to their ancestral faith. Among orthodox Jews, one of the most disputed and fiercely resisted Christian beliefs was (and still is) the profession of the deity of Jesus Christ as God the Son and also King of Israel. In view of the strong opposition which the growing number of Messianic Jews experienced at that time, this divinely-inspired epistle was written to strengthen their faith.

Zane Hodges (1983:777) says: “The Epistle to the Hebrews is a rich part of the New Testament canon. In a unique fashion it exalts the person and works of the Lord Jesus Christ. In doing so, it makes immensely valuable contributions to the doctrines of His Incarnation, His substitutionary death, and His priesthood. ... The church would indeed be incalculably poorer without the teaching of this inspired book.” In the first chapter, great truths are stated which are further expounded upon in the rest of the epistle:

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 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; who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say: You are My Son, Today I have begotten You? And again: I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son? But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: Let all the angels of God worship Him. And of the angels He says: Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire. But to the Son *He* says: Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness *is* the sceptre of Your Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions. And: You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail” (Heb. 1:1-12).

The following are key statements in this chapter:

The Triune God's final revelation to humanity through the Son (v. 1-2). Hodges (1983:780) says: "In a majestically constructed opening paragraph, the writer introduced his readers at once to the surpassing greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son, he declared, is the par excellence vehicle for divine revelation." What the prophets said in the Old Testament constituted a gradual unfolding of God's revelations to prepare humanity for the divinely appointed moment when He would become Man through the Son, the Messiah. The Son is the designated heir of all things and will reign as King forever. He made the worlds, and therefore existed from all eternity.

The Son is the express image of the Triune Godhead (v. 3-4). He is exalted far above the angels as He is not merely a servant of God as they are, but the express image of God. By His divine power He upholds all of creation. After He had purged our sins He ascended to heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

A Father-Son relationship existed since the incarnation (v. 5-6). At a certain point in time one member of the Triune God was incarnated and became God the Son. For that reason we refer to the "incarnational Sonship" of Jesus, i.e. the time when the Word became flesh (cf. John 1:1, 14), and not to His "eternal Sonship". He is not a created being who was begotten by the Father in the beginning, but from all eternity the self-existent God and Creator of heaven and earth. From a certain point in time He became the Son, and from that time onwards the Bible refers to a Father-Son-relationship within the Trinity.

The Son is both God and King (v. 8-9). Irrefutable evidence is given that the Son is God: "To the Son *he* [God] says: Your throne, O God, *is* for ever and ever; ... therefore God, Your God, has anointed You." Zane Hodges (1983:782) says: "The quotation found in verses 8-9 is derived from Psalm 45:6-7 which describes the final triumph of God's messianic King." In this Messianic Psalm the name "God" (Heb. *Elohim*) is applied to both the Father and the Son.

The Son is the self-existent LORD who will live forever (v. 10-12). In these verses God says of His Son: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth and the heaven; ... like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same." This is a quotation from Psalm 102:25-27. Jesus is here referred to as Lord (Heb. *Yahweh*). The immutability of the One who is King, Son, Lord and God, is further stressed by these statements. The Son is the LORD who created both earth and the heavens. But even when the present creation wears out like an old garment and is exchanged for a new one, the Son will remain unchanged and create new heavens and a new earth. Towards the end of this epistle the immutability of the Son is reiterated: "Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8).

Names of the Lord Jesus

The names of the Lord Jesus Christ can be divided into four categories, i.e. His personal name, His names as God, His official name and official titles, and finally His descriptive names which emphasise His various attributes or works:

Personal name

The name *Jesus* (*The Lord [Yahweh] is Salvation*; Heb. *Yeshua*) was given to Jesus by God Himself. An angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:20-21).

To meet the divine qualification to be the Saviour of Israel and of the whole world, Jesus had to be the perfect God-man. He had to become man and be born of a human generation (the royal lineage of David) to be *the Son of Man*. That would qualify Him to be a substitute for human beings and atone for their sins. For this very reason, Jesus could not be begotten by any man, so as not to inherit the depraved nature of fallen humanity ("*There is none who does*

good, no, not one” – Ps. 14:3). Jesus was begotten by God the Father through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit so that He, as man, could also be *the Son of God*. That is why He was born from a virgin (Luke 1:27, 35).

His name as God

In the Old Testament the LORD God (Yahweh Elohim, the Triune God) declared Himself to be the eternal, self-existent “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14). In John 8:58 Jesus Christ declared, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM.” He is the self-existent God, co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, and should also be addressed as Lord and God. The apostle John confirms this statement: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). He laid aside all His glory and power as God the Almighty Creator, subjected Himself to the will of God the Father, and, out of love for sinful humanity, humbled Himself to become a Man, so as to be able to atone for our sins by dying for us on Calvary’s cross!

Though Christ accepted all the limitations of being Man, there are indications of His divine glory, as confirmed by the apostle Paul who says of Him: “He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible He is before all things ...” (Col. 1:15-17). In Hebrews we read: The Triune God has spoken to us in the Person of the Son “who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His Person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3). His deity was also evidenced when He, as Man, said, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30).

In John 5, the equality of the Son and the Father is confirmed by way of seven statements. They are equal in works (v. 19), equal in knowledge (v. 20), equal in quickening power (v. 21), equal in judgements (v. 22), equal in honourableness (v. 23), equal in recreative power (v. 24), and equal in self-existence (v. 26).

Indeed, Jesus, the Word, though Man, is both Lord (*Kurios* – Acts 10:36) and God (*Theos* – Rom. 9:5). It is important to address Him by these titles when we pray to Him or speak to others about Him. Before His crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it was commonplace to address Jesus only as Master (*Didaskalos, Kathegetes, Rabbi, or Epistates*). Only His disciples were aware that He was the promised Messiah (*Mashiach* or *Christ*) and the Son of God (Matt. 16:13-17). After His glorification, His full Godhead was revealed and then He was not only addressed as Master, but as Lord and God.

Peter refers to Jesus as “Lord” and “Christ” (1 Pet. 1:3), and also as “God” and “Saviour” (2 Pet. 1:1). John says that “Jesus Christ ... is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). Paul often refers to Him as “Lord” (Eph. 1:15) and in great awe describes Him as “the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13).

We should always connect the personal name of Jesus to His deity (i.e. Lord Jesus), or to His official name (Jesus Christ), or to both names (Lord Jesus Christ). In view of the widespread denial of His virgin birth and His deity we should always worship and proclaim Him as Lord and God.

Seeing that unbelievers often take the name of Christ in vain and even Christians use that name on its own when referring to Him in a rather formal and impersonal way, we should always join it to His personal name. Those who use the name of Christ on its own give the impression that they may not know Him personally and therefore do not use His personal name.

We should remember that there is “no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved,” but the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). Call on the name of Jesus while always honouring Him as Lord and God. New Testament believers who do Bible study under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, have the benefit of a fuller revelation of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit gives believers more insight into the unsearchable riches of the greatness,

omnipotence and the saving grace of their Saviour, as well as His boundless love. We do not need to live in ignorance on His deity and all His wonderful attributes.

His official name

The Lord Jesus is also *The Anointed One* (Heb. *Mashiach*, Gr. *Christos*, Eng. *Messiah* or *Christ*). According to a messianic prophecy, He was to be anointed for His unique mission to save humanity and the world: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD [*Adonai Yahweh*] is upon Me; because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings” (Isa. 61:1; cf. Luke 4:16-21).

Christ is an inclusive official title that combines ten titles, roles, or offices for which the Lord Jesus was anointed and sent forth (Gr. *apostello* – sent forth) into the world.

Official titles of Jesus Christ

The ten offices for which Christ was anointed, and the titles associated with them, are as follows:

1. Lamb of God

The most important reason why Jesus Christ was anointed and sent into the world was to redeem fallen humanity from their sins. To be able to do this He had to come in the likeness of men so that He could offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins by shedding His blood and physically dying on the cross. He had to become the sacrificial Lamb of God:

“For *it is* impossible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. ... Then I said, Behold, I come – in the volume of the Book it is written of Me – to do Your will, O God. ... By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*” (Heb. 10:4-5, 7, 10).

The spiritual law that “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22; cf. Lev. 17:11) was impressed on Israel 1 500 years before the coming of the Messiah. Thousands of sacrificial animals were slaughtered according to the Old Testament laws in order that the Levitical priests could offer them to atone for the sins of the people.

All these sacrifices were only types or shadows which pointed forward to the coming sacrifice of the Lamb of God in the fullness of time. It was John the Baptist who announced the coming of that divine Lamb: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

His perfect, once for all sacrifice gave efficacy to and superseded inadequate, repetitive Old Testament types: “[Christ] does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself” (Heb. 7:27).

Isaiah prepared the people of Israel long before the time for the great sacrifice of the Messiah as the ultimate Lamb of God: “But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. ... He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isa. 53:5, 7).

Do you give due recognition to the atonement for sins that the Lamb had made through the shedding of His blood and the giving of His life on the cross? Have you accepted it in faith and was your life completely changed? Consider the deep significance that this sacrifice should have to you: At the institution of the Holy Communion Jesus explained that the signs of the bread and the wine were meant to be a poignant reminder of the broken body and shed blood of the Lamb (Luke 22:19-20). We need to ask ourselves whether we vividly call to mind the Lord Jesus and the great sacrifice which He had made on our behalf. No contemplation of Him is adequate without appreciating the profound significance of His shed blood: “Whom God set forth *to be* a propitiation by His blood, through faith ... that He might be just, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:25-26).

Our salvation and rebirth is based on the blood:

- We are justified by His blood, and saved from wrath through Him (Rom. 5:9).
- In Him we have “redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7).
- We are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18-19).
- Jesus Christ “washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Rev. 1:5).
- We are beneficiaries of a new testament (or covenant) in the blood of Christ (1 Cor. 11:25).

Our continued cleansing is also based on the blood:

- “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).
- The blood of Christ purges our consciences from dead works to serve the living God (Heb. 9:14).
- When Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins He has perfected for ever those who are being sanctified (Heb. 10:12, 14). Through His once for all sacrifice He keeps on perfecting us if we abide in Him (John 15:2, 4).
- “[A] little leaven leavens the whole lump. Therefore purge out the old leaven For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:6-7). Cleansing by the blood of the Lamb is always available to us when we are convicted of sin and wish to confess and forsake it.

The blood is also a strong weapon against the attacks of the enemy

- The martyrs of the tribulation period will overcome the Antichrist “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (Rev. 12:11). For us too, there is power in the blood of the Lamb in the fierce battle against the enemy of our souls. The power of the blood should be understood as faith in the atoning death of Christ.

It is evident that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God who gave His life for a dying world, forms the basis for all His offices. Because He paid the ransom for our sins, He confirmed the promises of His prophetic ministry that He would save and lead His people, and ultimately also reign with them. It enables Him to serve as High Priest, Mediator between God and man, Shepherd, Head of His redeemed church, and King over His inheritance. He is also qualified to be Judge of His own servants appointed by Him, and on judgement day will judge all who have rejected or neglected His atoning sacrifice on the cross.

In the Book of Revelation it is as ‘the Lamb’ that He is named 26 times as the One who will, during the great tribulation, judge the world which has rebelled against Him. The kings and their subjects will flee to the mountains, hide in the caverns, and call on the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Rev. 6:16-17). On the other hand, there will be many who will have been faithful to the Lamb and who will, in deep gratitude, exclaim:

“You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10).

Many people trust in a popular gospel, not firmly based upon the blood atonement of the Lamb. They have various substitutes which are false foundations, e.g. a covenant theology based upon baptismal regeneration (salvation through baptism), moral reform (salvation by moral standards of behaviour), or works holiness (salvation by good works). We must abandon any self-justification by works and honour the Lamb for the perfect sacrifice He

offered on the cross as the only atonement for sins, and also for the continuous cleansing and sanctifying power of His precious blood.

2. Prophet

A prophet is a person whom God inspires to declare His word, His will and His judgements (i.e. to preach the truth). Jesus Christ was no ordinary prophet, but the One of whom Moses prophesied: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren. Him shall you hear in all things, whatever He says to you” (Acts 3:22). Christ prophesied in His sermon on the mount, His parables, the Olivet discourse and throughout His entire ministry. He revealed truths that were unknown before: “I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 13:35). “The people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority” (Matt. 7:28-29). Officers sent to arrest Him could not do so, declaring, “No man ever spoke like this Man!” (John 7:44-46).

In Deuteronomy 18:20-22 God gave strict rules to prophets who were only to speak *His* word to the people – nothing was to be added or taken away, nor was His word to be distorted or incomplete. This is why all biblical prophecies are 100% reliable and the true words of God. A false prophet and his prophecies were to be rejected: “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak ... that prophet shall die.”

Jesus, of whom it was said, “A great Prophet has risen up among us” (Luke 7:16), spoke only the Father’s words: “For I have not spoken on My own *authority*; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak” (John 12:49-50; see also John 17:8).

3. High Priest

During Old Testament times, a major function of the High Priest was that, once a year on the Day of Atonement, he had to enter the Holy of holies to make atonement for Israel’s sins. No other priest was allowed to enter the sanctuary where the Ark of the Covenant was.

Jesus Christ is the High Priest of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:1-2). To hold this office He had to identify with humanity by becoming man Himself, thus subject to temptation, thus being able to feel for and help the tempted: “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:17-18; see also Heb. 4:15-16).

Jesus was not a Priest of the Levitical order, since the Levitical priests were mortal men succeeded by others. Also, they were sinful, and first had to offer sacrifices for their own sins before they could offer them for others and the nation. Jesus has a perfect, unchangeable priesthood!

“And inasmuch as *He* was not *made* priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: The LORD has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek), by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. And there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues for ever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, *appoints* the Son who has been perfected for ever” (Heb. 7:20-28).

Do you know this faithful High Priest who can sympathise with your infirmities, having already atoned for your sins, and who ever lives to make intercession for you? Do you realise your responsibility to follow in His footsteps, to live a holy life, consecrated to God, and come to the throne of grace to find help in time of need? Do you enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus Christ, the new and living way He has opened for us through the veil to the mercy seat? (Heb. 10:19-22). Are you a regular visitor there?

We are a royal priesthood who were commissioned to proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9). A priest must convey God's word to the people (preach), and also intercede at the throne of grace on behalf of them (pray). He must be holy and not sin, nor grieve the Holy Spirit. If he does, he must repent immediately and be restored at the throne of grace: "... [T]hese things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:1-2).

4. Mediator

Jesus Christ acts as Mediator between humanity and God the Father. He was anointed for this office since only He, by virtue of His atoning death on the cross, can reconcile lost people with God. Compared to the Old Testament high priests who acted as mediators between God and the people of Israel, Christ "is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises" (Heb. 8:6).

The sacrifices under the old covenant were incomplete as they were only shadowy types of the final sacrifice of the Lamb of God (Heb. 10:1-10). We have obtained the better promise that we are sanctified by the sacrifice of Christ, who is the Mediator of the new covenant. Only His sacrifice complies with the demands of God's righteousness (Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

5. Shepherd

As the Shepherd of His flock, Jesus Christ is totally committed to their well-being, since He has redeemed them at such a great cost: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). He gives them this firm assurance: "I am the door of the sheep. ... If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved" (John 10:7, 9).

It is to be appreciated that if He sacrificed His life for the sheep, He will also provide in their every need. That includes protection against their arch-enemy, the devil, who is a thief and a murderer: "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they might have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly" (John 10:10).

The Shepherd leads His sheep by showing them the way, and they follow Him (John 10:4). If they stay near the Shepherd and obey His voice, they will be safe, but if they are wayward and go astray, the devil will attack and scatter them (John 10:12). If they are separated from Him they must return to Him and He will restore them: "For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25).

The Shepherd remains faithful and will always meet His obligations towards His flock: "The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You *are* with me" (Ps. 23:1-4).

We live in an evil world which is under the control of the devil (1 John 5:19). Temptations, Satan's attacks and deadly perils often come our way. The Shepherd allows trials that are necessary to test our faith. In these ordeals we must cling firmly to Jesus Christ, "that great Shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20). Psalm 23 ends by assuring us of our Shepherd's presence with us when death is near. Goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

We must never allow any bitterness in our hearts if things do not work out as we had hoped. The Lord's ways are higher than our ways and we can be assured that He will make all things,

even afflictions and disappointments, work together for good to those who love and trust Him and faithfully dedicate their lives to Him (Rom. 8:28).

The Shepherd also cares for us by raising up able under-shepherds to lead, teach and guard the flock: “And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints” (Eph. 4:11-12).

The pastors, assisted by the church elders, are shepherds of the local church. They do not only teach the Word of God and preach the Gospel, but have pastoral duties to encourage and motivate the flock, to guide in all important decisions, to counsel any with spiritual or practical problems, pray with the sick and bereaved, shepherd wayward Christians and warn against moral and spiritual dangers:

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Pet. 5:2-4).

6. Servant

As the Son of Man, Jesus Christ is the Servant of God who came to earth to do the great work of salvation. His coming as Servant was foretold in several Old Testament prophecies:

“And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb *to be* His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him ... , It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:5-6).

“Who among you fears the LORD? Who obeys the voice of His Servant?” (Isa. 50:10).

“By His knowledge my righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:11).

A servant should display humility and submission in the service of his master. God’s Servant, Jesus, showed us the perfect example! He also strongly warned His disciples against self-exalting pride:

“But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

7. Head of the church

The office of Jesus as Head of the church was a mystery that was only revealed after the church was established. The bond between Him and the church is likened to a marriage relationship: “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is Head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. ... This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:23, 32). For a thorough examination of the biblical standards set for the functioning of the church, as well as all the implications of the Headship of Christ, see References: Bosch (2007).

Ephesians 5:25-27 states that Christ gave Himself for the church to sanctify and cleanse it, to present her to Himself holy and without blemish. He is the church’s heavenly Bridegroom and “when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” and, having this hope, must purify ourselves “even as He is pure” (1 John 3:2,3; KJV), so that when He presents her to Himself she will not have spot or wrinkle to mar her pristine beauty.

The concept of *holiness* also means *to be set apart for the service of the Lord*. In this context

we are seen as members of the body of Christ. We all fulfil different but complementary duties in achieving the mission and functions of Christ's church on earth: "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom. 12:4-5; see Rom. 12:6-8 and 1 Cor. 12:12-31 for an exposition of the functions of members).

Perform your task and calling only in the power and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. "For by one Spirit we are all baptised into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). You must also realise that the authority for your spiritual calling is in Christ who is the Head. In Him you are in a position of victory: "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ ... raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come. And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* Head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:17-23).

8. Bridegroom

A very personal, intimate and exalted relationship with Christ is made possible by His position as Bridegroom. We are not destined to be only servants and disciples in His kingdom, but have an upward calling to also be members of His bridal congregation. But that also imposes more responsibilities upon us.

Paul says that all Christians should endeavour to be presented to Christ as chaste virgins when He comes (2 Cor. 11:2). They must not become corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ but, in a dedicated way, make preparations for their meeting and union with Him. These spiritual preparations will enable them to fulfil their role as bride of the Lamb, and subsequently as His wife, in a worthy manner (Rev. 19:7-8).

9. King

The Lord Jesus has all power in heaven and on earth, and worthily holds the office of King. God has given man a free will, but not the right to use it to disobey Him! Adam and Eve had disobeyed Him and in this dispensation, too, the nations have rebelled greatly against His authority. The free will God gave humanity is the ability to choose between good and evil. In practice, the wrong choices predominate since most people, like sheep, have gone astray, and love darkness more than light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). Satan has blinded their minds (2 Cor. 4:4) and deceived them into walking in darkness. As a result "the whole world lies *under the sway of the wicked one*" (1 John 5:19; the NIV's rendering is: "... the whole world is under the control of the evil one").

We live in an evil world and Christians are often hated, oppressed and rejected because of their faith (John 15:18-19; 16:33; Luke 6:22-23, 26). Effectively, we are strangers and pilgrims in a world which largely rejects the true God (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11). This situation makes it all the more important to remain vigilant, committed and steadfast in the service of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). As redeemed ones we are not under the control of Satan, but he is our enemy who incessantly attacks all true believers. That is the reason why we have to put on the whole armour of God that we may remain standing against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:11).

Born again people are members of a kingdom that is not of this world (John 18:36; Phil. 3:20). The Lord Jesus is our King and we experience His peace in our hearts. But our lives in this world are characterised by conflict against the adverse and hostile forces of darkness (Matt. 10:34). Satan and his kingdom are actively targeting Christians in an effort to harm the kingdom of heaven.

The situation will dramatically change when Jesus Christ comes to reveal His kingdom on earth and to reign as King: "The seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

From the viewpoint of His position as King, three very important events will occur at the

Second Coming of Christ:

1. The enemies of God will be destroyed during the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21).
2. The throne of David will be restored in Jerusalem, from which the Lord Jesus will rule (Acts 15:16-17).
3. The worldwide Millennial reign of Christ as the King of kings and Lord of lords will be instituted, with Jerusalem as capital (Mic. 4:1-3; Jer. 3:17; Rev. 20:1-3, 6).

We have to accept and serve Jesus Christ *now* as the rejected King if we wish to be accounted worthy to reign with Him in the Millennium. We should demonstrate to the world that we serve a King who can really change the lives of those who come to Him for salvation and eternal life.

Our citizenship is in heaven from where we expect the very soon coming of Jesus Christ as King of kings. He will destroy the power of the principalities and rulers of the darkness of the present world and set up His Millennial kingdom on earth. The Sun of Righteousness will rise over a troubled world and completely dispel every vestige of darkness and unrighteousness (Mal. 4:2).

10. Judge

The Lord Jesus is the righteous Judge and we can rely on Him to fulfil His office justly when, after the rapture but before His Millennial reign, He judges believers at His judgement seat, the *Bema* (Rom. 14:10). Their works and lives will be assessed and rewards given to all who served Him faithfully and lived holy lives (1 Cor. 3:10-15). The apostle Paul said: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day" (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

"For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12).

Christians are not saved by works, but by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). However, after we are saved by grace, the Lord has need of us in extending His kingdom on earth. But He does not only call us and command us to do this work, He also gives us the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to effectively be His witnesses (Acts 1:8).

It is regarding this aspect of our lives that we must give account to Him. Any works that are not truly the fruit of the Spirit but done unspiritually in our own strength will result in our appearing empty-handed before the Lord, though we will be saved "yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). Others will receive the various crowns the Lord will award them, but there will be no excuse for servants who hid their talents (Matt. 25:24-25). Even if truly born again, their negligence will result in them standing empty-handed at the judgement seat.

After the seven years of tribulation, Christ will sit as a Judge to judge the nations of the world at His second coming. He will then come "with ten thousands of His saints" (Jude v. 14-15) who "will reign with Him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6).

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats" (Matt. 25:31-32).

After the Millennium He will judge the nations and all unbelievers of all time, who will appear at the awesome great white throne on the final judgement day (Rev. 20:11-15): "God ... has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all, by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).

You cannot escape having to bow the knee to Jesus: He is either your Saviour who gives you eternal life or will be your Judge who condemns you for sin and unbelief.

Descriptive names of Jesus Christ

There are also a number of descriptive names of the Lord Jesus in the Bible. In these names, emphasis is placed on specific aspects of His Person and work. In this way we can know more about Him and understand Him better, and be able to love Him more. The following is not a comprehensive list of descriptive names, only some of the most important ones:

Light of the World

One of the most telling symbols of the kingdom of heaven is that of light. God Himself, whom no man has seen, dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16). In His perfect holiness He is exalted and far removed from the sinful lives of mortal humans on earth.

Jesus came as the Light from on high to shine on those who live in darkness (Luke 1:78-79). He could truly say: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

The fact that so many people still walk in darkness can only be attributed to their unregenerate hearts that draw them away from Him who is the light of the world: "And this is the condemnation, that *the* light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practising evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God" (John 3:19-21).

Bread and Water of Life

The true bread and water of life that alone can satisfy the deep spiritual needs of humanity come from heaven: "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Then they said to Him, Lord, give us this bread always. And Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:33-35).

We are not only dependant on Jesus for new birth, but also for spiritual nourishment to sustain the new life. He is Himself daily our fresh manna from heaven, to build us up in our most holy faith. We feed on Him through His Word – which is why He so memorably said, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life" (John 6:63). He still invites all who are spiritually needy to come to Him: "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).

Rock and Foundation

Jesus is the Rock of Ages that was cleft for us. His body was pierced when He died (John 19:34) and from His death great blessings flow to us. Horeb's rock was a prophetic type of Christ and His death. God said to Moses: "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink" (Ex. 17:6).

The New Testament clearly indicates that the rock at Horeb typified the Messiah, Jesus. The striking of the rock prophetically refers to His crucifixion, and the stream of water alludes to the blessings that flow from Him through the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). The Israelites in the wilderness "drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). We can all drink of His great mercies, His forgiving love, and His renewing grace. "You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You *is* the fountain of life" (Ps. 36:8-9).

Jesus Christ, the Rock of Ages, is a firm foundation to build our lives on. If you build your life upon Him as the Rock, you will be safe for time and eternity! "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11).

A wise man builds his house on the Rock (Matt. 7:24-25). The Lord Jesus is his rock and fortress. Since he trusted Him for salvation, he is established on the Rock of Ages: "The LORD

is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust" (Ps. 18:2).

The Way, the Truth and the Life

Some claim there are many ways to God, but Jesus is the only way to God, since no one can come to God the Father but by Him (John 14:6). He is not only the Way, but said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved" (John 10:9). There is no other way to heaven but through Jesus, the door! Also there is no other name given to us whereby we must be saved, except that of Jesus Christ! (Acts 4:12).

He is also the Truth, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, who glorifies Christ, brings us to His word which is truth, reveals things to come and guides us into all truth! (John 16:7-14). Further, Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25-26). Only by Him can someone who is spiritually dead in sins and iniquities be made alive in Him: "Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:11).

Sinners are subject to the punishment of death for their sins, which means eternity in hell. Because Christ received the punishment for our sins, by virtue of His sacrifice for sin, we can have a free pardon and the gift of eternal life: "For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). "The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

He died that we may live. Because He rose from the dead on the third day, trusting Him as Saviour we have the gift of eternal life and can rise from spiritual death to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life for lost, sinful, spiritually dead humanity!

The Living Vine

"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 15:5). The vine is used as a symbol of the most sacred things: the juice of its fruit being a type of Christ's blood, and its main stem and branches being the perfect figure of the mystery of godliness – Christ's union with His people.

The expression "in Me" refers to our justification and union with Him when we are grafted into the vine. The expression, "I in you", refers to our deeper union with Christ, in our sanctification, when He becomes our entire life. The main aim with sanctification is indeed the fullness of our life in Christ.

Another truth conveyed here is communion with Christ: "Abide in Me and I in you" (v. 4). We must maintain close fellowship with Him – we must not play 'fast and loose' but practise a moment-by-moment dependence upon Him. Paul says: "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Col. 2:6). Abiding in Him depends upon our obedience: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love ... *that* your joy may be full" (John 15:10-11).

Sanctification

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30) "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified" (1 Cor. 6:11).

Jesus Christ is not only our Wisdom, Righteousness, Justification and Redemption, but also our Sanctification. He sets the standards for holy living and enables us, by the Holy Spirit, to make continuous progress to higher levels of sanctification. He promises we shall live as overcomers if we are obedient to Him and allow the Holy Spirit to establish us in the grace of Christ (Rom. 6:14; Tit. 2:11-12).

Since their exodus from Egypt, Israel was taught that they should, for a whole week, observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6), which was a time of sanctification and soul-searching. Paul says, "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us

keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:7-8).

We must often search ourselves to determine whether any leaven of sin has entered our lives. “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). There is no other lifestyle which is acceptable to the Lord: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification Therefore he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 4:3, 8).

While we grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour we should also grow in grace and sanctification. Conformity to His image of holiness should be our major objective, and this should induce us to prevent a situation in which deliberate sin casts its dark shadow on our lives. How can we ensure that sin does not again ensnare us? “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).

The Root and the Offspring of David

Jesus Christ said, “I am the Root and the Offspring of David” (Rev. 22:16). As the Root of David, His deity is emphasised – He is David’s Lord! As the Offspring of David His humanity is emphasised – He is the *Son* of David (Luke 20:41- 44). He is the promised Messiah, who was born of the house and lineage of David, of the tribe of Judah; the Seed of Abraham, in Whom all nations would be blessed (Gen. 22:18).

Throughout the centuries, Satan hated and persecuted the people of Israel because of the promise of the coming Messiah that was made to them (cf. Rev. 12:4-5). Herod’s slaughter of the male children was part of this persecution (Matt. 2:13-18). That was one of the first efforts by Satan to kill Jesus, thereby averting the establishment of His kingdom. Various other demonic-inspired attempts have also afterwards been made – the most recent being the Jewish Holocaust of World War II.

The Bright and Morning Star

The Lord Jesus says: “I am ... the Bright and Morning Star” (Rev. 22:16). Peter adds to this: “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19).

The morning star is a prophetic symbol of hope, the herald of a new day that will dawn over this dark world. In Jesus we have a bright future of hope! We can look beyond the anxiety, hardships and sin of the present evil world to the rays of a bright new day which will dawn at the second coming of Christ. Through the signs of the times we can discern His nearing footsteps in the present distressing circumstances. Those without a Christian expectation of the future are not able to spiritually interpret world events, and are easily driven to despair by all the bad news and negative prospects.

Wisdom

“We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block and unto the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called ... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23-24). Reverence for God and the Lord Jesus is the beginning of wisdom. Your mind is enlightened to understand God’s love in the provision of salvation for sinners. Christ is the true Solomon, the wisdom of God. To reject Christ is to despise wisdom, and those who do so are utterly foolish: “The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:7).

Through Christ Jesus, God gives us the spirit of wisdom and enlightens our understanding so that we may fully appreciate the riches of His glorious inheritance in His people (Eph. 1:17-18). We must therefore seek to increase in wisdom by becoming better acquainted with who Christ really is, He “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

Conqueror

At the cross, Christ conquered Satan, death and hell! He spiritually disarmed the powers behind this world, triumphing over them (Col. 2:15) and will soon do so literally! (Rom. 16:20). He is the Conqueror who frees from Satan's power and makes us "more than conquerors" (Rom. 8:37). "If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Are you still in bondage to Satan through sins, addictions, the occult, etc? You need to accept Christ, the only Saviour who can forgive your sins, cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9) and set you free to live a new life of victory over Satan and sin as you "put on the armour of light" (Rom. 13:12-14) and reject any kind of bondage: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

"Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:14; cf. 1 Cor. 15:57). You can indeed be more than a conqueror in Christ!

The great significance of Christ's deity

Many of the names and titles of the Lord Jesus that were mentioned in this chapter relate to His incarnation as Man. But, as His deity is so much under attack these days, it may be helpful to make a clear, outlined statement on His eternal existence as God. Scripture names Him, among others, as follows:

- The "I AM", the unsearchable, timeless, self-existent One (John 8:58; cf. Ex. 3:14-15).
- "The Word", who not only was with God in the beginning, but was Himself God who became flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14; cf. Rev. 19:13).
- "Elohim", one of the glorious divine Persons of the Triune Godhead, the LORD God, Yahweh Elohim, who is Himself Yahweh, the ever-existing One (1 John 5:7).
- "The Creator" (John 1:1-12; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2) and "Prince" (Originator) of Life (Acts 3:15).
- "The Lord" (Matt. 22:41-46; Ps. 110:1). Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:11). Thomas, with his doubts completely dispelled when seeing the risen Christ, exclaimed in a sincere statement of faith: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).
- "The Mighty God" (Gibbor El). "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given ... [a]nd His name will be called ... Mighty God" (Isa. 9:6). In Genesis 17:1 the same LORD (Yahweh) declared to Abraham, "I *am* Almighty God" (El Shaddai), so the Word is Himself the "Almighty God." He is the "great God" (Tit. 2:13) to whom has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18).
- "The Same", i.e. the self-existent One who does not change. "Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8; cf. Ps. 102:27). "You are the same, and Your years will not fail" (Heb. 1:12).
- "Alpha and Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, the First and the Last" (Rev. 1:8, 22:13). His eternal self-existence is described here, and it is impossible to limit Him to a more restricted role or existence within time or space.

We are living in the end-times, shortly before the second coming of Christ; and Satan, "who deceives the whole world" (Rev. 12:9) and his minions are intensifying their attacks against the Christian faith, the Bible and, above all, against the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. With Satan's efforts to destroy Him at the cross having been thwarted by His resurrection and ascension, he soon turned to perverting the truth of Christ's glorious Person, causing widespread doubt about His virgin birth and deity.

Some 700 years prior to the birth of Jesus, Isaiah prophesied, "the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). This was confirmed by the angel who appeared to Joseph to announce the birth of Jesus, quoting this prophecy, adding that

this name means “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). At a stroke this proves the deity and virgin birth of Jesus – two crucial doctrines which have been under ever-increasing attack during the past two centuries. Scripture also declares that “He is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15).

In Händel’s magnificent work, “The Messiah,” the choir sings these memorable words, “Say to the cities of Judah, Behold your God!” (Isa. 40:9). Prophecying the coming of the Messiah, Isaiah says, “He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces And it will be said in that day: Behold, this *is* our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This *is* the LORD [YAHWEH]; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Isa. 25:8-9). That is further confirmation, if any were needed, that the Messiah would Himself be God!

Let us remind ourselves of that great hymn of Isaac Watts:

Join all the glorious names of wisdom, love and power,
That ever mortals knew, that angels ever bore;
All are too mean to speak His worth,
Too mean to set my Saviour forth.

We are either going to be forever with Him as Saviour, Lord, King, and God, or forever without Him in eternal darkness and anguish. He is the incomparable Christ, who said, “He who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 6:47). Only He is worthy of our trust. If the reader has not yet trusted Him, may he or she do so now! As Frances R. Havergal entreats: “Why will you do without Him? Is He not kind indeed? Did He not die to save you? Is He not all you need?” (Havergal 2011).

2. The Sonship and Deity of the Lord Jesus

We are living in times in which an increasing number of theologians are rejecting the doctrines on the Holy Trinity and, particularly, the deity and eternal self-existence of the Lord Jesus. This problem is not only the product of modern theological thinking but emanated from age-old Christological errors. We will go back very far in church history to determine the origins of these doctrinal deficiencies and wrong teachings.

The Trinity

In the Old Testament, there are two primary names used for God: Yahweh and Elohim. Each has a special significance. Elohim is the first name to be used, and is mentioned well over two thousand times. Though the name Yahweh (the eternal I AM) is paramount, there is a special significance about the name Elohim that God does not want us to miss. Dr. Richard Bennett (1998:45-46) explains the meaning of this name as follows:

“In the English language we talk in the plural if we wish to speak of more than one. And we use the singular if we refer to just one. But the Hebrew language can be even more precise, for it uses the dual when referring to two and then the plural when referring to more than two. The distinction between dual and plural (between ‘two’ and ‘three or more’) is very significant in the first name in the Bible that is used for God. ‘Elohim’ is in the plural. However, in another clear statement about God the Bible also says: ‘The Lord our God is one Lord’ (Deut. 6:4). So in the very first verse in the Bible, which is God’s revelation of Himself to man, we are introduced to a three-in-one and a one-in-three concept of God. ‘In the beginning God [Elohim] created the heavens and the earth’ (Gen. 1:1). This tri-unity has sometimes been called the Trinity.”

The term ‘one’ which is used in Deuteronomy 6:4 to describe the Lord (Yahweh) our God (Elohim), is *echad* in Hebrew, which refers to a composite unity as opposed to an absolute unity. It is important to correctly understand this concept since plurality and singularity are combined with the same word. In Genesis 2:24, *echad* is also used as a composite unity: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

That ‘Elohim’ refers to *one* God in its singular form and to *three or more* in its plural form is clearly demonstrated by the personal pronouns used for God. Elohim said about the creation of humans: “Let **Us** make man in **Our** image, after **Our** likeness; ... So God created man in **His own** image, in the image of God **He** created him; male and female **He** created them” (Gen. 1:26-27). The Triune God can indeed say: “Let **Us** make man”, and then, “... male and female **He** created them” (emphasis added).

Before His incarnation as Son of God, Jesus was, and still is, the self-existent and eternal God. The apostle John refers to Him as the Logos, who existed since the beginning as God (John 1:1). He was *with* Elohim and He *Himself was* Elohim. The third Person is the Spirit of Elohim (Gen. 1:2). He is “the eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14) who also has an eternal self-existence as a Person in the Godhead.

The three co-eternal, co-equal, and co-self-existent Persons in the Godhead are described as follows by the apostle John in his first Epistle: “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). All three Persons may be described and addressed as Lord (Heb. *Yahweh*; Gr. *Kurios*) and God (Heb. *Elohim*; Gr. *Theos*). Paul addressed the incarnate Lord on the road to Damascus: “Who are You, Lord [Yahweh]? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5). In Romans 9:5 Paul says of Him: “Christ ... is over all, *the* eternally blessed God [Elohim].” These titles apply to Him during all periods of His timeless existence.

People who do not believe that the title Lord, or Yahweh (the eternal I AM), applies to Jesus cannot have their sins forgiven. He said to the unbelieving Jewish leaders: “If you do not believe that I AM, you shall die in your sins When you have lifted up the Son of man, then

you shall know that I am He... Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham came into being, I AM!" (John 8:24, 28, 58; MKJV). The Amplified Bible renders John 8:58 as follows, including the cross-reference to Exodus 3:14: "Jesus replied, I assure you, I most solemnly tell you, before Abraham was born, I AM. [Exod. 3:14]." He was not only a human prophet but also God in a human body.

The creative work, pre-eminence and superiority of Christ

We need to seriously and thoroughly reflect on the deity of Jesus Christ and on his pre-eminence over all things. That can be done by objectively and honestly studying the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit: "For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). Paul gave a great revelation of Jesus Christ when he said:

"He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence. For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself – by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:15-20).

In this section, seven unique characteristics pertaining to the creative work, pre-eminence and supremacy of Christ are mentioned. Jesus Christ is:

1. **The image of God.** He revealed God to humanity, as all who have seen Him have seen the Father (John 14:9). When we hear the glorious gospel of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus the image of God shines on us (2 Cor. 4:4).
2. **The firstborn over all creation.** As He is God, the self-existent I AM, and Himself the Creator, the term 'firstborn' cannot, of course, refer to His being born prior to the incarnation, but that *after* having emptied and humbled Himself to become Man, He is "the last Adam ... the second man ... the Lord from heaven ... the heavenly *man*" (1 Cor. 15:45-49) and became at His resurrection "the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18), therefore He is the firstborn of a new creation and Head of a new order of humanity. Geisler (1983:672) says: "The whole point of the passage (and the book) is to show Christ's superiority *over* all things. Other statements about Christ in this passage (such as Creator of all [1:16], upholder of Creation [1:17], etc.) clearly indicate His priority and superiority over Creation. The 'Firstborn' cannot be part of Creation if He created 'all things'. One cannot create himself."
3. **The creator of the universe.** All things were created through Him and for Him, and in Him they consist (1:16-17). He is the instrumental Cause, the final Cause and also the conserving Cause of all creation (Geisler, 1983:673). John confirms this profound statement about the creative work of the Word, Jesus Christ: "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ... He was in the world, and the world was made through Him" (John 1:3, 10).
4. **The head of the church.** Geisler (1983:673) says: "Besides being the Lord of the universe He is also the church's Head (cf. Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23). The reference here is to the invisible or universal church into which all believers are baptised by the Holy Spirit the moment they believe in Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). ... It is a special body in which there is 'neither Jew nor Gentile' (Gal. 3:28) but a whole new creation of God (Eph. 2:15). The church is a 'mystery ... which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men' (Eph. 3:4-5; cf. Rom. 16:25-26; Col. 1:26)."
5. **The first-born from the dead.** Christ was the first to rise from the dead in an immortal body (1 Cor. 15:20), and as such He heads a whole new order of people who all obtain the resurrection to a new life from Him. They will all be raised in new bodies at the coming of Christ for His saints (1 Cor. 15:22-23; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thes. 4:16-17).

6. **The fullness of God.** Colossians 1:19 is a powerful description of Christ's deity. Later in the same letter Paul says: "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (Col. 2:9-10). John says that the Lord Jesus is "full of grace and truth. ... And of His fullness have we all received, and grace for grace" (John 1:14, 16).
7. **The one who reconciles everything to God.** The "all things" reconciled to God are limited to good angels and redeemed people since only the things in heaven and on earth are mentioned. The things "under the earth" (Phil. 2:10) are not reconciled. An important statement is made that people are reconciled to God – it is not God that is reconciled to people. Mankind is estranged from God: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way" (Isa. 53:6). We now need to be led back to the Lord. The statement that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Cor. 5:19), points to the fact that all people on earth can potentially be saved because Jesus has "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). But all of us have to take a decision on this critically important matter, hence the earnest appeal by Paul: "We implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). The church history of almost 2 000 years indicates that only a minority of humanity has made this choice and also abides by it.

The incarnation of the Word

In the fullness of time the Word, who created all things Himself, became flesh: "In the beginning was the Word ... All things were made through Him; and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-4, 14). With the incarnation of the Word He temporarily surrendered His glory but not His essential deity.

In self-sacrificing love He condescended from His throne position in heaven to take upon Himself the likeness of men. He even came in the likeness of a servant who had no comeliness or beauty that we should desire Him (Isa. 53:2). He humbled Himself to be scoffed at and be crucified to die a cruel and despicable death on behalf of all sinners: "Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient *to the point of death*, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-8).

Robert Lightner (1983:654) says: "Christ's humiliation included His making Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, and being made in human likeness. These statements indicate that Christ became a man, a true human being. ... He emptied Himself. ... 'Likeness' suggests similarity but difference. Though His humanity was genuine, He was different from all other humans in that He was sinless (Heb. 4:15). Thus it is seen that Christ, while retaining the essence of God, was also human. In His incarnation He was *fully* God and *fully* man at the same time. He was God manifest in human flesh." He was truly Immanuel – God with us (Matt. 1:23).

For Jesus Christ to be able, according to God's standards, to become the Saviour of the world, He had to be the perfect God-Man. He had to be born from a human lineage (the house of David in the tribe of Judah) to become the Son of Man. At the same time, a man could not beget Him as He would then have inherited the sinful nature of fallen man. Through divine intervention He had to be born from a virgin to also be called the Son of God: "The virgin's name was Mary. ... And the angel answered and said to her, *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God*" (Luke 1:27, 35).

Though He is eternally self-existent as God, the I AM, Christ Jesus was begotten of God the Father as a Human Being, and consequently the Father, as God, is greater than Him as Man (John 14:28).

Jesus, the Word of God that became flesh, “was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him” (John 1:10). He was not recognised as God in human likeness (John 14:8-9). During His incarnation, the Word took upon Himself a human form and nature that He did not have previous to the incarnation. Apart from still being God, He also became a human being – the Son of man: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). However, the incarnation of the Word in no way diminished His essential deity (cf. Reeves, 2011a).

View of the early Christian church

During different historical periods there were always church fathers who proclaimed the truth about the deity and self-existence of the Lord Jesus, as well as the fact that He is co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. But there were also those who questioned and completely distorted biblical Christology. Through their views these deluded fathers deceived millions of other people. Examples will be given of true as well as false views about Jesus.

Evidence indicates strong convictions held by the apostles and early church fathers on the eternal deity and incarnational sonship of the Lord Jesus. Kelly (1977:92-93) refers to the godly church father, Ignatius (35-107 AD), bishop of Antioch, who was later martyred for his faith, as a good source of theological thought of his time: “The centre of Ignatius’ thinking was Christ. ... [He] even declares that He is ‘our God’, describing Him as ‘God incarnate’ ... and ‘God made manifest as man’. ... In His pre-existent being ‘ingenerate’ (the technical term reserved to distinguish the increate God from creatures), He was the timeless, invisible, impalpable, impassable one Who for our sakes entered time and became visible, palpable and passable. His divine sonship dates from the incarnation’ [Kelly comments]: In tracing His divine sonship to His conception in Mary’s womb, he was simply reproducing a commonplace of pre-Origenist theology; the idea did not convey, and was not intended to convey, any denial of His pre-existence. So far as Ignatius is concerned, he definitely states that He existed with the Father before all ages.”

In saying that Christ was ingenerate, Ignatius would have rejected any idea of His eternal generation. In stating that His divine sonship dates from the incarnation, i.e. from His conception in Mary’s womb, Ignatius would also have rejected any idea of Christ’s eternal sonship – He was God from all eternity, and only became man in the fullness of time. The truth about Jesus Christ, the Word was, throughout the ages, strongly opposed – not only by other religions but also by humanist ideologies with a strong basis of Greek philosophy.

Gnosticism

Since the time of the early Christian church theological development was strongly influenced by philosophy. Initially, it was the pagan Greek philosophy of Plato that had the greatest impact on religious thinking. Since the first century, Gnosticism developed concurrently with evangelical beliefs on the deity and incarnation of the Lord Jesus. This philosophy was derived from the concept “gnosis” (intuitive religious knowledge) and teaches that knowledge, rather than faith, is the key to salvation. This philosophy enjoyed great support until the sixth century and during that time perverted the truth of various theological concepts. It was developed with the purpose of making the Christian religion more acceptable to Greek-speaking intelligentsia, but in the process the biblical concept of God was fundamentally distorted.

The Gnostic love for knowledge was shaped by the mystic beliefs of Plato, as well as his concept of God as the “Absolute,” which is not compatible with the biblical concept of the Holy Trinity. After these views were mixed with Christian concepts it was argued that there is a singular Creator-God, the Father, and that He created Jesus as a lower order God, or even as an angel. That was a vicious attack on the deity and incarnation of the Lord Jesus. Geisler (1983:677) says: “Both Christ’s deity and humanity were challenged by this early Gnostic-like heresy. Those heretics diminished Christ to an angel whose ‘body’ was only apparent, not real.” But Paul defended the deity of the Lord Jesus, as well as His real human body, i.e. He was God manifest in flesh: “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9).

He was fully God and fully Man.

Paul said that philosophical knowledge derived from mystical sources is futile as it is not based on the Bible. Instead of pursuing hidden knowledge outside of Christ, people should endeavour to understand the mystery of the Father and of Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. ... Beware lest anyone *should* cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:3-4, 8). Serious spiritual deception came from Gnostic philosophy.

One of the fallacies which was devised to present the Word as a created being and subordinate God is the so-called “Logos theology”. In His eternal pre-existence Jesus is, according to John 1:1, indeed described as the Word (Gr. *Logos*) who is also God Himself. In the Gnostic Logos theology, however, Greek philosophical concepts were borrowed to formulate the paradigm of the Absolute God in which it is alleged that God the Father created the Word and then used the Word to do the rest of His creative work. Other Scriptures were also wrongly harnessed to support this theory, e.g. by applying the Proverbs 8 exposition of God’s attribute of wisdom in such a way that it would support their view of the Word having been created.

Prof. Young (1991:35) summarises the Logos theology as follows, from which the synthesis between pagan philosophical concepts and the Bible is very obvious: “This Logos was the only-begotten of God, the Word projected forth as the instrument through whom God created, as the Wisdom who was beside Him fashioning all things. ... It was this Word which came to the prophets – indeed to Socrates and all genuine teachers of the truth, and in the last days, it was this Word which was incarnate in Jesus Christ.” This view of the Word is unrecognisable from Scripture, and even goes to the extreme of attributing the wisdom of Socrates (c. 470-399 BC), the father of Greek philosophy, to divine illumination by the pre-incarnate Logos. This is nothing more than pagan philosophy dressed up in Christian robes.

The philosophical perversion of the *Logos* concept may be the reason why it is rarely used in the New Testament as a title for Jesus. Sproul (1983:42-45) confirms that “by the time the Gospels were written the notion of the *logos* was a loaded philosophical category ... one pregnant with meaning against the background of Greek philosophy.”

In relating the Logos theology to Proverbs 8, it was wrongly assumed that the wisdom referred to in this chapter represents the pre-incarnate Word. Proverbs 8, verses 21 to 31 were taken to refer to Him and, as a consequence, Arius, the 4th century heretic (whose teaching the so-called Jehovah’s Witnesses perpetuate) wrongly concluded that the Word was created before the foundation of the world. He is depicted as a subordinate onlooker at the creation: “When He [Yahweh] prepared the heavens, I was there, ... when He marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside Him” (Prov. 8:27-30). The wisdom described in Proverbs is an attribute of the Triune God and not a reference to Christ, even though wisdom is one of His characteristics (Buzzell, 1985:922). Solomon describes wisdom as a woman whom we should regard as our sister (Prov. 7:4). It is exegetically unjustified to personify wisdom as Jesus Christ and, in terms of this Scripture, to regard Him as a created being.

The errors of Origen

The church father, Origen (185-254 AD), became engrossed in the philosophy of Plato as he received his education in the Greek philosophical schools of Alexandria (Bray, 1997:78). He was the first great Christian scholar whose work was regarded with suspicion, even in his own day, and was later branded a heretic. Young (1983:40-42) says that Origen identified the God of the Jewish Scriptures with the ultimate One of Platonic thought and, since he was so strongly influenced by Platonism, having been educated under a leading Platonist philosopher, may be labelled a Christian Platonist.

The writings of Origen clearly reveal that he was influenced by the Platonic monotheistic concept of a singular ‘Ultimate One’, the abstract Absolute. He said: “I am of the opinion that

the will of the Father ought alone to be sufficient for the existence of that which He wishes to exist ... thus also the existence (Lat. *subsistentia*) of the Son is generated by Him. For this point must above all others be maintained by those who allow nothing to be unbegotten, *i.e.* unborn, save God the Father only” (Roberts & Donaldson 1878:23). In saying this, Origen was, in effect, denying the self-existence of the Word as the eternal I AM (John 8:58) and that the Holy Spirit is the “eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14) who, as a Person in the Trinity, also has a timeless self-existence. Kelly (1977:263) says: “Origen, ... basing himself on John 1:3, had taught that the Spirit must be included among the things brought into existence through the Word.”

According to Berkhof (1958:93) Origen, in the third century, was “one of the very first to speak of the generation of the Son.” In allowing “nothing to be unbegotten, *i.e.* unborn, save God the Father only,” Origen appears to have completely overlooked the fact that Christ claimed to be the self-existent I AM, and implied that the pre-incarnate Word was dependent upon the Father for His very existence, hence, in effect, denied the truth of His eternal self-existence as the I AM, co-equal and co-eternal as God, with the Father in the eternal triune Godhead. In also teaching that the Holy Spirit was “brought into existence through the Word,” Origen was clearly denying the Holy Spirit’s eternality (cf. Heb. 9:14) and self-existence as God. Origen thus, in effect, denied the deity of both the Word and the Holy Spirit. Although some less crucial aspects of his teachings were later questioned and rejected, e.g. his Platonic view of the soul, many theologians, including those who formulated the 4th and 5th century creeds, held him in awe as a great scholar and authority of the development of theology and Christology. The effects of his theology persist to this day.

Trigg (1983:95-99) also exposes the pagan philosophical concepts in the theology of Origen, which moulded his understanding of God: “Origen quickly began to interpret the Christian faith in Platonic categories. The doctrine of God par excellence was the doctrine of God the Father since for Origen the Son and the Spirit are ‘God’ only by attribution The Son as a mediating hypostasis is inferior to the Father and represents a lower stage in the cosmological scale. Only the Father, Origen said, is truly God; the Son is God only by participation in the Father.” The Son, for Origen, is not God but the image of God which clearly shows that Origen did not regard the Son as God but as inferior to the Father!

Origen equated the Father with the Ultimate One of pagan philosophy and held that only the Father is unbegotten since the existence of the Son was generated by Him. In terms of John 1:3 he also argued that the Holy Spirit must be included among the things brought into existence by the Word (Kelly 1977:263). The deity and eternality of Christ and the Holy Spirit are denied in this way.

The heresy of Arius

In the fourth century, Arius gave new impetus to the theological view of a created Word who was not equal with the Father. Prof. Young (1983:59, 62) identifies this serious heresy as follows: “Arius claims that ... [t]he Son is not co-eternal with the Father. ... He accepted the traditional view that Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is identical with the Logos, and on the basis of verse 22 concluded that the Logos was God’s creature.” It was the traditional view that Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is Christ, which led Arius into heresy. This view, also referred to as Arianism, holds that Christ was the first, greatest and most perfect of God’s creatures, thus denying His deity. Following the example of his mentor, Origen, Arius transformed the living God of the Bible into the ‘Absolute’ of the philosophical schools (Young 1983:61).

What does God say about the servile observance of theological traditions formulated by imperfect men? “This people 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. For laying aside the commandments of God, you hold the tradition of men *All too well* you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition” (Mark 7:6-9). Creeds and other ecclesiastical documents become part of the theological traditions of a particular denomination, and are in most cases even more rigidly adhered to and defended than the

Bible itself. The end result is that a form of godliness is instilled in people by pressurising them to conform to church rules and traditions. In this way, believers become loyal members and followers of a church, rather than followers of the Lord Jesus. They confess church dogma instead of pure biblical truths, the former often being more of an intellectual exercise than a truly spiritual statement.

In Roman Catholicism, tradition is more important than the Bible; consequently, the Bible is interpreted in the light of theological traditions handed down from the church fathers (Boettner, 1966:103-105). Unfortunately, many of these heresies are also perpetuated by a number of Protestant churches. What was the reason for this? The Reformation was incomplete as it compromised by not outrightly denouncing the heresies of Origen and Arius, who presented Christ as a created being. Dave Hunt (2002:33-74) presents irrefutable evidence that the Reformation was incomplete by not addressing some of the unbiblical traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, which this church inherited from some of the early fathers. Reformers such as Calvin leaned heavily on early church fathers, notably Augustine who is also highly revered by the Vatican, thereby perpetuating a number of serious errors.

William Romaine

An influential and much-loved British preacher and lecturer in theology who held strong views on the deity and eternal self-existence of the Lord Jesus was William Romaine. He played a big part in the evangelical revival in England. On his death John Newton said of him that he was “inflexible as an iron pillar in publishing the truth, and unmoved either by the smiles or frowns of the world.” Reproduced below are important excerpts from a sermon he gave on the self-existence of Jesus Christ (Romaine 1755:1-12):

“In the unity of the divine essence there are three Persons equal in all perfections and attributes, so that none is before or after the other, none is greater or less than another, but the glory is equal, the majesty co-eternal. The Trinity in unity is thus expressed in Scripture, 1 John 5:7: ‘There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.’ The ever-blessed Trinity took the names of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, not to describe in what manner they exist as divine Persons, but in what manner the divine Persons have acted for us men and for our salvation. These names were to give us ideas of the different offices which the Trinity had agreed to sustain in the economy of our redemption. ...]

“According to the plan of this covenant one of the divine Persons agreed to demand infinite satisfaction for sin, when mankind should offend, and to be the Father of the human nature of Jesus Christ, and our Father through Him: and therefore He is called God the Father, not to describe His nature, but His office. Another of the divine Persons covenanted to become a Son, to take our nature upon Him, and in it to pay the infinite satisfaction for sin, and therefore He is called Son, Son of God, and such like names, not to describe His divine nature but His divine office. Another of the divine Persons covenanted to make the infinite satisfaction of the Son of God effectual by inspiring the spirits of men, and in disposing them to receive it, and therefore He is called the Holy Inspirer, or Holy Spirit, and the Spirit of God, not to describe His divine nature, but His divine office. ...

“The Scripture makes no difference between the divine Persons, except what is made by the distinct offices which they sustain in the covenant of grace. ... Christ, who was from eternity co-equal with the Father, did not make Himself inferior because He covenanted to become a Son, nor did the Holy Spirit, who was from eternity co-equal with the Father and the Son, make Himself inferior because He covenanted to make the spirits of men holy by His grace and influence. Son and Holy Spirit are names of office, and the names of their offices certainly cannot lessen the dignity of their nature, but should rather exalt them in our eyes, for whose salvation they condescended to sustain these offices. Our blessed Lord was Jehovah [Yahweh] when He covenanted to be made flesh and to become a Son. The very nature and terms of the covenant prove that at the making of it He must have been a Person of the self-existent essence, because He had thereby such offices committed to Him, as none but the

true God was able to sustain. The whole economy and government of the world, from the time of its creation to the final dissolution, was put into His hands; and therefore the Scripture expressly assures us that He created it, and He governs it by His providence, that He redeemed His people by His blood, and that He is to come again at the last day in all His glory to judge it. And He, who was Almighty to create all things, who was all-wise to govern all things, who had infinite merit to redeem His body, the church, and who is to be God the Judge of all at the last great day, certainly this Almighty, this all-wise, this all-meritorious and divine Judge, must be self-existent and being possessed of these offices, He might truly say I AM ... because He was the First Cause, who gave existence to every other being and thing. ... Christ is the great and eternal I AM, true and very God, equal in all things with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

“The Lord Jesus said, ‘If ye believe not that I AM, ye shall die in your sins.’ Denying Christ to be self-existent is not a small crime, it is the greatest that a man can commit; for what is it to deny the king’s title to the crown? Is it not high treason? And what is it then to deny the Godhead of the King of kings and Lord of lords? Is it not high treason against the supreme majesty of heaven? ... The Scripture we have been considering is most awful and solemn and holds out to us a doctrine of eternal importance, viz. that we must die in our sins, unless we believe the self-existence of Jesus Christ. ... Let it be no hindrance to your owning His divinity, that the Scripture calls Him Son, Son of God, Son of Man, etc., for Son is a name of office and not of nature. He was the true, self-existent God. ... He took the name of Son when He covenanted to become a Son, and to be made flesh for us and for our salvation.” (End of quote from William Romaine’s sermon).

Dr. Albert Barnes

Barnes (1962) so memorably comments on the deity of Jesus: “On earth He was the brightness of the divine glory, and the express image of His Person. It was by Him, eminently, that God was made known to men – as it is by the beams of the sun that that is made known. He bore an exact resemblance to God. He healed diseases – like God. He raised the dead – like God. He wielded the power which God only can wield, and He manifested a character in all respects like that which we should suppose God would evince if He appeared in human flesh, and dwelt among men. And this is saying much. It is in fact saying that the account in the Gospels is real, and that the Christian religion is true. Uninspired men could never have drawn such a character as that of Jesus Christ, unless that character had actually existed.

“The attempt has often been made to describe God, or to show how He would speak and act if He came down to earth. ... But Christ is GOD IN HUMAN NATURE. The form is that of man; the Spirit is that of God. He walks, and eats, and sleeps as a man; He thinks, and speaks and acts like God. He was born as a man – but the angels adored Him as God. As a man He ate; yet by a word He created food for thousands, as if He were God. Like a man He slept on a pillow while the vessel was tossed by the waves; like God He rose, and rebuked the winds and they were still. As a man He went, with affectionate interest, to the house of Martha and Mary. As a man He sympathised with them in their affliction, and wept at the grave of their brother; like God He spoke, and the dead came forth to the land of the living. As a man He travelled through the land of Judea. He was without a home. Yet everywhere the sick were laid at His feet, and health came from His touch, and strength from the words of His lips – as if He were God. As a man He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane; He bore His cross to Calvary; He was nailed to the tree; yet then the heavens grew dark, and the earth shook, and the dead arose – as if He were God. As a man He slept in the cold tomb – like God He rose, and brought life and immortality to light. He lived on earth as a man – He ascended to heaven like God.

“And in all the life of the Redeemer, in all the variety of trying situations in which He was placed, there was not a word or action which was inconsistent with the supposition that He was the incarnate God. There was no failure of any effort to heal the sick or to raise the dead; no look, no word, no deed that is not perfectly consistent with this supposition; but on the contrary, His life is full of events which can be explained on no other supposition than that He

was the appropriate shining forth of the divine glory, and the exact resemblance of the essence of God. There are not two Gods – as there are not two suns when the sun shines. It is *the One* God, in a mysterious and incomprehensible manner shining into the world in the face of Jesus Christ. As the wax bears the perfect image of the seal – perfect not only in the outline, but in the filling up – in all the lines and features, and letters, so is it with the Redeemer. There is not one of the divine perfections which has not the counterpart in Him, and if the glory of the divine character is seen at all by men, it will be seen in and through Him.” (End of comments by Dr. Albert Barnes).

Rejection of the deity of Jesus

There are many people who, to their eternal ruin and downfall, reject the deity and atoning work of the Lord Jesus. The Jewish leaders have clearly taken notice of the statements by Jesus that He and the Father are equal, but they refused to accept it. The problem is they did not know the Father, and that accounts for their spiritual ignorance in matters related to the Messiah. The knowledge of the Triune God was replaced by man-made theological constructions and religious traditions (Mark 7:6, 9, 13). The opinions of the rabbis were more important to them than the Word of God.

The spiritual blinding that was caused by the inadequacy and deceptive nature of the traditions and teachings produced by generations of rabbis was so intense that they could not recognise the Messiah who came from the Father. Instead of accepting Him as the long-awaited Messiah they utterly rejected Him and condemned Him to the death of a criminal. Their theology was so far removed from the truth of Scripture that they could not within its framework recognise Jesus as Messiah. They were also not able to relate the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament to Jesus. Because of denying the One who is the only door to the kingdom of God, the deceived religious leaders barred the whole Jewish nation from obtaining salvation. Jesus said to them: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in *yourselves*, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in” (Matt. 23:13).

It was basically because they did not understand the concept of a Triune God (Elohim) that they could not accept the claim of Jesus to be the eternal I AM who is equal with the Father, and also one with Him. The Jews accused Him of blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God. Jesus rebuked them for their ignorance: “It is my Father who honours Me; of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him ... but I do know Him and keep His word” (John 8:54-55).

The agnostic Jewish leaders did not keep God’s Word because they were strangers to Him: “He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God” (John 8:47). It is understandable that if they did not truly believe in God and His Word, they would also reject Jesus as the Word that became flesh, since He witnessed about the Father whom they did not know. It is obvious that if they did not know the Father they would also betray the Son and resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51-52). To their utter disgust they heard from Jesus that they actually had the devil as father (John 8:44).

The agnostic Jews told Jesus the most serious accusation against Him was that He who was a mere human made Himself God (John 10:31-33). Jesus ascribed their erroneous notion as being a direct result of ignorance: “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29). A poor knowledge of the Father and His Word inevitably leads to a poor knowledge about His Son.

The unsaved, orthodox Jews were so extreme in their rejection of Jesus that they expelled all people from the synagogues who confessed His Name as Messiah (John 9:22). The Lord Jesus had warned His disciples against this persecution, which emanated from a lack of knowledge about God: “They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me” (John 16:2-3). These are the harsh, antichristian actions of people who do not truly know God the Father and His divine Son.

We are living in the end-time, shortly before the revelation of the Antichrist and the coming of Christ. Satan and his accomplices are preparing the way for themselves to be accepted and worshipped world-wide by trying to prohibit and eradicate the knowledge of God in the largest circles of human society. Their aim with this evil campaign is to convince governments not to have Christian constitutions, but multireligious ones in which all faiths are equally recognised. Christian education should be discontinued to ensure that the young generation grow up without knowledge of the Bible and the God of the Bible, and would thus become easy victims of the coming cosmic Christ of all faiths. For the same reason, the truth of the Bible is also questioned by apostate theologians who entertain the same multireligious and antichristian vision.

In the same way in which many church fathers in the early centuries bowed the knee to the idol of the pagan Greek philosophy of Socrates and Plato, there are also many modern theologians who, in religious matters, prefer not to be guided solely by the Bible but by philosophy, psychology, the natural sciences, and the holy books of the non-Christian religions. They elevate reason above faith and submit to knowledge produced by the humanistic sciences. The primary objective of deceived theologians, who obviously do not know God, is the rejection of Christ's deity, His uniqueness and exalted position over the idols of the non-Christian religions, the redemptive significance of His atoning death on the cross, the truth of His Word, and the reality of heaven and hell.

Because of the general acceptance of these and other false teachings, a world-wide process of spiritual decline has been set into motion to create a climate which is conducive to promoting the lies of Satan instead of the truth of God's Word: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). False prophets will parade in Christian robes and proclaim the most far-fetched teachings of Satan (2 Cor. 11:3-4, 13-15), thereby trying to give scientific and theological credibility to their heresies. In this way, false foundations are offered to people to build their lives on them, thereby denying the biblical message of salvation.

We are clearly living in the time of intensive exposure to doctrines of demons, which should motivate us to ensure that the true knowledge of God and His Word does not become a vanishing phenomenon in our lives and in the lives of our children. We have no excuse to be deceived by false prophets since, in the Bible, we have the full revelation of the Triune God and His plan of salvation for a lost humanity. We have to believe in God and His Word, confess the Lord Jesus as the only Saviour of the world, and defend the true message of salvation – even though many churches and their leaders may be ignoring or refuting these truths. As in Israel of old, Jesus Christ is still, to a lesser or greater degree, despised and denied by false religious leaders. They only have "a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (2 Tim. 3:5).

Special spiritual significance is attached to the fact that the rejected Lord Jesus suffered outside the city walls of Jerusalem to sanctify us (Heb. 13:12). In the next verse, His true disciples are thus challenged: "Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach." Are you prepared to go to Him outside the camp of your man-made religious dogma or organisation to bear His reproach? These "camps" could be churches based on perverted creeds, aimed to offer false spiritual security and a convenient comfort zone to their deceived supporters.

Zane Hodges (1983:812) says the following about this verse: "Jesus also suffered outside the city gate ... to make the people holy. ... The readers ... should not hesitate to share in the disgrace He bore (cf. 12:2) by abandoning the camp of Judaism and identifying with Him. If the readers actually were acquainted with sectarian encampments in their region this exhortation would have had special force. The readers' home was no camp or city that then existed, but the city that is to come (cf. 11:10, 16; 12:22)."

Do we really know the Lord Jesus and are we prepared to proclaim His wonderful Name and all His divine attributes? Bernard Reeves (2003:7) says: "Could anything be more important

than restoring a higher view and a more truly Scriptural doctrine of the glorious divine Persons of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and of the eternal, essential oneness of the awesome, self-existent, triune Godhead? Time is short – Christ’s second coming draws ever closer, as world events indicate, so let us not risk being reproved by Him for holding any wrong doctrines about Him and the Holy Spirit, and thus be put to shame before Him. ... Let us all ‘earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints’ (Jude v.3).”

3. The Atoning Death of the Lamb of God

Gaining clarity about the time and circumstances of the atoning death of the Lord Jesus outside of Jerusalem on Good Friday, almost 2 000 years ago, is important. The historical event itself as well as the deep spiritual significance of the crucifixion should be clearly understood. There are different opinions about the day on which Jesus was crucified, and for that reason we will first focus on the three days of Passover. Subsequently, the profound soteriological significance of these events will be considered.

Good Friday and Easter Sunday

We first have to identify the three days between the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ in their correct historical context.

The Lord Jesus compares His burial and resurrection from the dead with the experience of Jonah: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40). Jonah 1:17 reads, “And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” John Hannah (1985:1467) says, “The phrase *three days and three nights* need not be understood as a 72-hour period, but as one 24-hour day and parts of two other days.” Compare in this regard also Esther 4:16 and 5:1, where Esther asked for a fast of three days and three nights; but on the third day, before the end of the day, she had accomplished her purpose with the fast.

Some people have a problem with the view that Jesus was not in the grave for three full days (i.e. 72 hours), and endeavour to move the crucifixion from Friday to the preceding Wednesday. However, in the inclusive chronology of the Jews a part of a day is also reckoned as a full day. Louis Barbieri (1983:47) makes the following remarks on Matthew 12:40: “Since the Jews reckoned part of a day as a full day, the ‘three days and three nights’ could permit a Friday crucifixion.” In an addendum to the *Strong’s Concordance (Harmony of the Gospels)*, 41 events are listed, together with Scripture references, that all occurred during the week of Christ’s crucifixion – the week commencing with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a Sunday, and ending with His crucifixion and burial (Strong, 1990). This sequence of events proves beyond any doubt that He was crucified on a Friday.

According to the Bible, as well as other supporting sources, Jesus was crucified on Friday, early in the morning, and buried on that Friday afternoon shortly before the start of the Sabbath, while He rose early on the first day (Sunday) of the following week. The day when He was crucified (Friday) was the first day of the Passover events, Saturday (the Sabbath) was the second day, and Sunday (His resurrection) was the third day. In Jewish chronology, a period of this nature is described as “three days and three nights” or simply as “three days”. Jewish days elapse between sundown and sundown the next day. Therefore, the third day after the crucifixion already commenced on the Saturday even at dusk.

The men on their way to Emmaus confirm these facts. The day (Sunday) when Jesus rose from the dead they were walking along the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13). Not being aware of the fact that Jesus Himself had joined them, they discussed the events related to His crucifixion early on the Friday morning, and added: “We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive” (Luke 24:21-23). Sunday was, therefore, the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus, which occurred the preceding Friday.

On this Sunday afternoon, on the third day, when the men of Emmaus talked to Jesus, He had already risen from the grave several hours earlier: “On the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw *that* the stone had been taken away from the tomb” (John 20:1). After Jesus had met with the travellers to Emmaus, still on the day of His resurrection, He also appeared to His disciples (John 20:19).

Jesus was in the grave for only a part of the third day, and also for only a part of the preceding Friday. But the Jews nevertheless regard this as three days and nights, although only parts of these days constitute the entire period. The discussion of the men from Emmaus nullifies all speculation on an earlier day for the crucifixion. If Christ was crucified and buried on Wednesday (the fourth day of the week), then the following Sunday would have been the fifth day since the event took place, but these men clearly said it was “the third day”!

Jewish chronology

Since a part of a day may be regarded as a full day in a system of inclusive reckoning of time, a week (e.g. from Wednesday afternoon to the next Wednesday afternoon) may be described as eight days as both Wednesdays are counted as full days. The Feast of Tabernacles in Israel is celebrated for one week, from the 15th to the 22nd day of the seventh month: “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: The fifteenth day of this seventh month *shall* be the Feast of Tabernacles *for* seven days to the LORD. On the first day *there shall be* a holy convocation. ... *For* seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation” (Lev. 23:34-36). The last day of this week, i.e. the eighth day, was the great day of the feast (cf. John 7:2, 37).

Leviticus 23 says, among others, the following on the feast of the 50th day: “And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath ... : seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath” (Lev. 23:15-16). These 49 days between a Sunday and a Sunday seven weeks later, are referred to as 50 days because the first and last Sundays are both counted as full days. In the New Testament, these two feasts were fulfilled during the resurrection of the Lord Jesus on a Sunday, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit seven weeks later, again on a Sunday. “Pentecost” means “Fiftieth” – that is the Feast of the Fiftieth Day.

The Old Testament feast of the first fruits was fulfilled during its proper time in the New Testament, i.e. on the Sunday on which it started and the Sunday seven weeks later when it was concluded. Note the clear directives for both feasts: “... the day after the Sabbath”. Sunday is the first day of a new week, or dispensation, in God’s divine plan for humanity. During this present dispensation, the resurrection of Jesus is spontaneously celebrated every Sunday as the Day of the Lord.

The Feast of Firstfruits in Leviticus 23 is the earliest indication in the Old Testament of a future Sunday celebration as a Christian feast. On this day we proclaim the message: “He has risen – He lives!” Jesus Himself delivered the first sermon of the new dispensation on the Sunday of His resurrection, and a week later, again on a Sunday, the second one (John 20:19-29). Thereafter, Sunday worship became an established practice. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the spiritual enduing for world evangelisation also occurred on a Sunday.

The crucifixion of the Lord Jesus on Good Friday, His resurrection three days later on a Sunday, as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on a Sunday, are pivotal dates on the Christian calendar. His ascension occurred on a Thursday, 40 days after His resurrection, and ten days prior to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The date of the crucifixion according to Daniel

Daniel 9:24-27 offers a clear prophecy on the time of the Messiah’s crucifixion. During the Babylonian exile of Israel, Daniel prophesied on the restoration of Jerusalem, and indicated that from the command to rebuild Jerusalem, a count-down of 69 year-weeks would follow until the crucifixion of the Messiah: “... from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, *there shall be* seven weeks and ~~and~~ sixty-two weeks” (Dan. 9:25). The rebuilding of Jerusalem took up 7 year-weeks, followed by another 62 year-weeks until the Messiah was “cut off” by Israel and the Roman authorities (Dan. 9:26).

This prophecy is based upon prophetic years of 360 days each, in which each month has 30 days (cf. Rev. 11:2-3, in which 42 prophetic months equal exactly 1 260 days. From Gen. 7:11, 24 & 8:4 it is evident that the Flood lasted five months of 30 days each, i.e. 150 days).

The reason for the use of the prophetic calendar was to ensure that despite the use of other calendars (e.g. Israel's lunar calendar or the solar calendar of the Romans) it would still be possible to arrive at a specific date for the crucifixion.

69 year-weeks (483 prophetic years) had elapsed since the day when King Artaxerxes, on 1 Nisan 445 BC, gave Nehemiah permission to go and rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 2:1-8), and the day of the Messiah's crucifixion on 14 Nisan, 32 AD. Prof. J.M. Schepers of the University of Johannesburg indicated in an article (1984:7-10) that 483 prophetic years of 30 days each, represent 173 880 days. Divided by $365\frac{1}{4}$, this period equals 476,06 years on the Gregorian calendar. On this calendar, the 69 year-weeks elapsed between 23 March 445 BC and Friday 11 April 32 AD, ending on the Friday when Jesus was crucified.

The Passover

The fulfilling of the Old Testament Passover was during the crucifixion of the spotless Lamb of God who was incarnated in the fullness of time to lay down His life on our behalf. Peter referred to the priceless sacrifice of the Lamb when he said: "You were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Paul says, "In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7); and also: "... without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22).

Because of the typological nature of the Passover, referring to the future sacrifice of the Lamb of God, it was obvious that this feast would be fulfilled during one of its future celebrations. The Lord Jesus was indeed crucified on the feast of the Passover. According to Mark 14:1-2, the Jews in fact wanted to avoid such a situation: "After two days it was the Passover And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put *Him* to death. But they said, Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people."

But the Jews could not succeed in averting the exact fulfilment of this feast, and Jesus was crucified on Friday 14th Nisan (11 April 32). On the ninth hour of the day (3 p.m.), He died (Mark 15:34-37), on precisely the same hour when the lamb was slaughtered during the first Passover in Egypt. Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so soon, and gave permission for His burial (Mark 15:42-45). That was done before six o'clock on the Friday evening, when the Sabbath started, on which no one was allowed to be buried (Luke 23:52-54; John 19:31).

We read the following about the day of the crucifixion in Mark: "Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, ... went in boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus" (Mark 15:42-43). John Grassmick (1983:191) comments as follows on this passage: "Jesus' burial officially confirmed His death, an important point in early Christian preaching (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-4). The designation *Preparation Day* is used here as a technical name for Friday, *the day before the Sabbath* (Saturday) as Mark explained to his non-Jewish readers. Since no work was allowed on the Jewish Sabbath, Friday was used to prepare for it. This reference confirms that Jesus was crucified on a Friday."

Friday (the day before the Sabbath, or the Preparation Day) and Saturday (the Sabbath) are the only two days with specific names in the Jewish week. The other days are simply numbered, e.g. the first day of the week (Sunday), the second day (Monday), etc. Should a religious feast such as Passover (the 14th day of Nisan) be celebrated on any particular day of the week, it is celebrated like a Sabbath, but not referred to as a Sabbath; the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week. Likewise we may also, on any day of the week, celebrate certain religious feasts as a Sunday, but that does not however, turn such a day into a Sunday.

The crucifixion of Jesus on the Preparation Day is clearly evident from John 19: "Therefore, because it was the Preparation *Day*, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a solemn day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. ... But when they came to Jesus and saw that He

was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out” (John 19:31-34). The Sabbath directly following upon the Preparation Day on which Christ was crucified, was described as a solemn day (NKJV) or a special Sabbath (NIV) because it was at the same time the weekly Sabbath and the important first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Luke also confirms the fact that the burial of Jesus occurred on the Preparation Day: “Then he [Joseph from Arimathea] took it [the body of Jesus] down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb *that was* hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near” (Luke 23:53-54). The Sabbath that would start at sundown that evening was, without any doubt, the weekly Sabbath. If it was the Passover that would begin, it would mean that Jesus was crucified a day before the Passover and that this feast would then not have been fulfilled on its appointed time. He was indeed crucified on the day of the feast, the day when the sacrificial lamb was slaughtered in Egypt to mark the beginning of Israel’s exodus from slavery.

We should have an unwavering confession of Christ’s atoning death and His resurrection, regardless on which specific day they occurred. Nevertheless, it is edifying to have specific historical points of reference for these important events.

The sign of Jonah

We should not confine the sign of Jonah only to the burial and resurrection of Christ, but also take notice of what happened to Jonah after he had been delivered from the belly of the fish. He had a message of repentance for the pagan city of Nineveh. These people sincerely repented from their evil ways and pleaded with the Lord for mercy. Because of this, the wrath of the Lord was turned away from them (Jonah 3:1-10). God did not relent in the sense that He retracted a wrong decision that He had made with regard to Nineveh, but the repentance of the inhabitants ensured His benevolence and grace (Jonah 3:10). The repentance of the people caused the postponement of God’s judgements upon the city for about 150 years. Subsequent generations again lapsed into sin and rebelled against God, which led to the destruction of the city and its inhabitants in 612 BC.

In a message through the prophet Nahum the Lord said: “I will cast abominable filth upon you, make you vile, and make you a spectacle. It shall come to pass *that* all who look upon you will flee from you, and say, Nineveh is laid waste! Who will bemoan her? ... There the fire will devour you, the sword will cut you off Your injury *has* no healing, your wound is severe” (Nah. 3:6, 7, 15, 19).

After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the message of God’s wrath upon sinners should be proclaimed, as well as His saving grace upon those who sincerely repent: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).

What is the condition to be favoured by God? We must believe in the atoning death of His Son on the cross, and thoroughly repent from our sinful past. This is the message which should be proclaimed to the world. Shortly before His ascension the Lord Jesus said to His disciples: “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” (Luke 24:46-47).

During the past 2 000 years there have been various communities, and even countries, where the gospel of Christ was accepted by a large sector of society, Christian constitutions were implemented, and Christian norms established and honoured in various spheres of social life. As in the case of Nineveh and their national conversion, the blessings of the Lord were enjoyed by these communities and nations.

But these good times did not continue – not because God was unfaithful, but because the upcoming generations apostatised into open sin and rebellion against God. Christian constitutions were repealed and replaced by humanistic constitutions in which all religions are

equally recognised. At the same time, Christian norms were also rejected and this widely opened the door to antichristian practices such as lies, corruption, materialism, idolatry, sexual immorality, abortion, homosexuality, drunkenness, violence, and various other malpractices. Things that were previously regarded as shameful conduct are now openly practised.

What else can a depraved world expect than the judgements of God? All those who failed to repent to the Lamb of God will be the objects of His wrath and be judged by Him: "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now *He* commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all, by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).

Do you believe in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus with all your heart, and has the foundation of repentance from dead works been laid in your life? (Heb. 6:1). If so, you will escape the outpouring of God's wrath during the coming tribulation period (Luke 21:36). The believers in Thessalonica have "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

Those who pursue a false, man-made peace outside of Christ will miss the rapture and unexpectedly be overcome by the judgements of God. "For when they say, Peace and safety! then sudden destruction comes upon them And they shall not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3). Those who truly believe and, as disciples of Christ, live holy lives, will watch and pray to be worthy to escape the coming tribulation and to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:36).

Our escape is based upon the work of redemption which the Lord Jesus did on Good Friday on the cross. "The chastisement for our peace was upon Him" (Isa. 53:5). Let us persevere on this way, "for we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end" (Heb. 3:14). Let us not, like the inhabitants of Nineveh, backslide into apostasy after a time.

Great Significance of the Crucifixion

The gospel of the cross was the great message which the Holy Spirit impressed upon the hearts of the disciples. He makes the crucified Christ a reality in our lives as He is the Rock upon which our lives are built. Identification with Jesus Christ is also foundational to sanctification as a second work of grace. If we die with Him we will also live with Him. Paul said he preaches Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:23). A person can only be saved after proclaiming to him or her the message that Jesus shed His blood for the atoning of sins on the cross. We are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood through faith" (Rom. 3:24-25).

During the six hours when Jesus laid down His life on the cross (that was from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. – in Israel it is between the 3rd and 9th hours of the day) He talked very little. The seven pronouncements which He did make jointly took less than a minute to utter. Nevertheless, they were the most meaningful words of forgiveness, saving grace, comfort and victory over the powers of Satan which Jesus had spoken in the midst of intense agony of death. These words were the following (the actual words are typed in bold):

1. "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). Jesus demonstrated His boundless love and grace when He prayed for His trespassers during His condemnation and execution. Before His crucifixion He had already prayed for the spiritually blind residents of Jerusalem. They faced great anxiety and international dispersion because they did not recognise the time when God visited them through His Son. The prayer which Jesus offered on the cross for the pardon of His trespassers was answered during the subsequent centuries when thousands of Jews accepted Jesus as their Messiah. In the end-time there will also be a large group of Jews who will look on Him "whom they have pierced", and grieve for Him (Zech. 12:10).

2. "When Jesus therefore saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He

said to His mother, **Woman, behold your son!** Then He said to the disciple, **Behold your mother!** And from that hour the disciple took her to his own *home*" (John 19:26-27).

With this arrangement Jesus had far more in mind than caring for His mother Mary. He also committed His mother (Israel) to the care of His disciples (the church). In the Bible Israel is often likened to a married woman of whom the Messiah would be born. In Isaiah 54:5 Israel is depicted as a married woman, and in Revelation 12:4-6 as a woman with her male Child, Jesus, who will rule all nations with a rod of iron.

The church certainly has an obligation to comfort and encourage Israel. We are called upon to provoke them to jealousy by the way in which we serve the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through this woman's Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 11:11-12).

3. "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Initially, the thieves who were crucified with Jesus both reviled and insulted Him (Matt. 27:44). Later, the one thief was strongly convicted of his own wickedness and of the innocence and righteousness of Jesus. He then begged for mercy (Luke 23:39-42). The Lord Jesus immediately reacted to this change of heart, and gave the repentant sinner the assurance of eternal life. In this way He honoured a promise which is still valid today: "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37).

From the wonderful repentance of a stubborn sinner on the cross we know that Jesus is the great Physician who came to save spiritually dying people. He did not come for those who justify themselves and think they do not need His saving grace. We also know that there is no sin which is so big that it cannot immediately and completely be forgiven. Furthermore, we know there is grace for everyone who has entered the valley of the shadow of death, as long as he or she stretches out the hand of faith to the Lord Jesus.

4. "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). Between 12 noon and 3 p.m. when Jesus died on the cross there was darkness upon the whole land (Mark 15:33). That was an overt indication that, spiritually speaking, the dark clouds of humanity's sin had descended upon Jesus and separated the Son from His heavenly Father. As an innocent Person, Jesus willingly took the place of convicted sinners so that the sin of lost humanity could be laid upon Him to pay the just penalty for all sinners. "He was wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

The Father has laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6), thereby making Him the object of His divine wrath: "For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). At that critical moment when the Son was covered by lost humanity's burden of sin the Father looked away. Jesus was dying and during those agonising moments of laying down His life on the cross He cried out in His human nature: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He took the place of all lost sinners who were forsaken by God, and was surrounded by the darkness of divine wrath and judgement.

5. "I thirst!" (John 19:28). People who were crucified experienced an intense thirst when they were nearing death, and yearned for water. In a Messianic Psalm which prophetically refers to the death of Jesus, David said: "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue clings to my jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death" (Ps. 22:15).

The death of Christ was much more intense than ordinary people's death. He was confronted by fallen humanity's total burden of sin and had to lay down His life under the extreme wrath and judgement of God: "My heart is like wax. It has melted within Me" (Ps. 22:14). He was indeed forsaken by God in a place where perpetual thirst prevails. The lost rich man was vividly conscious of this thirst when he opened his eyes in Hades (Luke 16:24). Jesus served the full penalty for our sins (cf. Santala, 1992:108-145).

It was shortly before His death when Jesus was forsaken by God and experienced immense thirst. The events of these critical moments emphasise the clear contradistinctions of His

crucifixion:

- The big antithesis from which all the others arise is that Jesus died so that we can live (John 3:16).
- Jesus was forsaken by God so we will never be forsaken by God once we are reconciled to Him through Christ (Heb. 13:5).
- Because Jesus experienced the thirst of death He can quench our spiritual thirst so we will never again be thirsty (John 4:14; 6:35).
- He hung naked on the cross so we can be clothed with the garments of salvation (John 19:23; Rom. 13:14; Rev. 3:18).
- He became poor so that we, through His poverty, might become rich in God's grace (2 Cor. 8:9).

6. "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46). Jesus laid down His life and commended His spirit into the hands of His Father. He did it willingly and consciously (John 10:17-18). Directly afterwards, with His last breath, He cried out:

7. "It is finished" (John 19:30). The original Greek version of the dying word of Jesus is *tetelestai*. To fully comprehend the significance of the word *tetelestai* that was uttered by Jesus at the moment of His death, we should briefly investigate its applications during the first century. This word was more meaningful to those people than to us today, and we will do well to retrieve its original meaning.

Fully paid. In the first instance, according to the *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, the word *tetelestai* was used as the first word on a receipt. It therefore conveys the meaning of *fully paid*. Have you ever considered the fact that Jesus actually bought you when He shed His blood and gave His life for you? Paul reminds us of this truth: "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20). Peter said: "... you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). The testimony of the elders in heaven confirms their full realisation that they have been bought with the blood of the Lamb, when they sang: "You were slain (sacrificed) and with Your blood You purchased men unto God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9; AB).

Do you have the assurance that the price for *your* sins has been fully paid? Do you comply with the condition of repentance and confession of your sins to have them forgiven? The Word of God says: "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy" (Prov. 28:13; see also 1 John 1:8-9). After conversion, we ought to walk with the Lord and keep our record clean by confessing all sins of which the Holy Spirit convicts us (1 John 2:1-2). Do you have fresh date stamps on your receipt?

The Corinthians were very carnal due to a lax attitude, and this disposition seriously hampered their spiritual growth to maturity (1 Cor. 3:1-3, 16). Do not enter the new life with a heritage of carnal attitudes and unconfessed sins. They will eventually cripple you spiritually. Jesus has paid the full price to do a complete work in your life. He wants to save *and* sanctify you. Do not leave the throne of grace with hidden sins that have not been confessed and forsaken.

Sentence served. During the first century it was common practice to nail the charge-sheet of a prisoner to his cell-door. The offences for which he was convicted were written on the charge-sheet, as well as the penalty imposed upon him. After he served his sentence, the charge-sheet was removed from the door and cancelled by writing across it in large letters: *Tetelestai* (Fully served). It was then given to him and nobody could ever charge him again for these offences. He had paid the price for his trespasses in full by serving the entire sentence.

In a spiritual sense all human beings are captives of Satan, "for all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23). They find themselves in his death cells awaiting their trial before the great white throne where

they will be condemned to eternal death. The prison master is the devil, and no person can free himself of his own accord from this grim bondage, or from the death sentence imposed upon him. To save lost sinners, Jesus Christ willingly served the death sentence that has already in principle been imposed upon all sinners (Rom. 6:23). After His resurrection from the grave, He is in a position to cancel the charge-sheet of every lost sinner by writing in red letters with His blood across it: *Tetelestai* – Sentence served.

“You were dead in sins, and your sinful desires were not yet cut away. Then He gave you a share in the very life of Christ, for He forgave all your sins, and blotted out the charges proved against you, the list of his commandments which you had not obeyed. He took this list of sins and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ’s cross” (Col. 2:13-14; LB). The Saviour was indeed sent to earth “to bring out the prisoners from the prison, *and* them that sit in darkness out of the prison house” (Isa. 42:7; KJV). His mission to free those who are spiritual captives of Satan, is also reiterated in Isaiah 61: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *those who are bound*” (Isa. 61:1).

Have all the sins of which the devil accuses you before the throne of God been blotted out by the blood of the Lamb? If so, nobody can ever accuse you again for those sins, no matter how serious they were, because the sentence for them has been fully served.

Victory gained. A third usage of the term *tetelestai* was related to successful military campaigns against the enemy. When a general returned from the battle-field and paraded his captives of war in the streets of Rome, he proclaimed his victory by shouting: *Tetelestai ... tetelestai!* By this victory shout a clear statement was made that the enemy was conquered and its power broken: *mission accomplished!*

Although it was His dying-word on the cross, Jesus also proclaimed His victory over the enemy with the shout: *Tetelestai!* To die was a major victory for Jesus, “that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15).

Jesus conquered the enemy, but has not yet obliterated him. The devil is still very active on earth, therefore we are called upon to share in the victory of Calvary and become “more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37). There is a battle to be fought and a victory to be gained.

These were highly dramatic moments when Jesus laid down His life on the cross to become the Saviour of a lost world. It introduced the dispensation of the New Testament, which made a marvellous difference in the relationship between God and mankind. The veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). This ensured free access to the throne of grace for every person. During Old Testament times, only the high priest could enter the Holy of holies once a year to bring a blood sacrifice for the atonement of Israel’s sins. However, the broken body and shed blood of Jesus were part of a once for all sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world. Lost sinners who accept this sacrifice by faith do not need human mediators, such as priests, to approach the throne of grace on their behalf:

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and *having* a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:19-22).

A big earthquake occurred at the moment when Jesus died, and many of the deceased saints rose from their graves when Jesus was resurrected (Matt. 27:51-53). Jesus broke the power of death so it cannot contain and lay hold of those who have received the gift of eternal life. Jesus said: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, even though he dies, he shall live” (John 11:25).

After the three hour long darkness which prevailed immediately prior to the death of Jesus, the sunlight burst through the clouds and shone vividly. Golgotha was bathed in a new lustre and the testimony of these events would, through the centuries, dispel the darkness of sin and the digression in the lives of millions of people. Everyone of us who has become a partaker of His saving grace has been sent to proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

When the Roman soldiers “saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, Truly, this was the Son of God!” (Matt. 27:54). Even pagans who were ignorant of Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, came trembling to the conclusion that Jesus is the Son of God. The Lord offers reconciliation through the blood of Christ to people from every nation, tongue and tribe, even to the ends of the earth. Because Jesus was prepared to make Himself of no reputation and descend to the lowest depths of dying on a cross in the place of lost sinners, God raised Him from the dead and gave Him a name which is above every name (Phil. 2:6-11).

Every person on earth will have to bow the knee before Jesus Christ and confess that He is Lord and God. It is the duty of believers to prepare all people for an encounter with Christ. They are invited to bow before His throne of grace now to receive Him as their Saviour. If they refuse the offer they will, on judgement day, appear before Him at the great white throne where He will condemn them to the lake of fire. He is either your Saviour who has saved your soul, or He will be your Judge to condemn you to hell because of your sin and unbelief (cf. Acts 17:30-31).

The shadows of the church dispensation are stretching longer and time is running out. Let us make the most of the remaining time by redeeming it to serve the Lord and extend His kingdom on earth. Like Jesus, we should be urgent about our mission: “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4). The night of God’s judgements in the great tribulation is rapidly approaching and there is still much unfinished business in His kingdom to be done before the trumpet will sound. The lost must be saved and Christians must be prepared to appear before the heavenly Bridegroom.

The Call to rebirth

The main mission of the Lord Jesus to the world was to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Since the redeeming of lost sinners calls for divine intervention and a new beginning in life, Christ made a basic statement on rebirth to a Jewish preacher who was still in the dark on what salvation really is:

“There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him. Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born? Jesus answered, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, You must be born again. ... Nicodemus answered and said to Him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said to him, Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?” (John 3:1-10).

Nicodemus was one of the moderate and more open-minded members of the Sanhedrin in Israel. He was impressed with the ministry of Jesus, particularly with His divine power to do miracles, and wanted to find out more about it. His colleagues hated Jesus, so he decided to approach Him alone at night-time. Nicodemus addressed Jesus on an equal basis as rabbi, but nevertheless recognised the fact that God was with Him. Jesus was not the equal of this Pharisee but far superior to him as He came from above. John the Baptist said: “He who comes from heaven is above all” (John 3:31). The Lord Jesus knew very well that the spiritual problems of Nicodemus were due to ignorance. He practised a dead, legalistic religion based

upon outward acts and rituals, while his heart was cold and far from the Lord.

Jesus quickly came to the point by clearly mentioning the solution to this preacher's problem of a dead form of godliness: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus could not at all understand how a person could be born for a second time as he was thinking about a second physical birth. The Lord Jesus then explained to him that for the second time he had to be born from above, by the Holy Spirit. He had to be quickened spiritually by getting a changed heart. Nicodemus was criticised for not being able to grasp this point. He was an expert on the Old Testament and should have known that God expects a changed heart from His people (cf. Deut. 30:6; Ezek. 36:25-27; Jer. 4:4). Jesus said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" He was unable to understand the point made by Jesus because his heart was not correctly inclined towards God.

Paul also refers to this deep spiritual work which the Lord wants to do for His people, i.e. a change of heart to be able to really love Him: "For he is not a Jew who is *one* outwardly, nor is that circumcision *which is* outward in the flesh; but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly, and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, *and* not of the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God" (Rom. 2:28-29). Of what avail is a good-looking outward life, but inside the person has a dark, unregenerate, unholy and unbelieving heart?

Is your religion based upon the rule of the new creation? Do you have the testimony that your life and values have changed on a spiritual level, and that the old things have passed away and all things have become new? (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul warned Timothy that, particularly in the end-time, there will be many people who only have an outward form of godliness, but on a spiritual level they will still be dead in their sins and trespasses: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away" (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

These people do not know the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They have only been baptised and confirmed, but for the rest they live as they please. According to outward criteria such as church rituals and good works they claim to be Christians who are on their way to heaven. But they deceive themselves as they are like the church in Sardis of which the Lord Jesus said, "You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (Rev. 3:1).

Regeneration refers to the resurrection life of Christ with which we are endued when we are truly saved. Only this gives us a hopeful future: "Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah! By His boundless mercy we have been born again to an ever living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3; AB). When we become conformed to the death of Christ after putting down the old life, we are spiritually renewed and endued with the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus. We can then walk with Him in a completely new life. Our family and friends will be able to see that our life has fundamentally changed. We can still falter and sin but immediately put the matter straight again and continue to walk in the Spirit – not in the flesh. The Lord transforms us spiritually to be shining lights in the midst of a crooked generation. We distance ourselves from the sins which we have committed in the past and endeavour to become conformed to the image of Christ.

The forgiving of sins and rebirth are closely associated with one another, since the Lord Jesus cleanses us of our sins when He gives us a new life with a new nature through rebirth. The cleansing of our sins is the major purpose for which the Lord Jesus came to the world (Matt. 1:21). This is a vitally important matter as the Bible says that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). The Lord Jesus saves us by having paid the ransom for our sins on the cross in order that we may be born again spiritually and become partakers of His holy nature.

Correctly Portraying Christ

It is important that we correctly present Christ during the church dispensation, namely as the Saviour who has come to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). The emphasis should be on His crucifixion where He paid the ransom for our sins. Paul always maintained the pre-eminence of this perspective: "We preach Christ crucified. ... For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2).

Faith in the crucified Lord Jesus is the key to rebirth and a new life to all sinners, and for that reason He must specifically be presented to them in the context of His atoning work. All sinners are "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth *to be* a propitiation by His blood, through faith" (Rom. 3:24-25). This image of Jesus Christ is also of continuous significance to Christians after conversion, as we must be united together in the likeness of His death (Rom. 6:5-6).

In our new life, the cross of Christ should be our greatest glory as our identification with it will help us to be crucified to the world, and the world to us (Gal. 6:14). We walk on the way of the cross, which is characterised by self-denial and continuous cleansing by the blood of the Lamb (Luke 9:23). John says, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7; cf. Col. 1:14).

If our perspective on Jesus as the crucified One diminishes and is replaced by other perspectives we are running the risk of missing the great blessing of His atoning death, as well as the continuous cleansing by His blood. There are unfortunately people who only accept Jesus as a moral role model and then, by their own efforts, endeavour to lead exemplary and socially acceptable lives. But their association with Him ends there. Others regard Jesus as an inspiring example of political activism as, according to them, He was a champion of the poor and the oppressed, and was prepared to be unjustly persecuted by society and government. In this way they completely miss the great purpose for His coming to the world.

Then there is also the serious problem of a large number of believers who entertain wrong views on the revelation of Christ's kingdom. They emphasise the position of the Lord Jesus as King at the cost of His other attributes, thereby justifying their main objective of becoming kings themselves. They pursue a kingdom here and now in the church dispensation, and are thus strongly inclined towards gaining kingdom powers. They strive after power to do miracles, including the healing of the sick and the raising of the dead. They also pursue fame, popularity, and great wealth. They want large followings and many of them wish to be known as specially anointed prophets or apostles.

Dominionists also try to gain power over the kingdom of Satan. They trust the Lord for power to cast out demons – not only from individuals, but also from towns, cities, and entire countries. In this way they endeavour to introduce a transformation towards kingdom conditions on earth, and then to rule over their kingdom on behalf of the Lord. Meetings for the promotion of a Christian transformation on national level are frequently held in many countries of the world. A great number of people are highly impressed by these efforts, but the question remains: "Which Jesus do they proclaim?"

The supporters of this movement promote Christ's position as King who will rule together with His saints, but they do so at the cost of His position as the crucified Saviour who sent out His disciples to all corners of the earth to proclaim the gospel of salvation in a hostile world. They do not have the mandate or power to break Satan's power in a territorial context – they can only lead people to the cross where they can be saved from sin and the power of Satan.

Evangelisation is a taxing task as only a small minority of people react positively to the gospel message (Luke 13:24; John 3:19). It is unbiblical and unrealistic to expect that entire societies and nations will now turn away from the broad way and come over to the narrow way, much as we would like to see it happen. We must continue preaching the crucified Christ who is still rejected by the majority of people. We will also experience suffering and rejection when doing this work (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12), but if we persevere, we will one day rule with Christ in His

kingdom – definitely not now in a world which is under the control of the Evil One (1 John 5:19).

The Lord Jesus will only, at His second coming, appear as King of kings and completely break Satan's power-base on earth (Rev. 19:19 – 20:3). Only then will His glorified saints rule with Him as kings (Rev. 20:6). It is dispensationally completely out of place to emphasise Christ's position as King now, in the church dispensation, at the cost of His capacity as the crucified Saviour.

4. The Centre of Our Existence

A saving faith in Jesus Christ leads to a profound regeneration of our lives in which the old things pass away and everything becomes new (2 Cor. 5:17). An important part of this transition is a new outlook on life which leads to a Christian worldview. New significance is rendered to the total reality of our existence – the creation of the universe, the nature of man, the reasons for man's depravity, the reality of an opposing kingdom of darkness, Christ's work of renewing, as well as the eternal glorification of believers and the everlasting judgement of sinners.

Jesus Christ is the Creator of the world, the mighty Saviour, and the only light of a spiritually dark world. He is the beginning of our spiritual life, and conformity to Him is the highest ideal to which we can strive. Christ is the absolute centre of the new life which He offers to us, for in Him we live and move and have our being. Everything should be accounted for in the light of His holiness, divine authority, and intervention in the destiny of humanity. His coming to the world causes the falling and rising of many people, depending on whether they accept or reject Him (Luke 2:34). We should not repeat the mistake that was made by the majority of Israelites, who were blind to who Jesus really is and consequently rejected Him:

"[Jesus is] the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name" (John 1:9-12). We are obliged to make a choice about Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus is the only Saviour of humanity; the One who has embarked upon a vital mission to a lost world. The destiny of all people is determined by their relationship with Him: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). In Him are truth, light and life, and outside of Him are deception, darkness, and death.

We cannot disregard the Lord Jesus in our concept of reality, since we are either His followers or His adversaries. All people have a God-given conscience, which is a basic knowledge of good and evil, and it enables them to make moral choices. But knowledge of the gospel is still needed in order to make wise and life-changing decisions in this sphere. Without the redemption of Christ, and without His new nature, we will not be able to prevail in the struggle against evil.

Apostate theologians who refuse to recognise the power and divine attributes of Christ, and the significance of His death and resurrection, intuitively know that they are contending against the truth but nevertheless yield to the unbiblical thoughts of their deceived hearts. These academics are wilfully intent on questioning and discrediting the claims of the Lord Jesus. They reveal the same kind of theological scepticism which the first century scribes proclaimed to their own spiritual ruin when they rejected Jesus as Messiah and said blasphemous things about Him.

It is rather strange that modern agnostics would devote so much time and energy to contradict a teaching which, according to them, is only a man-made myth without any substance. Intellectual self-conceit is probably what motivates them to exalt themselves above God's Word and to reduce it to a humanly-conceived book in which mistakes, mythology and contradictions abound. They now take the liberty to present to us a "historical Jesus" who, like themselves, is only an ordinary human being with many limitations. This amounts to treason against divine revelations and is doubtlessly part of the intense battle which is waged in the spiritual realm against the Bible (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 6:10-12). According to John, a demonic spirit of deceit is at work to deconstruct the biblical Jesus in a typical postmodern way in order to replace Him with another Jesus who is described by the Bible as the Antichrist (1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-6). Paul expounded the same error of the distortion of the biblical image of Jesus, as well as the basic message of the Bible, which all occur under the influence of deceiving

spirits and the doctrines of demons (2 Cor. 11:2-4; 1 Tim. 4:1). The Lord Jesus Himself warned against impostors who would present themselves in His name as “the Christ”, and said that deception of this nature would be particularly prevalent in the end-time (Matt. 24:3-5).

True disciples of Christ are on the right side of this battle because their eyes were opened to the great and wonderful truth of the deity of Jesus. Their belief is in agreement with the statement made by John in the first century, when he realised that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfilment of Messianic promises in the Old Testament, and that God’s Word became alive through the Messiah: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The central position which the Lord Jesus should occupy in the hearts and lives of believers is evident from the following 24 aspects of His Person and works:

1. The beginning and end of all things

We worship the Triune God, Elohim, consisting of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, but the Lord Jesus is specifically referred to as the Creator of the world (John 1:3; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:2). He is the beginning of creation, He still maintains it and will eventually destroy it because of the contamination caused by sin, and subsequently renew everything. That is the reason why He said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, the First and the Last” (Rev. 22:13). We cannot conceive anything in time or space that is beyond His creative power, renewing work, and the systematic fulfilment of His divine purposes. He is central in these events.

How do you adapt to God’s counsel? You can either be a fellow-worker in the expansion of His kingdom, or one of His adversaries who will be judged by Him. If you plan and conduct your life outside of Christ it will inevitably be in conflict with His counsel and end in disaster. All people will live forever, and for that reason the wicked are heading for eternal condemnation. All peoples’ lives will be judged as good or evil in terms of a divine standard by Him who is and who was and who is to come (Rev. 11:17).

2. The One who has all authority in heaven and on earth

The Triune God who has all authority in heaven and on earth, sovereignly made a decision to create people according to His own likeness (Gen. 1:26), and also gave man a free will with the ability to make moral choices between good and evil. Man can either pursue his calling towards conformity to God’s holiness, or he can disregard God’s commands and turn his back upon God and His Word, thereby rendering himself an enemy of God. When he acts in the latter way he moves away from the centre of the universe and embarks on a road which ends in moral perversion and spiritual darkness, as well as domination by Satan who is the self-declared god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). The devil gives the apostates idols to worship and turn them into lawless people who do not readily accept authority.

Since the early beginnings of human life on this planet people were, in a spiritual sense, called to the throne of grace in the centre of the universe to subject themselves to God’s will and receive the gift of everlasting life from Him. The choice was theirs. Adam and Eve were confronted by a critically important choice between life and death, which would also have implications for all their posterity (Gen. 2:16-17; Rom. 5:12). Cain had to choose between God’s righteousness and the spiritual defilement caused by sin (Gen. 4:7). Moses reminded all of Israel that they had to make the right choice of loving and obeying the Lord if they wished to live and avoid the curse of sin (Deut. 30:19-20). This vital responsibility of choosing was later reiterated by Joshua (Jos. 24:15).

When the Lord Jesus came He lamented Israel’s fatal decision of rejecting Him as Messiah (Matt. 23:37; Luke 19:41-44). Paul also implored the Gentiles to be reconciled to God if they wished to have a share in His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:20-21). In the last chapter of the Bible an appeal is once more made to the free will of humanity to take the right decision by bowing down before the only One who can quench the spiritual thirst of us all: “And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

If we make the correct decision, we become followers of the Lord Jesus, to whom the Father has given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). He will also make us more than conquerors in an evil world in which most people prefer to walk on the way of sin (John. 3:19). If we persevere on the right way, we are heading for the eternal glory of Him who is the Creator and centre of the universe. How wonderful if He is the centre and main goal of your life!

3. The personification of saving grace

The grace which God offers us for salvation and spiritual growth is based entirely upon Christ's work of atonement, i.e. His incarnation, His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. The moment when we shift our focus away from this central truth we are at risk of basing our salvation partially, or even entirely, upon good works or law observation, or upon church rituals such as baptism and confirmation. In that case, faith in Christ is no longer at the centre of our salvation, as we would then trust in ourselves or in other things.

Paul said that he was standing before God, not in his own righteousness which is from the law but in the righteousness which is through faith in Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:9). Our Saviour is a Person, Jesus Christ – not a religious organisation, a set of laws, or church rituals conducted by human officiators. We must have a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus and have the testimony of His Holy Spirit in our hearts that we are saved.

We should open the door of our hearts to Jesus Christ because He is the Saviour of our souls. We must have a continuous consciousness of His presence through the Holy Spirit, and for that reason a true Christian should be able to say: "I know my Saviour is alive because He lives in me; in Him I have redemption through His blood, therefore I glory in the cross of Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. If I abide in Jesus Christ I will bear much fruit and He will be with me always, even to the end of the age. I should ever be looking at Jesus as He is the author and finisher of my faith." (Cf. Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:7; Gal. 6:14; John 15:5; Matt. 28:20; and Heb. 12:1-2.)

4. The lowly Servant who Himself is also God

The Lord Jesus was, as a human being, revealed in the form of a lowly servant and was presented as such in the four Gospels after His first coming. During His earthly ministry He acted as the Son and Servant of the Father, and laid down His life as a propitiation for our sins. This special revelation of Him as a human being should not be used as an excuse to regard Him as only a mortal man with an earthly father, and consequently as somebody who does not come from heaven and is Himself not God. His virgin birth renders proof of the fact that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and comes from heaven. Because of us He had accepted a human body to be able to die on behalf of sinners.

We should not only read in the Gospels about the suffering Messiah, but also in the book of Revelation on how He will appear at His second coming. When He comes again, He will come as King of kings in glory, power and majesty. His eyes will be like a flame of fire, His hair white like wool, and His chest girded about with a golden band. He will take charge of the kingdoms of the world and will rule as King on the throne of David. He will judge His enemies and break the power of the devil and his henchmen.

After His second coming, all people will know about Him and the kings of the earth, together with their high-ranking officials, will go up to Jerusalem to honour and consult the Lord Jesus there (Isa. 2:2-3; Zech. 8:21-22). His position as the centre and highest authority on earth *and* in the universe will be recognised without any contradiction. But, already now, we should realise who He is and offer all honour and thanksgiving to Him. That will make us worthy to appear before Him in future and to share in His glory.

5. The resurrection and the life

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is of great significance as it, together with the cleansing from our sins, renders us children of the resurrection who all have eternal life (Luke 20:36).

First, there is the fact of Christ's physical resurrection from the dead after His atoning death on the cross. Because He has eternal life in Himself it was impossible that the grave and death could contain Him. He was raised in an immortal resurrection body, and promises all His disciples a similar resurrection in a new body.

The Lord Jesus says: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, even though he dies, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). When He comes, all who died in Christ will be raised incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:52-53) while the believers who are still alive on that day will be changed from mortality to immortality in the twinkling of an eye, and will therefore not see death. Paul says our lowly body will be transformed that it may be conformed to the glorious body of Christ (Phil. 3:20-21).

The resurrection of deceased believers and the transformation of living believers will occur at the coming of Christ, and only Christians will share in this divine blessing (1 Thess. 4:16-17). The promise is clear: "... everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him [has] everlasting life; and I will raise him up in the last day" (John 6:40). Paul said that the promise of the resurrection from the dead was a strong motivating force in his life, and he fully exerted himself to attain it: "... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10-11).

Since all people will live forever, there will also be a resurrection for the wicked. John says, "The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29). The just will be raised at the end of the church dispensation when Christ will come for His bridal congregation, but the unjust will only be raised after the millennial reign of Christ to appear before the great white throne judgement where they will be condemned to eternal death in the lake of fire.

John distinguishes the two resurrections as follows: "But the rest of the dead [the unjust] did not live again until the thousand years were finished. ... Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:5-6). The second death – that is eternal death – is awaiting the unbelievers at the end of the thousand-year reign.

The promise of the resurrection of the just is central to our life as believers and therefore forms part of our basic confession of faith. Paul says, "For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins!" (1 Cor. 15:16-17). We are worshipping a living God, and that clearly distinguishes us from all the false religions that all worship dead idols. Christ rose from the dead and lives for evermore, and we will also rise and live forever in His sight.

6. The true Vine as the source of our life

We should be strongly convicted that the Lord Jesus is the Source of our life. He is the true vine into which we have been grafted, as He Himself explained to His disciples: "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 15:5). If we live close to Him and abide in Him, it will be beneficial for our spiritual lives and we will bear fruit which is worthy of repentance. We should not give place to any leaven of sin in our lives (1 Cor. 5:6-8) as that would disturb our relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Some people tend to forget that Christ should be the central focus of their lives, and then strongly identify with a secondary spiritual source. One of the views which deviate from our relationship with the true vine is entertained by those who, in terms of the symbol of the olive tree used in Romans 11:16-24, think that we as believers have been grafted into the people of Israel. Instead of becoming more like Christ, these people now become more like Israel. They refer to themselves as the *Hebrew Roots Movement*, observe Old Testament laws, and

celebrate Jewish festivals, including the Sabbath, and also use Hebrew names for the Lord.

A return to the law as the source of their life can have highly detrimental consequences in people's spiritual lives. Paul says, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt* to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4). If Jesus Christ is no longer the absolute centre of our lives, major problems follow.

As far as the symbol of the olive tree in Romans 11 is concerned, it should be noted that it is actually only the branches that represent the people of Israel. They were broken off because of unbelief, so we have definitely not been grafted into the branches! Israel originated from God, so the root of the olive tree refers to God who gave them the promise of the Messiah. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the Root and the Offspring of David" (Rev. 22:16). Although, as a human being, He was born in the royal lineage of David, He is also the Root, or origin, of David as well as the Root of Israel as the Chosen People.

Abraham, as the founding father of Israel, is only important because he had a relationship of faith with God as his spiritual root: "And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). The deep meaning of the root, to Israel and the nations, is not the Jewish people that descended from Abraham, as well as their laws and rituals, but the Messiah who was born from this people. Jesus is the seed of Abraham, and could therefore say to the Jews: "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58). That is the reason why the Lord said to Abraham: "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). The Messiah, who is the Saviour of the entire world, would be born from Israel. Paul refers to the great significance of the Messiah's crucifixion, "that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit by faith" (Gal. 3:13-14).

Christ is the source of all blessings, and because Israel has rejected Him, they have been scattered all over the world. Only after they have been reunited with Him, will they be grafted back into the olive tree in which we already are (Rom. 11:23-26). Then, they will be a blessing to all nations in the Messiah (Rom. 11:11-12). We should not try to imitate them now, but only follow in the footsteps of the Messiah. We must provoke them to jealousy by the way in which we serve the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through the Messiah.

7. The only foundation of our life

A further characteristic of Christians is that, through rebirth, they obtained a new life built upon the foundation, Jesus Christ. That is a firm spiritual basis on which their whole life is built. The Lord Jesus explained this fact in the parable of the wise man who built his house on the rock of God's Word. This house could resist all storms because it was founded on a solid rock. But there was also a foolish man who built his house on the sand, and it fell down when it was struck by the storms (Matt. 7:24-27). Such is the experience of all people whose lives are not built upon the Rock, Jesus Christ: the crises and storms of life eventually destroy them. Even if they survive the present storms of life, they will certainly collapse when the end-time storms of God's judgements strike them.

We should devote much attention to this important aspect of Christ's position and role in our lives, as it poses a great challenge to us to react and build upon it in a proper way. Not all the branches which have been grafted into the vine (Jesus Christ) always bear fruit (John 15:1-6). Likewise, not all of us are building in the right way with a life of dedication upon the Christian foundation of our lives. Paul says:

"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 manifest; 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" (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

Only the Lord Jesus can save us because nobody else can lay the foundation of rebirth in our

lives. But this is only the beginning of the new life in Christ, and we have to be careful how we build on this foundation. If we trust the Lord for the filling of the Holy Spirit and walk in the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit will be evident in our lives. It will manifest in works which have value for eternity.

However, if we are negligent in our spiritual lives and fail to make a complete surrender, we will only do carnal works which will be rejected by the Lord. These works will have strong elements of worldliness, pride, self-glorification, striving for material gain, and a slanderous disposition, and will all be consumed like wood, hay and straw before the judgement seat of Christ. The carnal (worldly-minded) Corinthians were guilty of this lifestyle (1 Cor. 3:1-3), as well as the carnal Galatians and Hebrews (Gal. 5:16-17; Heb. 5:12-13).

It is evident that many Christians are not, with undivided hearts, committed to Jesus Christ as the centre and foundation of their lives, and consequently do not lead lives which comply with His standard of holiness and fruitful service (cf. John 13:17). They are not strongly focused on the Christian foundation of their lives but on the things which they can do by depending on their own abilities and insight every day. But such a life is built on sand, without a solid foundation, and has no certain future to look forward to.

8. The centre of our prayers

Jesus Christ must also be the centre of our prayers, which should primarily be aimed at glorifying His Name, thanksgiving because He has saved us by grace, and all other matters which are related to the expansion of His kingdom on earth. We should also pray for strength to remain steadfast in an evil world, wisdom to take the right decisions, and determination to lead a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. All prayer requests for ourselves as well as other people should always be made in the Name of Jesus Christ, because the merit of His atoning death is our surety for the hearing of prayers which are offered in accordance with His will (1 John 5:14). The Lord Jesus, His kingdom and His will should always be the centre and main objective of our prayers.

9. The highest expression of holiness and completeness

If the Lord Jesus is truly the beginning, the centre, and the final destination of our lives, we will earnestly strive to become conformed to His image of holiness. God's purpose with humanity since creation is holiness, in order to ensure sustained fellowship and communication between the Creator and humans who were created in His likeness. "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; Lev. 11:44). The Lord Jesus is the highest expression of holiness, thereby leaving us an example to follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6). We are called to a life of holiness in Christ.

This high standard of holiness can only be achieved if we move closer to the spiritual centre of our life, which is Christ. As far as our knowledge of Jesus Christ is concerned, we must grow up "to a perfect man, 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).

The question is: "Are we still small children who walk with faltering steps, who have to be fed and carried about by others, and who have no insight into the deeper things of the Word?" If so, we will be easy victims to deception by the enemy of our souls. Apart from the fact that we will not comply with the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, we will also cause harm to the work of the Lord because of our lack of knowledge. Our knowledge and discernment will be so poor that we will not be able to properly counsel anybody. The solution to this problem is to conform to the image of Christ more completely, and to be guided by His Spirit into all truth. Follow the advice of John the Baptist with regard to the Lord Jesus: "He must increase, but I *must* decrease" (John 3:30).

10. The example of divine love

Jesus Christ is the example and personification of divine *agape* love. If we are committed to Him with undivided hearts He firstly expects from us to love Him and His Father above anything and everybody else; secondly, to love our brethren in Christ; and thirdly, to have love and compassion for a lost world. The commandment of love is the only commandment of the New Testament, and if we honour it we no longer need the Old Testament law – God’s love complies with all it’s demands (Rom. 13:8-10).

We must make a distinct choice to be filled and guided by God’s love since we cannot, at the same time, love the world as well as God (1 John 2:15-17). We must also learn to become perfect in love and to persevere in it. John says, “Whoever keeps [the Lord’s] word, truly the love of God is perfected in him” (1 John 2:5).

It is unfortunately also possible to backslide and fall short of the grace of God if we do not seriously regard Christ and His love for us. Many people become bogged down spiritually and revert to human and worldly forms of love, including a preference for churches with low spiritual standards. To such people the Lord Jesus says: “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).

Pure, divine love which is in the first instance inclined towards the needs of those who are spiritually lost and/or physically deprived, is what the Lord Jesus explicitly proclaims as a solution to the spiritual needs of the world. The dynamics of this love should guide the nature of our decisions, actions and human relations. Only then, the Lord Jesus will truly be the centre of our life.

11. The Holy One who guides us through His Spirit

The Lord Jesus is the only role model for our lives. We are called upon to fully identify with Christ and become like Him: “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to *fulfil its lusts*” (Rom. 13:14). That means that Christ must be formed in us (Gal. 4:19). How does that happen? Through the filling of the Holy Spirit we put on a new nature which is “created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24). A precondition for this transformation is that we “put off, concerning [our] former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of [our] mind” (Eph. 4:22-23). The old nature should be mortified through full identification with the cross of Christ, as it is a stumbling-block in the process of spiritual renewal (Luke 9:23; Gal. 5:17; 6:14).

Christ has poured out the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, to endue us with power, and to remind us of all things that He has said to us (John 14:26; 16:13-14; Acts 1:8). If we walk in the Spirit, the holy nature of Christ will be seen in us. This is the only way in which we will be able to spread the fragrance of Christ everywhere (2 Cor. 2:14).

We should not propagate a particular church or religious view, as we would run the risk of elevating a secondary issue to being a primary issue. We should be witnesses of Jesus Christ, and not protagonists for baptism, the law, tongue-speaking, or any other matter. When we engage in discussions with other people it is not even necessary for them to know to which church we belong – that is, if we belong to any denomination at all. Many people serve the Lord Jesus in a much more informal way at their homes and in their interaction with other people. They read good books and also get useful information on the internet, although well developed discernment is needed to assess informative material for doctrinal purity.

All of us should take care to diligently grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). Without astute spiritual insight we will not have the ability to detect and resist deception. We cannot just accept everything that comes our way, as not all views are in agreement with the demands of an evangelical doctrine. Whether we find ourselves inside or outside a denomination, there will always be forms of deception which we will come into contact with, and which we will have to refute. Deceptive teachings obviously become more rigidly

established when they are accepted as part of a denomination's doctrine. In that case, one has to leave a church in order to dissociate oneself from the influence of a particular form of deception.

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). The "doctrine of Christ" (2 John v.9) includes all the essential truths of which we should have knowledge: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. ... Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:32, 36). If we truly know Him well and He is the centre of our life, then we will have a good understanding of spiritual and moral truths, and will consequently not be easily deceived. In our preaching and witness to others we should concentrate more on Jesus Christ than on deception. Unless people know Him very well they will not easily realise that they are wrong. But when they do know and serve Him they will have a sound frame of reference on spiritual matters. The Holy Spirit wishes to lead us in the footsteps of Christ, and instil a conviction in our hearts on what is right and what is wrong.

12. The Conqueror of evil powers

The Lord Jesus is the big Conqueror over all the powers of the enemy. Through His death on the cross He has broken the power that Satan had over people (Heb. 2:14). "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). Through faith in Him we can also be more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37).

But this victory is only for those who truly belong to Christ and have been endued with power from on high by His Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). As far as the unsaved world is concerned, which is represented by those who walk on the broad way, Satan is still a powerful ruler. The Bible refers to him as the ruler of this world (John 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:4, Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19). He and his demons are the rulers of the darkness of this age (Eph. 6:12), and their power over an evil world will only be broken at the second coming of Christ (Rev. 19:19-20; 20:1-3).

We are, spiritually speaking, in an operational area in which we have to put on the whole armour of God to remain standing against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:10-11). The Lord offers us spiritual weapons to use in this war: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Every stronghold of Satan in our lives – that is sin which binds us – should be broken, including all the arguments, or evil plans, which the enemy of our souls gives us to also commit hidden sins such as fraud and adultery. High things that exalt themselves against the Word of God refer to the unbiblical justification to do sin, and should also be broken down, while sinful thoughts and evil intents should be taken captive and replaced by a resolve to remain faithful to Christ. In our mind also we should honour Christ and pursue His holiness.

Through a strong faith we should learn to become conquerors who do not submit to temptations and attacks by the Evil One. Be strong in the Lord and do not bow the knee to Baal. If we overcome we will one day rule with Christ in His kingdom. He says, "He who overcomes, and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations" (Rev. 2:26).

13. The Head of the church

To be conscious of the key role of Christ in our lives, calls for the recognition of His position as the Head of the church: "And He is the Head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence" (Col. 1:18, cf. Eph. 1:22). All born-again Christians are members of the body of Christ, and He is the Head of us all. Also where Christians meet in various places to form local assemblies, Christ is the Head of every assembly.

Elders, including preachers or teaching elders, are supposed to function under the headship

and guidance of Christ. They should be cautious not to demand high titles and status, thereby infringing upon the headship of Christ. Peter says, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, ... not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Pet. 5:2-4). Christ has supreme authority, and therefore all leaders should seek His guidance through the Holy Spirit and heed it.

Paul seriously warns against arrogant shepherds who follow the dictates of their own minds, proclaim heresies and cause disarray in congregations (Acts 20:28-30). He describes them as savage wolves that deceive the flock of God. That happens where many of the members are followers of men, rather than followers of Jesus Christ who should be their Head and Guide.

When we as believers join in serving the Lord, it should occur with a strong consciousness of the headship and guidance of Christ. We should take care not to become excessively pastor oriented or church oriented, to the extent of pushing the Lord Jesus to the background, as we would then occupy ourselves with the structures, doctrines and commandments of men. But if the pastor leads an irreproachable life and preaches the pure Word of God, we may accept his guidance as Christ can minister to us through such a person. Paul said, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1; NIV). But that is not the case with all spiritual leaders, and we should ensure that we do not recognise and follow a dubious "head" over our lives.

It was common practice in Israel to establish religious structures and proclaim teachings in which there was no room for the Lord Jesus and His gospel message. He strongly reproached the religious leaders for resisting God: "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. ... *All too* well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition, ... making the word of God of no effect through your tradition" (Mark 7:7-13).

The same form of deception occurs in our time: false spiritual foundations are offered to people in which baptism and church membership are regarded as sufficient for salvation, while the demands of repentance and rebirth are mostly ignored. The virgin birth of Christ, His deity and resurrection from the dead, as well as the infallibility of His Word, are also very seldom proclaimed. It is obvious that Jesus Christ is not the Head of such churches, despite the fact that they may nominally subscribe to a Christian confession. These people only honour the Lord Jesus with their lips, but their heart is far from Him (Matt. 15:8).

Do you conduct your life under the direct headship of Christ, who wants to guide you through His Word and His Holy Spirit? Do you turn away from those who proclaim false teachings and only have a form of godliness? (2 Tim. 3:5). If you do not act accordingly, your eyes are not truly fixed on Christ, and He is not in reality the centre of your life and Christian experience. If you are carried away by a stream of man-made theological systems you will certainly become estranged from the Source of all truth and eternal life. You will then wither away spiritually and have no power to resist the attacks and false teachings of the enemy. The Lord will not in the last day assess your life before His judgement seat to determine whether you were in the first instance a faithful church member, but whether you were a faithful follower of Christ – that is all that really matters!

14. The Bridegroom who will come for us

Our connection with Jesus Christ as members of His bridal congregation contributes greatly towards giving more content to the spiritual and emotional bond between Him and us. It strengthens our longing to see Him, to be united with Him at the marriage of the Lamb, and to subsequently live in His presence forever. This relationship is a very strong motivation for sanctification, as we have to be prepared to appear before Him on that day without spot or blemish. He does not impose unreasonable demands on us and made it possible for all believers to achieve this high level of sanctification (Eph. 5:25-27; cf. 1 Thess. 5:23-24).

It is an absolutely inspiring thought that we can be so intimately associated with Him who is

the Creator of the world, the Centre of the universe, and the King in God's eternal kingdom, and that He wishes to share His glory with us. After the "bride" of Christ has been united with Him (2 Cor. 11:2), she will be called the "wife" of the Lamb who will stand at His side at the marriage feast (Rev. 19:7). We will be glorified with Him (Col. 3:4), be joint heirs in His kingdom (Rom. 8:17), and rule with Him (Rev. 20:6). After His second coming we will live in His presence for ever: "And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).

15. The light of the world

The Lord Jesus said: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12). If we are conscious of Him, we should continuously strive to walk in the light of His presence. However, most of the people do not draw near to Christ because they live in sin and love darkness rather than light (John 3:19). We, as children of the light, should have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather expose them (Eph. 5:11).

With a view to His ascension, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples: "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). During His physical absence it is our obligation to keep on walking in the light and, through our lives, to be witnesses for Him. To be constantly aware of Jesus Christ as the centre and main objective of our lives, demands that we faithfully follow Him and avoid crooked ways which deviate from the truth. We should have boldness to make our light shine everywhere so that the gospel of Christ's saving grace can reach a lost humanity.

16. The Bright and Morning Star

Christ Himself is our hope and assurance of a wonderful future with Him in heaven. He said: "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. ... I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star" (Rev. 22:12, 16). Christ is the origin and God of David but, in His capacity as man, also the descendant and son of David. He will come quietly like the morning star to take His disciples away, thereby allowing them to escape the judgements on earth, and to make them heirs of His heavenly kingdom.

The morning star appears during the last night watch when the night is at its coldest and darkest. The message of this star's appearance is that the night will soon end with the dawning of a bright new day (Rom. 13:12). The church dispensation is described as a dark period, hence the command that Christians must be the light of a dark world (Matt. 5:14-16; Luke 12:35). When this night is far spent and the new day is approaching, the Bright and Morning Star will suddenly appear above a dark horizon and will in an unseen, secret way of which the world is unaware, snatch away His bridal congregation (1 Thess. 4:16-17). In heaven the raptured Christians will be glorified and rewarded for their labours of faith.

After their departure, a relatively short but intensely dark time will prevail on earth, which will be the seven-year tribulation under the rule of the dragon (Satan), the beast (the Antichrist), and the false prophet (2 Thess. 2:3-12; Rev. 13:1-18). The withholder of the Antichrist – the true church as a temple of the Holy Spirit – will then have been taken away, and with it also the light of the world. After the seven years of tribulation, the Lord Jesus will come as the Sun of Righteousness and every eye shall see Him. The night of spiritual darkness will be over and Christ's thousand-year reign of peace will be established in all its glory.

Very few people see the morning star as they are then still asleep. If we are spiritually vigilant we will not only see Christ coming as the Morning Star but we will also immediately depart with Him to our heavenly home which He has prepared for us (John 14:2-3). We must ensure that we live in a Christ-oriented way and that we have a burning lamp. We are children of the light and should be watchful not to be influenced or dragged down by the darkness around us.

17. The Advocate

While the Lord Jesus is in heaven and intercedes for us at the Father's throne, He also pleads for us as our Advocate when Satan accuses us at God's throne. The devil is "the accuser of

our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night” (Rev. 12:10). When Satan accuses us the Lord Jesus comes to our defence by virtue of the fact that He has already paid the penalty for our sins. John says, “My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is a propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:1-2). Because of His pleading, the accusations of the devil are rejected and declared null and void.

However, to enable Christ to come to our rescue we should not persist with wilful sinning as we would, in such a state, not be living under the atonement. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, we should immediately confess and forsake these sins and thus be cleansed from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9; Prov. 28:13). Satan’s renewed claim to our life, or at least a part of it, will then be rejected.

It is precious to know that we can be daily conscious of the fact that the Lord Jesus intercedes in heaven for us and also acts as our Advocate at the Father’s throne. His throne of grace is always accessible to us (Heb. 10:19-22) and that enables us to maintain the right relationship with Him: “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Jesus Christ should be a living reality in our lives every day – not only to ensure forgiveness and continued cleansing by His blood, but also for the sake of spiritual growth and the obtaining of divine wisdom to make the right decisions in life. We also have the obligation to daily bring honour to His name for what He has done for us.

18. The highest authority in the universe

We should at all times be mindful of the fact that the Triune God is the supreme authority in the universe, even though this fact may not be evident if we look around us. “Why all the chaos and disorder?” many people would ask. God has sovereignly decided to give to angels as well as human beings a free will as He wants to ensure that we love Him in a voluntary and unforced manner. We are not robots that can be manipulated, but spiritual, intellectual, and emotional beings with an inner conviction of right and wrong, and therefore at all times free to take right or wrong decisions about our lives and relationships.

In heaven, Lucifer allowed pride and lust for power to take control of him, and he succeeded in instigating and deceiving a third of the angels in heaven to join him in a rebellion against the supremacy of God. They were cast out of heaven, and that was the beginning of the kingdom of darkness. Satan also succeeded in deceiving most people to live their lives outside the will of the loving, Triune God. The human and demonic factors, and particularly the interaction between these two forces, account for the evil condition of the world.

Since the Fall in the Garden of Eden till today, a war is waged between God’s kingdom of light and Satan’s kingdom of darkness. Those who are saved come over from the darkness of sin into the marvellous light of God’s kingdom. Since the vast majority of people have not made this transition, the world at large is still in a state of rebellion against God, and Christians often have a hard time to survive here. We must daily pray for the intervention and protection of God in order to remain standing in this dark and sinful world and to prevail against temptations and unrighteousness (Matt. 6:13; John 17:15; 2 Thess. 3:3; Jude 1:24).

However, soon there will be a time of great judgements when God will, like in the time of Noah and Lot, judge wicked humanity because they have despised His saving grace. Jesus Christ will return as King of kings and destroy the power base of the enemy on earth. Subsequently, the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9). Durable peace shall reign and all the nations will regularly send deputations to Jerusalem to consult and worship the Lord (Isa. 2:2-4; Jer. 3:17; Zech. 8:21-22; 14:16).

We must live in a spiritually hostile world as people who believe in the Almighty God, who honour the principles and rules of His kingdom, and do not give the devil any place in our lives. But the battle against evil powers will continue until the power base of the enemy has been destroyed by the coming King.

Jesus Christ is the King in God's kingdom. In Daniel 2, the world empires are likened to a large image which will be destroyed in the end-time by the coming of the Messiah. His kingdom is described as a stone that will crush the image, and then the stone will become a big mountain which will fill the whole earth (Dan. 2:31-35). Daniel describes this divine intervention as follows: "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44).

That is exactly what will happen during the second coming of Jesus Christ: "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15). On the day of the second coming of Jesus Christ He will first judge the hostile nations before establishing His kingdom on earth:

"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. ... And the armies in heaven ... followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. ... And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:11-16).

This is the King whom we expect from heaven, and we should remain true to Him while He tarries.

19. The Judge of all people

Since God is the supreme ruler of the universe He can hold all people, both believers and unbelievers, accountable for their actions and ways of life. The resurrected believers will appear before the judgement seat of Christ to receive rewards of grace for the works which they have done after their conversion. Peter says, "For the time *has come* for judgement to begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17).

This occasion will not be a condemnation but only the judging of the works of believers. All those who appear before this judgement seat will already have been saved by grace, without their own merit. Their life as disciples will be evaluated, with specific reference to the way in which they executed the commands of the Lord Jesus. Since all Christians are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to be witnesses for Christ in the entire world, their labours will be assessed and the divine fruit which they yielded will be rewarded (2 Cor. 5:10). "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12).

In the parable of the minas it is indicated that every disciple of the Lord Jesus has a divine ability to work (Luke 19:12-26). The gift of the mina alludes to the filling of the Holy Spirit, through which each of us is empowered to work for the Lord, regardless in which way. At the judgement seat of Christ it will be determined whether we were highly faithful, less faithful, or unfaithful, lazy disciples. That assessment will be the basis for more rewards, less rewards or no rewards (Luke 19:16-26).

The wicked should, with fear and trembling, take notice of this attribute of the Lord Jesus as they will be judged before the great white throne because they have rejected His offer of forgiveness and salvation (Rev. 20:11-15). Peter says, "And if *it* [the judgement] *begins* with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. 4:17-18).

God said that all people should repent. To do so would be in their own interest but also to the glory of God's Name. Should they neglect to repent, Jesus Christ who died for their sins will judge them (Acts 17:30-31).

The Lamb of God calls all sinners to repent (Luke 24:46-47) in order to deliver them from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10). But if they do not react to this offer, they are heading for the judgement which has been pronounced over all sinners: "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom.

6:23). During the coming tribulation period, long before unrepentant sinners will reach their final destination in the lake of fire, they will find themselves in the midst of severe natural disasters and, panic-stricken, they will call to the mountains and the rocks: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:16-17). They will know perfectly well that the judgements were ordered from heaven and that they are guilty before God.

Abide in Christ and walk on the straight, narrow way, for then you need not fear the coming judgements: "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28). To true believers there will be an escape from the coming judgements on the earth. The Lord Jesus said, "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). After the Christians have escaped the judgements they can look forward to rewards of grace. The Lord Jesus says: "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Rev. 22:12).

20. The only Prince of Peace

Every Christian should be predisposed towards peace, and for that reason we should also think of the Lord Jesus as the great Prince of Peace. In the first place, He brings peace to our hearts as He is the only One who can end the conflict between sinful people and a holy God by replacing it with a relationship built upon mutual love and trust. He can do that because He took the penalty for humanity's sin upon Himself, and also by giving all converts a new nature when they become reconciled to God. John says, "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not of ours only but also of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

Paul said that Jesus Christ is our peace, since He came to proclaim the gospel of peace by abolishing in His flesh the enmity that existed between us and God (Eph. 2:14-17). Through the Holy Spirit He poured out into our hearts a peace which surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:7). Because of this, we can also reach out to others as peacemakers in a world filled with hatred, hostility and strife.

But that does not mean that in a dangerous, hostile and evil world which is under the control of the Evil One, we should be pacifists who are opposed to all forms of discipline, punishment and armed confrontation. If a soft answer does not turn away the wrath, harder methods should be used. We should continue to be the salt of a corrupt world by taking a bold stand against sin and unrighteousness. Conflict with individuals and groups who are being used by the kingdom of darkness to promote unrighteousness is inevitable.

As far as this aspect of our existence is concerned, the Lord Jesus said: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). When a person turns to the Lord Jesus in repentance, there is a possibility that even his friends and family members may turn against him and become his enemies. He will then have to stand firm and contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude v.3). A Christian may also take up arms in a war to defend his country, as long as he conducts defensive warfare and not unjustifiable, offensive warfare.

The war which we are involved with on a virtual daily basis is a spiritual war against the kingdom of Satan (Eph. 6:10-12; 2 Cor. 10:3-4). But the time is coming when this war will be terminated, and that will happen during the second coming of Jesus Christ. In the battle of Armageddon He will not only destroy the evil people, but also the leaders of Satan's antichristian new world order, i.e. the Antichrist and the false prophet (Rev. 19:19-21). After that, the devil will be bound and his work of inciting and deceiving people will come to an end for one thousand years (Rev. 20:1-3).

During this time, Christ and His saints will rule over the earth in His thousand-year reign of peace (Rev. 20:4-6; Jer. 3:17). Physical peace will eventually also prevail on this sinful and

divided world, but not before the perpetrators of evil and the inciters of violence will have been removed from the scene. The Lord Jesus will then rule over the whole world from the throne of David in Jerusalem (Luke 1:32; Acts 15:16-17). "Of the increase of *His* government and peace *there will be* no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom" (Isa. 9:7).

Do you expect this reign of peace on earth, and do you proclaim the coming of the great Prince of Peace who does not only establish peace between us and God, but who will also cause all people to live together in peace?

21. The one who makes all things new

Any person who is wholeheartedly devoted to Jesus Christ, is himself proof of the renewing work which He is doing. All believers were called out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9) and can therefore testify that old things have passed away and that everything has become new. They expect even bigger and more wonderful things in future, and for that reason they forget those things which are behind and reach forward to those things which are ahead (Phil. 3:13).

All believers can look forward to a glorified body which will be in the likeness of Christ's own glorified body (Phil. 3:20-21). It is, therefore, with great expectation that we await His second coming: "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

In our glorified state when the Lord makes everything new, we will not even be able to remember the sins and misery of the past, so there will be nothing that can disturb our perfect bliss. The Lord says, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind" (Isa. 65:17). The Lord Himself will never again think about the sins of which He has forgiven us: "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Heb. 10:17).

Are you longing for the wonderful renewing in a perfect, new body that can never age, suffer pain, or have any unpleasant experience such as sorrow? John says, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:4-5).

There will be a new earth and new heavens, and an eternity of perfection which is awaiting all born-again disciples of Jesus Christ. We have all reason to be in hopeful anticipation of an illustrious future. We cannot even imagine all this glory with our limited intellect, as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

Unfortunately, many Christians do not have this expectation on the coming of Christ, who will make all things new. They prefer a kingdom here and now during the church dispensation, in which they can live in affluence and wealth, and over which they, themselves, can rule. They exalt themselves, and therefore Christ is not really the centre and major expectation of their life. Their understanding will only change for the better if they gain a more intimate knowledge of Christ, and also make an honest and objective study of biblical prophecy. They should also understand that "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6).

22. The central Person in biblical prophecies

A Christ-centred person will interpret biblical prophecies on the end-time in their direct relationship with Jesus Christ, and also teach them to others in this context. John says, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). Everything that will in future happen to individuals as well as nations will be the direct consequence of their relationship with the Lord Jesus. His enemies will be judged while His believing disciples will be fellow-heirs of His kingdom, in which they will receive rewards and also rule with Him.

The broad way and the narrow way will each reach its final destination. The majority of

unbelievers who have rejected the Lord Jesus can expect unimaginable, eternal judgements, while the minority of believers who have accepted His grace, will inherit unspeakable heavenly blessings which will continue forever.

There are important signs which indicate that the time of reward and judgement is at hand. Among these signs are the restoration of Israel and Jerusalem, escalating tension in the Middle East, the increased occurrence of serious natural disasters, spiritual deception, as well as an emerging new world order within which structures are created for the Antichrist's world government, global economy, and alliance of false world religions.

All these things should be considered in their direct relationship with Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, there are many Christian ministries that offer messages and articles on the end-time without referring to Jesus Christ in any detail. They do, for instance, only write on Israel, natural disasters, the Antichrist, false prophets, and other signs of the times without referring to the determining role of people's relationship, or lack of relationship, with Jesus Christ.

The world will in the final analysis be judged for rejecting the Lord Jesus. People will follow the Antichrist because they do not know the true Christ. Israel is heading for the time of trouble for Jacob because they still reject Jesus as Messiah. It will be of no avail to ignore this important fact and then to only blame the Arabs and other nations for their trouble. These are secondary factors caused by the fact that Israel do not enjoy the protection which faith in the Messiah would have afforded them.

Jews of the first century (and even up to the present time) made the same mistake by attributing the destruction of Jerusalem and the internal dispersion of Israel primarily to the hostility of the Roman Empire; but the Bible clearly says that these things happened because they have rejected the Messiah. The Lord Jesus said that Jerusalem would become desolate and ruined because its inhabitants have rejected their God-given Messiah-King. This state of instability would continue until Israel are eventually reconciled to Him as the Blessed of the Lord and the Holy One of Israel (Matt. 23:37-39). On another occasion He said that in Jerusalem not one stone would be left upon another that would not be thrown down, because the Jews were unaware of the favourable time when God visited them through the Messiah (Luke 19:41-44). They have caused their own downfall.

The same principle applies to this very day: the Lord is gathering Jews in Israel and Jerusalem to blow a fire of testing and purifying against them, in order to induce a remnant of the nation to realise their spiritual poverty and accept the Messiah to be saved (Ezek. 22:18-22; Zech. 12:2-3; 14:2; Jer. 30:7). They will have no lasting peace before the Messiah returns and the whole nation is reconciled to Him. Paul says, "And so all Israel will be saved. ... The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26), "... for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more. ... Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that the city [Jerusalem] shall be built for the LORD. ... It shall not be plucked up or thrown down any more for ever" (Jer. 31:34-40).

When the Jews will be a Messianic nation after their national reconciliation with the Messiah, they will be highly regarded everywhere in the world: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard *that God is with you*" (Zech. 8:23). In that time, Jerusalem will be established and made a praise in the earth (Isa. 62:6-7), and then the promise will be fulfilled which the angel Gabriel had made to Mary before the birth of Jesus: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). The throne of David is not in heaven, but in Jerusalem, and the Messiah will restore it when He returns (Acts 15:16-17).

The Lord Jesus is the centre of the Bible's prophetic scenario. He will return to take His bridal congregation away to her heavenly home (John 14:2-3). Subsequently, His wrath will be poured out upon the unsaved nations during the seven years of tribulation. Divine wrath will reach its peak during the second coming of Christ when the battle of Armageddon will occur in

the Middle East (Rev. 19:19-21; Zech. 14:12-13).

After that, the Lord Jesus will save the remnant of Israel and the nations (Zech. 12:10; 14:16; Matt. 24:29-30), reveal His kingdom on earth (Isa. 2:2-4), and be the supreme ruler of all the kingdoms on earth (Rev. 11:15). Peace will prevail everywhere on earth, and the nations will not even engage in military training (Isa. 2:4). The false religions will all be uprooted (Zech. 13:2), and all the nations will be Christian nations – they shall walk no more after the stubbornness of their evil heart (Jer. 3:17). That will also include the present Muslim countries, in which a remnant will be saved after the judgements of the great tribulation. Isaiah says that Egypt and Assyria (the present Syria and Iraq) will serve the Messiah just as wholeheartedly as Israel, and proclaim His praises to all (Isa. 19:22-25).

End-time prophecies revolve basically around the revelation of the heavenly kingdom of Jesus Christ. That also includes His sure and determined actions of punishment and judgement against the opposing kingdom of darkness when He comes, when "... the Lord Jesus [will be] revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

The workers of unrighteousness will know that Jesus Christ is pouring out His judgements upon an unrepentant world (Rev. 6:12-17), but the vast majority of them will harden their hearts and refuse to repent (Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9). Nevertheless, Christ still offers His grace to all to be saved. Those who repeatedly reject it will have to bear the dire consequences of their rebellious actions (Heb. 10:31).

23. The epicentre of the world

A Messianic Jew, Joel C. Rosenberg, wrote a book (2006) with the title, *Epicenter*, in which he dramatically describes the escalating tension in the Middle East as a prelude to the great war of Ezekiel 38 and 39. The word *epicentre* (Greek: *epi-kentros*) means *in or on a central point*. Joel Rosenberg uses this concept to indicate that Israel is the epicentre of the world, Jerusalem is the epicentre of Israel, and the Temple Mount which is part of Mount Zion, is the epicentre of Jerusalem. Considerable tension is building up in the area around the epicentre of the world, reflecting conflict between Israel and Christianity on the one hand, and the Muslims and their allies on the other hand. All these religions regard Jerusalem as holy ground:

To the Jews, Israel is a God-given land (Gen. 13:14-15), with Jerusalem as its 3 000-year old capital. God has chosen this city to put His name there for ever (1 Kings 9:3 and 11:36). King Solomon built the first temple on the Temple Mount. It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity, but over time fell into dilapidation. Herod built the second temple which was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. At present the Jews are preparing to build the third temple in the epicentre – that is the only place where it may be built (2 Chron. 3:1; Ezra 6:7).

Christians regard Jerusalem as a holy city and the cradle of their faith because Jesus suffered there for our sins, was crucified and rose from the dead. The Holy Spirit was poured out there, resulting in the formal beginning of the Christian church in Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus ascended to heaven from Jerusalem and will return to the same city at His second coming (Acts 1:8-12; Zech. 14:4-5).

To the Muslims Jerusalem is the third most holy place after Mecca and Medina. Two of their famous mosques are on the Temple Mount, i.e. the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa mosque. Their ultimate goal is the establishing of an Islamic world state in the Middle East with Jerusalem as its capital.

An important perspective which Joel Rosenberg does not discuss in his book is the promise on a fully revealed theocratic system of authority which will be established in the world's epicentre in Israel during the second coming of Jesus Christ. Jerusalem will be the seat of a

Messianic world government during the Millennium, with Christ reigning from the restored throne of David. The Temple Mount is indeed – and will be in future – the epicentre, or spiritual heart of Jerusalem, Israel, and the entire world, but not in an Old Testament context.

It is important to know that the dispensation of the law in the Old Testament was only a shadowy preparation for the coming of the Messiah: “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come ... can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. ... For *it is* impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ... Then I [the Messiah] said, Behold, I have come ... to do Your will, O God. ... By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*” (Heb. 10:1-4, 7, 10). All the sacrifices in the temple service typologically pointed to the perfect, once for all sacrifice of “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29; Rev. 5:9).

Any effort of defining the epicentre of Jerusalem short of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, amounts to idolatry. If we love anything or anybody above Him we are not worthy of Him. Orthodox Jews are inclined to see the Temple Mount only as the home of the temple, which they want to rebuild in order to resume the Old Testament’s sacrificial service. They refuse to acknowledge that animal sacrifices were fulfilled and abolished by the once for all sacrifice of the Lamb of God. The law and the temple service are so vitally important to them that they even wait for a Messiah who will help them restore it.

Who will be this “Messiah” who will grant them the right to build the Third Temple, with a view to keeping them away from the once for all sacrifice on the cross? He is the impostor, or false Messiah, who will desecrate the temple by declaring himself to be God in the Holy of holies and by also placing an image of himself in the temple (Dan. 9:27; 2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:15). This greatest idol in the entire history of Israel will be destroyed when the true Messiah comes. No one else but Immanuel is the salvation and epicentre of Israel and the world.

The second coming of Israel’s Messiah-King, Jesus Christ, who is also the Saviour and King of the world, will be the final breakthrough into the new dispensation of the Millennium, which will be His revealed kingdom on earth. He will establish His throne in Jerusalem, for which He was destined since the beginning of time (Luke 1:32). Jerusalem will then be the fulfilled epicentre of Israel and the world. The Messiah will be there and the city will be a praise in the whole earth (Isa. 62:6-7). All the nations will go up to it to honour and worship the Lord in “the city of the great King” (Isa. 2:2-4; Ps. 48:2).

After the creation of the new heaven and new earth, the new Jerusalem will descend from heaven upon the new earth to be the epicentre of the entire universe. It will be the eternal home of all the saints. God will dwell with us forever and His glory will shine forth to the ends of the earth. John describes the splendour of this city:

“I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb *is* its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it” (Rev. 21:22-24).

24. The Finisher of our faith

To those who have awakened spiritually and are living a life of faith, the Lord Jesus should be an unquestioned reality: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ... He who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:1, 6). We should live like people who are seeing the invisible (Heb. 11:27). How do we do that? While we are living in a spiritually dark world during the church dispensation (Gal. 1:4), we should heed biblical truths and never deny the Lord Jesus (Rev. 3:8). We should be inspired by the examples of other heroes of faith, diligently ensure that we do not again become ensnared by sin, and proceed with great determination to the final purpose of our unification with Christ:

“Therefore, since we also are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside

every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (Heb. 12:1-4).

Jesus Christ should be the central focus and final objective of our lives, and that demands that, in faith, our eyes should always be fixed on Him. During the days of our pilgrimage in an evil world we are living by faith – not by seeing. Through the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus is in and with us even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20) although bodily He is not here. But He should be such a clear, spiritual reality to us that our thoughts will be in heaven where He ever lives to intercede for us (Col. 3:1-2; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). We should look forward with great longing and expectation to the day when He will come to take us away, for then we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

When the Lord Jesus comes for His bridal congregation, He comes “to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe” (2 Thess. 1:10). We will look to Him and be radiant (cf. Ps. 34:5). He, who has been such a strong spiritual reality in our lives since our salvation, will then be a physical reality and we will behold His glory in amazement.

The suffering Messiah is also the conquering Messiah who is destined to rule the world. If we are diligent followers of Him, we will know that the way to ultimate glory starts at the cross. Only the full accomplishment of the purpose of His first coming can qualify us to be fellow-heirs of His everlasting heavenly kingdom at His second coming, and to rule with Him who is the King of kings.

The tragedy of a life outside of Christ

In the light of the unique and vital role of the Lord Jesus as Saviour, the call still goes out with great urgency to all sinners and nominal believers on earth: “Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). Christ is the centre of the universe, and we can only give sense and meaning to our lives and also enjoy true peace of mind if He is also the centre of our lives. The tragedy of a life outside of Him is evident from the following circumstances which are caused by estrangement from Him:

- Man cannot fulfil the purpose for which he was created, i.e. likeness to the image of God, if Christ does not change his depraved heart and give him a new life. Without this spiritual renewal, lost people are on an endless and unfulfilled quest for true happiness, solutions to their problems, and victory over the persistent, carnal lusts and desires which control them. Without the cross of Christ, the old nature with its wrong inclinations cannot be mortified. Neither can people’s distorted, arrogant, or poor self-image be corrected before they fully identify with Jesus Christ. Only He can fundamentally change our depraved nature, and further also make us complete as Christians, fit to serve Him under all circumstances.
- Without faith in the Lord Jesus as the Creator of all matter and life, people cannot properly comprehend the world and universe in which they live. Because they do not accept the biblical account of creation, they resort to the evolution theory which, after more than a century of speculation, could still not find any conclusive evidence of transitional species. All species are confined to their original form, and the one certainly did not develop from the other. Since evolutionists do not believe that God created them through Jesus Christ, they do not accept a moral obligation towards Him on how they should conduct their lives. Because of this agnosticism they forfeit His recreating work in their lives, and also the future wonders of the new creation that He promised to believers.
- Peoples and nations cause national tragedies when they fail to recognise the supremacy of God and refuse to accept Christian constitutions. They exalt fallen man and entrench many sins in their humanistic constitutions. They engage in a never-ending struggle against corruption because they rejected the only true basis for morality – that is Jesus Christ and the new life which He offers us. They cause the downfall of their own people:

“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). The former communist world (which is still kept alive in China) has completely collapsed morally and culturally, because of denying the Triune God and His institutions for social and family life. The Islamic world also rejects the Triune God, and is busy descending into the greatest confusion because of the religious justification of violence, as well as the feverish pursuit of earthly wealth. The Western world, having regarded itself as Christian during a considerable period of time, has turned its back upon Christ in recent years and entered into a postmodern or postchristian phase. That has given rise to the rejecting by most nations of Christian constitutions in favour of secular or multireligious constitutions. They are already paying the price for their unfaithfulness, by way of widespread moral collapse as well as uncontrolled corruption, serious economic problems, and a very costly arms race because of the increased military conflicts with which they are involved. Their intervention in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya, cannot be biblically justified; it is not Christian in nature and therefore delivers no positive results in promoting the Christian civilisation.

- The tragedy of a life outside of Christ is nowhere more evident than in the case of Israel – the people out of whom the Messiah was born (Rom. 9:5). He wanted to gather the inhabitants of Jerusalem (the core of the Jewish nation) around Himself to be the centre of their existence. For that to have happened, they would have had to accept Him as their Messiah-King but they refused (Matt. 23:37). Their refusal to submit to Him gave rise to the complete destruction of Jerusalem and the international dispersion of Israel for almost two thousand years (Luke 21:20-24). During this time a dead, legalistic form of godliness was the centre of their existence. Israel is responsible for their own spiritual blinding because of their refusal to accept the Messiah as the only light of the world (Rom. 11:25). That is what unbelief and the rejection of Christ can do to individuals as well as nations. We are warned not to do the same. Israel was cut off from the olive tree because of unbelief, and we were grafted in because of faith in the Messiah: “Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either” (Rom. 11:20-21). Israel only has a future if they accept the Messiah and make Him the absolute centre of their religious, cultural and political life. Only a remnant of Israelis will do that after the nation will have almost been wiped out during the tribulation period (Zech. 12:10; 13:8-9).
- It is also possible for individual Christians, and even entire congregations, to backslide and move away from their centre. Apostatising of this nature always has tragic consequences. The branch that does not abide in the vine (Jesus Christ) and stops drawing its life and inspiration from it, bears no fruit and eventually withers. If this process is not turned around, the branch can ultimately end up in the fire (John 15:4-6). The same principle also applies to congregations. Many of them are leaving their first love and are running the risk of walking in spiritual darkness (Rev. 2:4-5). We cannot talk about Jesus Christ in an open-hearted way if the Holy Spirit does not give us boldness to do so (1 Cor. 12:3). Do you often talk to Him and also about Him? Do you seriously regard His Word and also interpret it literally? Remember that He is the Word that became flesh (John 1:14), and one of His names is: “The Word of God” (Rev. 19:13). In Him all the promises of God are Yes and Amen (2 Cor. 1:20). That includes the promise on His secret coming as the Bridegroom (Matt. 25:6; 1 Thess. 4:16-17), and also His public coming at the end of the tribulation as King of kings when every eye shall see Him (Rev. 19:11-21).

How do you identify with Christ?

It is astonishing how many people are still evading the Lord Jesus. It is obvious that the great majority of people who are not in the right relationship with Him, are very uncomfortable about Him. It is possible that their own conscience accuses them because of their aloofness towards Him. That might be the reason why they mostly prefer to make use of impersonal terms when referring to the Lord Jesus or His heavenly Father.

It is customary that people only speak about an unidentified “God” or “Providence” who must

bless all people, without expressly indicating that He is the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When they speak about the Lord Jesus they prefer to be as formal and impersonal as possible by only using His official title “Christ” (the “Anointed”), or only His personal name “Jesus” from the time before the crucifixion, ascension and outpouring of the Holy Spirit, when it was not even common knowledge among His disciples that He is also Lord and God. Like many of the scribes in Jesus’ day, there are nominal believers of our time who proclaim that the so-called “historical Jesus” was only an ordinary, mortal being who was at most a prophet – not the Son of God. To them, He is only “Jesus” and nothing more.

After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the followers of Jesus fully realised that He was also Lord and God. The apostles often refer to Him as the “Lord Jesus”, thereby linking His personal name to His name as Lord or God. In this way all doubt is dispelled on who He really is.

A person as important as the Lord Jesus should be described and addressed in a very specific, clear and honourable way. He is the beginning and end of everything, the centre and maintainer of God’s creation, and the One who determines the destiny of individuals and nations after they, themselves, have made a free choice between good and evil. The history of humanity, as well as our prophetic future, cannot be understood or interpreted without Him. It is incomprehensible why so many people would evade the important issue of their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Those who do identify with Jesus Christ must make very sure that they do not only accept and confess Him as part of a Christian tradition, without an encounter with Him that leads to rebirth, as that would render them nominal believers who are still unsaved. Such people only have a form of godliness, they lead questionable lives and do not really do the will of the Lord. They, among whom also will be unsaved pastors and theologians, will in vain one day before the great white throne claim to be Christians: “Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, and driven out demons in Your name, and done many mighty works in Your name? And then I will say to them openly, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who act wickedly [by] disregarding My commandments” (Matt. 7:22-23; AB).

The personal relationship which many of the true disciples of the Lord Jesus maintain with Him, often also leaves much to be desired. Separation sometimes sets in when followers of Christ grow cold in their love for Him by allowing their spiritual devotion to dwindle (cf. Matt. 24:12). Some of them become worldly-minded and no longer serve the Lord wholeheartedly. If they continue like that, they will one day find it very hard to account for their lives before the judgement seat of Christ. Others backslide even further and may even completely lose their former love for the Lord Jesus. He calls such believers to repentance from their apostatised state, or else they are at risk to completely lose their lampstand, which refers to the Holy Spirit (Rev. 2:4-5).

Abide in the Lord Jesus, walk in the Spirit, bear fruit that are worthy of repentance, and prepare yourself through personal holiness to appear before the heavenly Bridegroom soon. Who can describe the glory of the ivory palace in which the marriage of the Lamb will be conducted? His bride will be clothed in heavenly splendour:

“You are fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured upon Your lips; therefore God has blessed You for ever. ... God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions. All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes *and* cassia, out of ivory palaces by which they have made You glad. Kings’ daughters *are* among Your honourable women; at Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir. ... The royal daughter *is* all glorious within *the palace*; her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colours They shall enter the King’s palace” (Ps. 45:2-15).

We should take courage and persevere because the end will be glorious. During this dispensation we are following the suffering Messiah who is rejected by the world, but if we are prepared to suffer with Him we will also be glorified together with Him (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12).

All of us need to make more of the Lord Jesus and put Him right in the centre of our thoughts and life, and also of our desires and future expectation. Godless people should know that their rejection of Him will lead to unimaginable judgements. Neither should Christians be overly complacent as many of them have, to their own detriment, marginalised Jesus Christ and His kingdom and replaced Him with other objectives. Such believers are heading for a situation in which they will have no crowns to lay down at the feet of the Lord Jesus in gratitude for what He has done for them (Rev. 4:10).

Those who will graciously be able to honour Jesus Christ in this way will fully realise that He is the Creator and Centre of the universe from whom all blessings flow. They will worship Him and say: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (Rev. 4:11).

The day of reward and reckoning is very near: "Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth" (Rev. 11:18). During this time, Jesus Christ will assume great authority and reign as King (Rev. 11:15-17). Each of us has the choice to accept Christ as Saviour and align ourselves with His plan for humanity, or to side with His adversaries upon whom His wrath will be poured out.

We have to make a clear decision on our present life as well as our final destiny, as there is no middle way between the narrow way and the broad way. Jesus Christ Himself is the narrow way to heaven – He is the door or narrow gate through which we have to enter in to walk on the right road (John 10:9). An honest confession and forsaking of all sin is needed if we wish to pass through the narrow gate: "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (Luke 13:24). The Lord Jesus does not compromise with sin and demands a clean break with our past. He is our Redemption (passing through the narrow gate) and also our Sanctification (dedicated walking of the narrow way).

On the broad way are all those who were deceived by a false Jesus (the Antichrist) and his father, Lucifer, to find other ways of spiritual fulfilment, and also another saviour. All these wrong ways are part of the broad way which leads to hell, and are speedily busy converging into a multireligious alliance of false world religions. Time is short to get onto the right way by yielding to the call of Christ to be saved (Matt. 11:28). The great purpose of His incarnation and substitutionary death on the cross was to be able to save lost humanity and put them on the only true path to heaven (Luke 19:10).

Whatever your reaction to Jesus Christ and His gospel of salvation, the fact remains that He is the absolute centre of the universe and you can do no better thing than to accept His claim of supremacy and also make Him the centre of your life. Eventually, all people will have to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, but unfortunately many of His adversaries will only bow the knee before Him when it is too late to be saved. It is infinitely better to submit to His authority now, and to also realise that this loving King has greatly humbled Himself to meet your needs of salvation.

Our commitment

In the light of these facts there is only one wise decision which any person on earth can take, and that is to make the Lord Jesus the centre and highest objective of his life. Consider the profound difference which a decision of this nature has made in the life of a hero of faith such as Paul: it changed him from a self-justifying scholar of the law, who persecuted Christ, to a faithful disciple of Jesus who said: "To me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). The only purpose of his life was to proclaim Christ to a lost world (Acts 20:24). He so completely devoted himself to this new life that he was even prepared to die for Christ because nothing was more important to him, not even his own life (Acts 21:13).

Also consider the big difference which a decision of this nature can make on the national level

in the life of a nation. Compare the time of Israel's national rejection of the Messiah during the past 2 000 years, and their resultant spiritual blindness, with prophecies on how this nation's life will be like during the coming Millennium after they will be reconciled to the Messiah. They will no longer be a controversial, struggling people who live with their backs against the wall, but the foremost witnesses of the Messiah, who will play a world reforming role (Isa. 27:6). Consider also the tremendous difference which the Messiah will make in confused and deceived Muslim countries such as Egypt and Syria, after they will be reconciled to Him (Isa. 19:22-25). Exactly the same principle applies to all other nations, and because of that, conditions during the Millennium will be drastically different from what they are now (Jer. 3:17; Zech. 8:20-23).

Why are most people waiting until they will see Jesus Christ coming on the clouds before accepting Him as Saviour and King, and surrendering their lives completely to Him? We are faced with the big challenge to be shining lights to the Messiah now, in the midst of much opposition from a spiritually blinded and deceived world. You should discover *now* that He is the only Saviour of the world (Acts 4:12) and that repentance and rebirth are only the beginning of a new life in Him – you should also daily follow and serve Him under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I can only be a good example and shepherd to other people if I faithfully follow the guidance of the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:2-4; 1 Cor. 11:1).

For wisdom on the complexity of life we can only go to Christ, who is the Wonderful Counsellor (Isa. 9:6). To be able to live a holy life, we can do nothing better than to imitate His example and follow in His footsteps, since He is the highest expression of a morally righteous life. Authority structures in society can also only properly function if the supremacy of Christ is recognised. When we abide in Christ in all spheres of our life, we will have confidence when He appears, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming (1 John 2:28).

5. Love as a Principle of Life

Christian living is based upon the nature of divine, *agape* love. Although various commands and guidelines emanate from the love of God, our life in Christ is not legalistic in the sense that laws or commands are imposed upon us from the outside. Through the rebirth we partake in the life of Christ, and need the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit to discipline our weak bodies and unstable emotions to live in accordance with the demands of our new nature.

All the New Testament commandments of God are derived from the nature of His divine love which has been revealed to us by the coming and atoning death of His Son, Jesus Christ. The commandments pertaining to Christian living are on a distinctly higher level than the Old Testament laws as they demand the honouring of the principles of divine love rather than the mere legalistic adherence to certain rules or patterns of behaviour. Unfortunately, not all Christians have truly made this transition to a new dispensation and therefore do not fully understand that we are not under law but under grace, and that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 6:14; 10:4). This ignorance has detrimental consequences in the lives of those believers who try to mingle law with grace.

As has already been pointed out under point 6 in chapter 4, there is a growing movement among undiscerning Christians to revert to the Old Testament law as the most significant embodiment of God’s commands to people of all time. Far from seeing the dispensation of the law as a preparatory phase leading up to the revelation of God’s Son as the Saviour of sinners, they keep on adhering to the law as the ultimate expression of God’s moral norms to people everywhere. They even go beyond the demands of the moral law and also observe ceremonial laws such as the OT Sabbath and Jewish feasts, despite that fact that these feasts have all been fulfilled in Christ and have therefore become obsolete in the present dispensation (Col. 2:16-17; Gal. 4:9-11).

All references to the commandments of Christ in the New Testament emanate from only one basic command, and that is to have a heart filled with divine love: “Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm” (1 Tim. 1:5-7). They do not understand that in the New Testament the emphasis is on a divine principle of life and not on a set of legal directives.

Since *agape* love is not of human origin but a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22), a heart filled with God’s love refers to a Spirit-filled life. This blessing can only be obtained by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Such a life may be described as “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). He is the personification of God’s love for us.

If we are rooted and grounded in the love of Christ we will fully know His divine love which passes knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:17-19). Such a person will never revert to the elementary principles and shadowy practices of the OT law because he who truly loves has fulfilled the law (Rom. 13:8-10). He is challenged to pursue the more lofty demands of God’s love such as following in the footsteps of Christ, being filled with the Holy Spirit, complete holiness, continuous prayer, evangelising the world, preaching the Word on every occasion, denying the corrupt practices of the depraved world, and engaging in spiritual warfare by putting on the full armour of God and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. The OT law does not even come close to commanding or fostering these Christian virtues.

We are not convicted of sin by the OT law but by the Holy Spirit who is our guide and tutor. The standard against which we are measured is not the law but the sinless life of Christ. The ways in which we give expression to His law of love determine the nature of our spiritual life. We really only observe the singular command of love, although it has many different applications. Jesus said to His disciples: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34). A changed

heart is needed to live up to this challenge, and that is exactly what the Holy Spirit wants to do for us (Rom. 5:5).

Although multiple obligations follow from this commandment, it is basically one and the same law of divine love which determines our attitudes and actions in different ways. We have to give expression to it in all the circumstances of our daily lives and also defend it against the wrong interpretations of false teachers. John says, "This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard it from the beginning, you should walk in it" (2 John v. 6). Zane Hodges (1983:907) says: "The movement from the plural 'commands' to the singular 'command' is natural for this author (cf. 1 John 3:22-23). The many specifics of God's will can be thought of as a single obligation."

Those people who wrongly impose OT laws on the NT gospel message often base their arguments on John's frequent references to the commandments of God which should be observed by all of us. They keep on reading and observing OT laws, but with an overlay of the NT gospel message. To them the Messiah did not come to fulfil and consummate the law, but to perpetuate it and provide for the forgiveness of infringements of the law. To them, believers still have to live in accordance with the Torah if they wish to be sanctified and please God.

However, this is a complete misrepresentation of John's message. In his Gospel as well as his Epistles John equates the commandments of Jesus Christ with the NT instructions given to us by Him and His apostles: "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His Word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you have heard from the beginning" (1 John 2:3-7).

Hodges (1983:889) says: "Verses 3-6 introduce the issue of obedience, though it was surely implicit also in 1:5-10. But John's insistence on obeying God's commands as a test of one's personal intimacy and knowledge of Him leads to a natural question: Which commands did John have in mind? The answer is offered here. John did not have in mind some new obligation which his readers had never heard. On the contrary the command foremost in his mind was an old one, which they have had since the beginning (cf. 2 John v.5). No doubt John thought here especially of the command to love one another (cf. 1 John 2:9-11). ... Whatever innovations the readers might be confronting because of the doctrines of the antichrists [false teachers], their real responsibility was to a commandment which they had heard from the very start of their Christian experience."

Obedience to God's Word (His commandments) results in a rich and full experience of God's love: "Whoever keeps His Word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him" (2:5). A Christian already knows God's saving love but this love is made complete in him if he fully knows God and observes His commandments. This is not a call for OT Torah observance but abiding in Christ and walking as He did (2:6; cf. the vine-branch relationship of John 15:1-8).

Christ is the epitome of OT law observance, but His life and works far exceed these standards and represent an abundance of grace and divine love that was unknown in OT times. We have an upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14) which not even the priests in the OT enjoyed. The law was their tutor to the Messiah (Gal. 3:24-25), but we already have the Messiah and share in the richness of His grace through His finished work on the cross, the indwelling of His Spirit, and all the promises of God in the NT which are Yes and Amen in Him (2 Cor. 1:20). We have received the promise of the Messiah, as well as a life of fullness in Him, which OT saints were still waiting for (Heb. 11:39).

The NT commandments given to us amount to nothing more and nothing less than complete obedience to Christ. It gives us confidence towards God in our prayer life, in building our relationship with Christ and daily walking in the Spirit: "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn

us, we have confidence towards God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 John 3:21-24).

This scripture contains a key statement on God’s NT commandment of love which can in no way be interpreted as referring to Torah observance: “And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another.” This is the foundation of a Christian life of loving and serving God through His Son, of loving our fellow-believers and reaching out to an unsaved world with the gospel of hope and love. Hodges (897-898) comments as follows on 1 John 3:21-24:

“As a result of active participation in the truth by real deeds of love, Christians can calm their disapproving hearts and achieve boldness in prayer, and their prayers will be answered because they, as believers, are consciously subject to God’s will (they obey His commands and do what pleases Him). This presumes, of course, that the requests themselves are made in subjection to God’s will (5:14-15). The writer had declared that a confident and effective prayer life is founded on obedience to God’s commands. Now those commands are summed up in a single command consisting of faith and love. The phrase ‘believe in the name of His Son’ contains the epistle’s first direct reference to faith. ... 1 John 3:23 furnishes a kind of climax to the paragraph beginning in verse 18. As a Christian actively engages in deeds of love and as he achieves boldness before God in prayer, he is doing what God commands: living a life of confidence in the name of Christ which is undergirded by love. Since faith and love, thus conceived, go together, this kind of life is seen as obedience to a single “command”. ... Two new themes appear in verse 24. The first theme is the epistle’s first reference to God, or Christ, abiding in each obedient believer. ... The second new idea is the epistle’s first of six explicit references to the Holy Spirit. The way a believer can verify that God lives in him is by the operation of God’s Spirit in his life. John then showed that God’s Spirit is the Spirit of both faith and love – the two aspects of the two-part command given in 3:23.”

The righteousness of Christ

There is no other way in which we are endued with the righteousness of Christ than to be born again and subsequently raising the level of our obedience to Him by completely surrendering ourselves to be filled with His Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16-17). Human efforts of law observance, as well as humanistic inspired efforts of fostering attitudes of kindness and morality, can never instill the divine nature of Christ in us. We can only trust the Saviour to regenerate us by His Holy Spirit. When we see true righteousness in a person we know that he is born of God: “If you know that He [Christ] is righteous, you know that everyone who practises righteousness is born of Him” (1 John 2:29).

Any effort of diminishing the immense significance and divine nature of the new life in Christ which NT believers receive through faith, is an attack on the sufficiency of the gospel of salvation. Those who try to supplement salvation by OT law observance ruin their faith: “You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4).

Modern Judaisers

Many of the modern Judaisers justify their cause by stating that they do not base their salvation upon the law as they fully trust in the atonement offered by the Messiah. They are nevertheless convinced that the law plays a crucial part in their life of dedication after salvation. They wrongly base their argument on statements such as the one in Matthew 5, which was made before the crucifixion of Christ when the dispensation of the law still prevailed. Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil” (Matt. 5:17). According to the Strong’s Concordance the word “fulfil” (*pleroo* in Greek) means: “to finish a period or task; to expire; to complete; to

accomplish.” The dispensation of the law has expired.

In the period after the crucifixion of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, OT law observance was completely ruled out as a practice among NT believers. The first synod of the early church took a clear stand on this issue by confirming that believers are not under the Law of Moses (Acts 15:1-29). We are not to build a relationship with the OT law, but with Jesus Christ who has completely fulfilled the law. All the moral principles of the OT law were fully observed by Christ, while a vast array of new values, virtues and commandments were added. These are all encapsulated in the commandment of divine love – to love God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves. If we strictly adhere to the principles of divine love we do not need laws to govern our behaviour.

Paul said to believers in Rome: “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). We are not guided to more holiness by the OT law but by the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-13; Gal. 5:16). He pours out the love of God in our hearts (Rom. 5:5) and teaches us to live in accordance with the NT commandment of love. He glorifies Christ and reminds us of all His promises and commandments (John 16:14-15).

A life of Christian liberty

We are not subjected to any form of bondage to the Mosaic Law but instead enjoy the wonderful liberty of following Christ under the tender but clear guidance of His Holy Spirit. We should dedicate ourselves to studying the Word and meticulously applying its noble principles to our lives. Fully surrender yourself to the control of the Holy Spirit and trust Him to give you enlightened eyes of the mind to fully comprehend the height, depth, width and length of the love of Christ. Set your mind on becoming conformed to Him so that people can see Christ in you. Take all decisions and determine all your priorities and values in the light of His divine nature as well as the urgency of His mission to an unsaved world.

Always guard against any inclination to develop an outward form of godliness which is devoid of the power of the Holy Spirit. People who conduct their lives in this way are often inclined to reduce New Testament teachings to a set of legalistic rules which are of no real use in becoming more Christ-like. Some of them are spiritually blind slaves of denominational creeds which may be nothing more than the commandments of men (cf. Mark 7:7). How can they claim to be guided by the Holy Spirit?

Paul entreats us to stand firm in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and to take care of not becoming entangled with a yoke of bondage to sin, to the Mosaic Law or to the doctrines of men (Gal. 5:1). Donald Campbell (1983:604-611) makes the following very relevant remarks on Galatians 5 and 6:

“Having defended both his authority as an apostle and the doctrine of justification by faith, Paul turned to defend the life of Christian freedom. Would the apostle’s teaching lead the Galatians into lawlessness or into godliness? The Christian life is described as a life apart from Law, a life apart from license, a life according to the Spirit, and a life of service.

“Galatians 5:1 summarises chapter 4, where the theme is bondage and freedom. It also serves to introduce chapter 5. Paul declared that Christ was the great Liberator who set believers free from bondage. The apostle then appealed to the Galatians to stand firm in that liberty, for having been delivered from slavery to heathenism, they were in danger of becoming entangled in slavery to the Mosaic Law. ... Paul emphasised that a godly life is not lived under the rules of the law but is a life led by the Spirit. ...

“Paul reminded the Galatians that in addition to a divine judgement of the sinful nature there is a divine enablement in the person of the Holy Spirit. He made the believer alive by regeneration, so each believer is exhorted to walk in the Spirit (‘If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit’ – 5:25). Step by step one’s Christian life should conform to the Spirit’s direction and enablement, lest believers become ‘conceited, provoking one another, envying one another’ (5:26). The latter traits would be true of a walk in the flesh and may point to divisions in the Galatian churches occasioned by the Judaising error.

“A believer is free from the Law of Moses and possesses liberty in the Spirit, but he must fulfil the law of Christ, and this can be done in the power of the Spirit. Such a life involves sacrificial service directed towards sinning Christians, burdened Christians, the pastor-teachers, and all people. ...

“Paul’s calling as an apostle and the message he preached had been challenged by the Judaisers. He asked for an end to such trouble, and he offered as a final proof to his critics the marks of the Lord Jesus on his body (6:17). These ‘marks’ meant signs of ownership such as were branded on slaves and cattle. Paul referred to the scars on his body, which were caused by persecution for Christ’s sake, because they demonstrated he was a slave of Christ and not just a people-pleaser.” (End of comments by Donald Campbell).

The true nature of divine love

The *agape* love of God is infinitely more than an outward set of rules or laws that prescribes certain forms of conduct and prohibits others. It is a divine principle of life which is established in the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit. Its holiness, its unselfishness, its truthfulness, its forgivingness, its compassion towards those in need, and its unwavering commitment to honouring God who is the source of true love, are its basic characteristics as a deep spiritual motivation to do the right things. It brings the divine light of God’s presence to those who walk in it, and enables us to take the right decisions under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in every circumstance of our lives.

The love of God is so pure that it cannot compromise with any form of thinking or acting that is contrary to it. It is completely at variance with the distorted human love that tolerates all sorts of evil for the sake of unity and good relations, and even compromises itself out of existence. But God is not a compromiser and that is the reason why He would chasten His wayward children that they may be partakers of His holiness (Heb. 12:5-10).

The *agape* love of God is the greatest asset any person can have in life: “And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have no love, I am nothing. ... Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (1 Cor. 13:2-8).

The high moral and spiritual values of divine love are evident from its characteristics. When the love of God has been poured out into your heart your dispositions and behaviour will be determined by its sublime principles. Rather than reminding you of the OT law, the Holy Spirit will lay the necessity on you to give expression to the demands of divine love. You will have an inner conviction of what is right and wrong. A Spirit-filled Christian, therefore, is not a licentious person who is inclined to disorderliness and lawlessness. Christ’s law of love is his norm and ideal, and he should find creative ways of expressing it. When His love urges you to share the gospel message with other people you must always, under the prevailing circumstances, find the best ways of doing it.

Always remember that the characteristics of Christ’s law of love, as well as the moral and spiritual obligations emanating from it, are stated in the Bible. Never proclaim your own ideas to people without quoting relevant Scripture. Our command is to preach the Word at every opportunity (2 Tim. 4:2). Only God’s Word is credible to convince people. There are too many personal opinions in circulation that reveal a poor knowledge of Scripture. The words which the Lord Jesus has spoken to us are Spirit and life (John 6:63). They are the purest statement of His love for us and for the world.

Conclusion

There clearly is a new definition of God’s law in the NT. In terms of “the law of love” (also referred to as “the law of Christ” – 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2) it is unwise to start sermons with the reading of the Law of Moses, or to write tracts on conversion from the perspective of the OT

law. The legalistic critics would argue: “But isn’t it true that God’s moral law (e.g. the denouncing of stealing, lying, murdering, the dishonouring of God, etc.) are unchangeable and equally apply to the Old as well as the New Testament periods, and also beyond?”

This equation is only partially true. In the NT, sinful acts are not defined as the breaching of Torah prohibitions but as the corrupt works of the flesh which are in opposition to the holy nature of Christ, and therefore also against the demands of His divine love. In addressing this problem, we should not merely realign ourselves with the law but rather restore our broken or strained relationship with Christ.

We must clearly understand that the depraved nature of all human beings calls for a spiritual rebirth by virtue of which we have the privilege of putting on the new nature of Christ, thereby becoming a new person. When sinning, we do not act according to the Spirit (the new man in Christ) but according to the flesh (the old, sinful man). The correcting of this problem does not call for a restored relationship with the OT law, but with Christ. Thinking and acting in terms of His law of love must again become our normal way of living.

Paul counsels sinning Christians as follows: “But now you must also 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. ... Above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another” (Col. 3:8-16; cf. Eph. 4:22-24).

If we teach Christ’s law of love in all its implications, the emphasising of OT laws becomes irrelevant, because “he who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8). When statements such as the one in Romans 13:8-10 are read to people they will realise that a new dispensation has dawned after the law, as well as a more effective way of becoming partakers of God’s holiness. That is the fundamental reason why the Holy Spirit ~~has~~ guided the early church in Acts 15 not to start with the law in preaching to the Gentiles but with faith in Jesus Christ.

Readers who are still not fully convinced that the Lord does not demand Old Testament law observance from us are advised to read the following articles and book on author’s website: Malan, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 (see list of references).

6. Commands and Promises

The Lord Jesus did not only come to the world to pay the ransom for the salvation of sinners – He also made provision for our needs after repentance. There are certain clear commands which He gave to all of His disciples, as well as promises which will enable us to execute them. There are five basic commands which all of us should obey. If we fail to comply with these instructions we will deprive other people of the opportunity of clearly and unambiguously taking notice of Jesus Christ and His gospel of salvation:

1. Be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)

The filling of the Holy Spirit is not an optional extra but an extremely important part of our spiritual endowment: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification. ... He who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 4:3, 8).

The very first command which the disciples received before they started evangelising the world was to be filled with the Holy Spirit. At that stage the Holy Spirit was already in their lives and they experienced the peace of the forgiveness of sins. The Sunday when the Lord Jesus rose from the dead He met with His disciples, breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). But they were not yet endued with the power of the Holy Spirit, which was imperative for spiritual growth and working for the Lord.

After the ascension of the Lord Jesus the disciples humbled themselves for ten days and waited for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This event made a tremendous difference in the lives of these young believers as they were then spiritually equipped for the service of the Lord. They had a clear promise to this effect: “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” (Acts 1:8).

This spiritual empowerment was extremely important to the disciples and made them as people of God complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). The fullness of the Holy Spirit enabled them to grow up to spiritual maturity, to have enlightened eyes of the mind to fully comprehend the Word of the Lord, to proclaim the gospel message to the world with boldness, and to prevail against all the attacks and temptations of the Evil One.

What happens if a Christian is not filled with the Holy Spirit? The uncrucified flesh will block the work of the Holy Spirit in his life: “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). Such people do not properly understand the Word of the Lord and do not have a strong commitment to Bible study. They are followers of other people because they are not guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth. The one says, “I am of Paul” and the other, “I am of Apollos”, because they are not dedicated followers of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Because the power of the Holy Spirit is lacking in their lives they cannot remain standing against the temptations of the world and its riches, they do not have the boldness to correctly proclaim the gospel, and their hearts are not filled with the love of Christ. Consequently, they are repeated victims of envy, strife and divisions, and they do not have a clear expectation of Christ’s second coming. Carnal believers are not an asset to the church of Christ.

The Holy Spirit guides us into the whole truth of God’s Word and also teaches us on the things to come (John 16:13). He is busy gathering a bride for the Lord Jesus on earth, and also sanctifies her to be able to appear before the heavenly Bridegroom without spot or blemish. The Spirit is the oil in the lamp of her testimony, and enables her to shine as a light in the midst of a dark world that does not know Christ. She must guard against the possibility of discovering, when it is too late, that she does not have enough of the oil of the Holy Spirit in her life, as her lamp will then be extinguished like those of the foolish virgins (cf. Matt. 25:8).

2. Maintain a Christian perspective (1 Cor. 11:26)

The Lord Jesus commanded us to have a Christian perspective on life. The point of departure of our new life is the cross of Christ, and its final objective our union with Him when He comes for us. The two important points of reference in our earthly life are, therefore, the first and second comings of Christ. In the light of these two events our life should find its deepest significance.

Whenever we celebrate communion this perspective is renewed: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). The cross of Christ is always the point of departure for our lives, and for that reason we keep on proclaiming Him as the crucified One, and daily identify with the cross of Jesus, by whom the world has been crucified to us and we to the world (Gal. 6:14).

We should also continuously look ahead and expect the second coming of the Lord Jesus. He went to prepare a place for us in heaven, and promised to return and receive us to Himself. With a view to our eternal life we should lay up treasures in heaven and also prepare to give account of our lives before the judgement seat of Christ. Many Christians do not have a clear expectation of the second coming, they predominantly live for the things of this world, and consequently render themselves failed disciples of Christ.

But if you entertain the correct Christian perspective and future expectation, you will live for the Lord Jesus and actively proclaim His coming. You will be in conflict with the depraved principles of the world and continuously contend against them while preparing for the Lord's kingdom.

Christians who do not have a clear expectation of the second coming, determine secular objectives and pursue them. Some of them completely miss the purpose to which Christ has called and equipped them because they do not have a clear consciousness of their final destination. They are building an earthly kingdom, they pursue wealth, and find their joy in the transient delights of this life. Because of this, very little of what they do have value for eternity. They are the ones who will appear before Christ empty-handed.

Those who are committed to maintain the correct biblical perspective are always mindful of their goal. They "run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith" (Heb. 12:1-2). They also realise the expediency of leading a holy life before God, while engaging in peaceful relations with all people in order to more effectively witness to them: "Pursue peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

3. Become involved with evangelism (Acts 1:8).

The Great Commission to the church of Christ is to evangelise the entire world (Acts 1:8). One of the most important reasons for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is to equip Christians for this great task. The Lord Jesus said to all His disciples: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21). We have all been commissioned to execute this important command. The only difference between a pastor and an ordinary church member of a congregation is that a pastor performs his task on a fulltime basis and the ordinary members on a part-time basis.

We should all bear fruit which is worthy of repentance, and the Lord will indeed ask us before His judgement seat what we had done with our talents, our time and our money. Did we promote the cause of His kingdom on earth or not? When we are busy doing this we will experience the presence of the Lord Jesus in a special way in our lives. Together with the Great Commission He also gave the assurance of His uninterrupted presence to His disciples: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

There are two matters in connection with evangelisation which are very important. The first one is that all of us should be involved with it, regardless of whether we proclaim the gospel ourselves or whether we render financial or other support services to the ministries of fellow believers. Our second responsibility is to follow up this work. The Lord Jesus said with

reference to the converts: “Go ... and make disciples ... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20).

Do you associate with young converts and assist them to get going with Bible study? They must become disciples themselves, who can also testify of the filling of the Holy Spirit, and of growing up in grace and knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18). Only then will they be able to make disciples of other people. It is a disturbing fact that most converts in big evangelisation rallies backslide due to a lack of proper follow-up actions.

4. Gain victory in the struggle (Eph. 6:10)

There were two important reasons why the disciples needed the power of the Holy Spirit. The first one was to have boldness to proclaim the gospel (Acts 1:8). The second reason is in connection with spiritual warfare: “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:10-11).

Christians who are not yet filled with the Holy Spirit do not have the power to successfully defend themselves and are consequently easy targets for temptation and deception. The command to the Ephesians to become strong in the Lord refers to a specific experience which they should seek, and for which they should earnestly pray (Eph. 5:18). It didn't happen by chance – they had to make a complete surrender so the Holy Spirit could fill and empower them to be conquerors in the struggle. Christians who have failed to take this step are leading lives of falling and rising again, and move from one defeat to another, rather than from victory to victory.

We have a clear command in this regard, which we would do well to heed: “Be strong in the Lord Put on the whole armour of God Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ... taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ... Take the ... sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:10-18).

Peter also emphasises the tremendous struggle which we are involved with: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith” (1 Pet. 5:8-9). The resistance that we offer must always be solely in the power of the Holy Spirit: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Paul highlights the fact that our spiritual defence is linked to the use of specific weapons: “For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4-5). We should become skilled in the use of these weapons, and that demands a sustained process of spiritual growth in our lives. The Bible mentions the following weapons:

First, the weapon of faith. My relationship of faith in the Lord should be so strong and unshakeable that I will fully trust Him, under all circumstances, to make me more than a conqueror in Jesus Christ. I must know and believe that He who is in me is greater and stronger than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). Without a strong faith in the Conqueror I will have a doubting disposition and consequently become defenceless in the struggle against sin and unrighteousness. John says: “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5).

Secondly, there is the weapon of the blood of the Lamb. He has shed His blood and laid down His life on the cross, “that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7). During the great tribulation, when the devil will come down to earth with great wrath and fury (Rev. 12:12),

Christians of that time will all physically die as martyrs but spiritually they will overcome the Antichrist “by the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 12:11).

Thirdly, there is the word of our testimony, which plays an extremely important part in the life of a Christian. We have a standing order to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus in a spiritually dark and apostate world. In so doing, many victories have been achieved for the cross while expanding the kingdom of heaven to many parts of the world. Without Christian witnessing and preaching millions of people would have remained in spiritual darkness, their senses still being blinded by the devil, who is the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4).

Fourthly, there is prayer as a mighty spiritual weapon which the Lord has given us: “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (Jas. 5:16). Prayer is sustained by faith: “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” (Jas. 1:6-7). To be able to pray prevailing prayers we should “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Heb. 10:22). Our lives should be pure and holy. We must also search the Bible to determine the will of God, and pray accordingly: “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 John 5:14).

Fifthly, there is the Bible which is an important part of the Christian’s spiritual armour. Paul calls it “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17). It is a living and dynamic word which enters deep into our hearts to do its work of conviction there: “For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). It discerns all thoughts as good or evil and works through our conscience to show us what is right and wrong. When we proclaim the Word, the gospel of Jesus Christ is “the power of God to salvation for anyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). To all unsaved persons who put their trust in the Word it has the ability to save them from the power of Satan (Jas. 1:21).

Are you busy achieving victories with the Lord Jesus for His kingdom, or do you forfeit the power of the Holy Spirit in your life? If that is the case, your life will be characterised by defeat, despondency and failed efforts. Come to the Lord Jesus and trust Him for full spiritual restoration.

5. Persevere (Heb. 3:14)

We are clearly admonished to persevere on the way of the Lord. He does not want us to underestimate the assault against Christianity as such believers may become discouraged, backslide, and ultimately accept defeat. It is with the purpose of prevailing over evil that He gave us the power of the Holy Spirit, as well as spiritual armour. We should consider the lives of great heroes of faith, but more specifically the life of Jesus Himself, and single-mindedly persevere to the end:

“Therefore, since we also are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (Heb. 12:1-4).

There are unfortunately many people who think that we need not persevere on the way of the Lord as, according to John 10:28, we cannot be snatched from His hand. But they forget that every promise of the Lord is conditional. The promise of eternal security in John 10:28 is tied to the conditions mentioned in the previous verse: “My sheep hear my voice, ... and they follow Me.” These verbs are written in the continuous present tense, which means that the disciples of the Lord Jesus must keep on obeying and following Him. Only they are assured of an unbroken relationship with the Lord.

What happens to those who do not persevere in following and serving the Lord? This question is answered in John 15: “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. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:4-6). We should, therefore, commit ourselves to abiding in Christ. He will not forsake us, but we can forsake Him and, like the lost son, leave the Father’s house to walk in the wicked ways of the world.

In the Book of Revelation, John refers to those who persevere on the way of the Lord as overcomers. Those who will inherit everything are not merely described as believers but they who persevered to the end. Jesus says: “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). Only the overcomers will rule with Him.

To believers in another congregation Christ says: “Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Rev. 3:11). Believers who backslide can lose the rewards which they could have received because of their earlier commitment to the cause of the Lord. John says in his second Epistle, verse 8: “Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.”

Paul said to the apostate Hebrews, of whom many had again indulged in sinful lives: “For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (Heb. 3:12-14). The apostle said to the Colossians that they would be presented to Christ blameless and irreproachable if they continued in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and were not moved away from the hope of the gospel (Col. 1:22-23).

Conclusion

We can, with great boldness, walk on the narrow way and do the work which the Lord Jesus has commanded us to do, because every command is accompanied by promises of provision. We have the command to evangelise the world, but together with that also the promise that the Holy Spirit will empower us, guide us into all truth, remind us of the words of Christ, teach us on the things to come, and give us enlightened eyes of the mind to understand the mysteries of the gospel.

We are also commanded to resist and overcome the attacks of the Evil One, fleshly lusts, temptations, as well as spiritual deception by the enemy and his collaborators. To this end we have the promises of spiritual empowerment, the use of the unsurpassable weapons of the light, and also the firm assurance that the Lord will never leave or forsake us if we abide in Him and persevere on the right way. If we seek His kingdom and His righteousness, He will supply all our needs according to the riches of His grace.

The hope on the coming of Christ is “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, which enters the inner part *behind* the veil” (Heb. 6:19). Let us proceed steadfastly on the new and living way which starts at the cross and leads uncompromisingly to the second coming of Christ – then we will be co-workers and heirs of a kingdom of righteousness which will endure forever.

7. Our Life in Christ

During His physical absence on earth, the Lord Jesus is living in His disciples to be seen by the world. Our command to be like Christ demands that we should, as far as possible, become conformed to Him in all our conduct, and also closely stay in touch with Him. This means that we should not only put our trust in Christ for salvation but also endeavour to reflect His image in all areas of our life. We must fully accept this challenge, to the point where we can say with Paul: "To me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain" (Phil. 1:21).

Our life in Jesus Christ is totally different from the natural life with which we are born. What does the new life embrace?

1. A spiritual birth

All people enter the world as sinners, without God and without hope. There is no one righteous as we are all under the control of the depraved nature which we inherited from Adam. Our life with the Lord Jesus begins with a spiritual birth, or rebirth, when, from God's perspective, we are passing from death into life (John 3:3; 5:24). When that happens we become believers who were saved by grace and endued with the holy nature of Christ. The new life is a gift from God which is offered to us through His Son: "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12). To us, to live is Christ.

2. A daily walk with Christ

After being made alive spiritually we are called upon to grow up in the new life in Christ and to daily walk with Him as His disciples. We must not, like Demas, be lured back to lead a life outside of Christ in the world. There are unfortunately those who try to do just that, and they are described as carnal believers who cannot say with conviction: "To me, to live *is* Christ." They do not really know what is most important to them – the Lord Jesus or the world.

There are two conditions with which we have to comply if we wish to qualitatively enjoy the benefits of a life in Christ. The first one is that we must die to ourselves (Luke 9:23) and the second one that we must be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

We should so completely identify with Christ's death on the Cross that we will die with Him to the world and to sin. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). A cross was planted in between him and the world; he forgot those things which were behind and reached forward to those things which were ahead.

Dying to oneself is a condition for the life in Christ and not only a once-off experience during rebirth – it is a continuous process. We should be united together with the Lord Jesus in the likeness of His death if we wish to practically experience His resurrection life on a daily basis (Rom. 6:5; Phil. 3:10).

In reaction to a complete surrender of this nature the Lord Jesus will fill us with His Holy Spirit. When that happens, the new life in Christ will fully manifest because the Holy Spirit instils in us the daily consciousness of Christ's presence (John 16:14). When the Lord Jesus is increasingly formed in us (Gal. 4:19) we will grow up to the stature of a perfect man or woman in Christ, "that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:13-15). We will become spiritually matured with good discernment and strong convictions.

3. Together with Christ in conflict with the depraved world

If we are serious about following the Lord Jesus with the confession that He is our whole life, we should be mindful of the fact that throughout the church dispensation we are following the suffering Christ who is still rejected by the great majority of people. We should expect opposition and be willing to bear His reproach when actively serving Him. Jesus said to His disciples: "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world ... therefore the world hates you A servant is not greater than his master. If they

persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 15:19-20; 16:33).

We can expect to meet with antagonism and even open resistance when proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are not kings and queens now, but soldiers for the cross. We must be prepared to put on the full armour of God that we may remain standing against the wiles of the devil. Are you prepared to fulfil this role by being the salt of a corrupt earth and the light of a dark world? Paul says it has been granted to us on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him but to also suffer for His sake (Phil. 1:29).

The truth of the gospel is controversial in the world because most people prefer the way of sin and self-glorification. But we are committed to completely putting off the old life and making no compromise with deceit and unrighteousness. Sin can never be justified as that would grieve the Holy Spirit and blur our spiritual vision.

Because of this situation, it is often a lonely journey which awaits us if we have resolved to be faithful followers of the Lord Jesus. We should not only be crucified to the world and to sin but also turn away from among those who only have a form of godliness by denying the power of the gospel and only paying lip service to the Lord (2 Tim. 3:1-5). We cannot associate with deceptive teachings and half-truths as that would undermine us spiritually and induce us to depart from the truth.

The life in Christ is a life of contending against unbelief, sin, compromising and a delusive form of godliness. The backsliders and apostates are worldly-minded as they only pursue material rewards and blessings. Because of their secular approach they are not inclined to heaven and do not proclaim the soon coming of Christ for His church. There are many false teachings against which we have to express ourselves when we proclaim Christ.

Paul said to Timothy: "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:12). In his second letter to Timothy he said: "Endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5). If we suffer for the truth with Christ we will one day be glorified together with Him (Rom. 8:17). We are engaged in a battle and should not expect kingdom conditions to prevail during this dispensation.

4. Persevere with Christ

With a view to all the hostility against the truth, the Lord expects from us a spirit of single-mindedness in order to persevere on the right way despite any negative consequences. The Lord Jesus set the perfect example to us in this regard, as He persevered without hesitation on the hard way of suffering and rejection to accomplish His mission on earth.

Some Christians dishonour the name of the Lord by allowing trials and hardships to bog them down spiritually. They backslide and allow bitter feelings to take root in their hearts. They blame other people, even the Lord, for their negative experiences. We must resist this spirit of apostasy and persevere on the Lord's way of holiness to the end. Paul encouraged believers in Colosse to persevere and "continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast" and not be "moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard" (cf. Col. 1:23). We should commit ourselves to Christ without wavering, not looking back after putting our hand to the plough. Do not be discouraged by opposition or criticism.

All Christians should often investigate the nature of their relationship of faith with the Lord and immediately put right the things that have gone wrong. Do not allow circumstances to prevail by which we leave the Lord no choice but to assess us in a similar way as He did the congregation in Ephesus: "I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (Rev. 2:4). If we say that to us to live is Christ, we should take care that we do not grow cold in our love towards Him. Make a fresh surrender to be fully restored, so the fire of the Holy Spirit will not be weakened or become extinct in our lives. We must pursue complete sanctification to be blameless on the day when Christ comes again.

5. Unbroken communication with Christ in prayer

The quality of our daily walk with Christ is reflected by the nature of our prayer life. We should acknowledge the Lord in all our ways and develop the practice to always pray in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18). We must often, in prayer, draw near to the throne of grace on the new and living way which Christ has opened for us. All our requests must be made known to Him with thanksgiving, while accepting His promises in faith. He will guide us through His Word and also through circumstances, give us power to prevail in every crisis, and give in our hearts a peace which surpasses all understanding.

If we privately, in our room, pray for the Lord's help He will keep us standing outside in the world where the demands for Christian living are high; He will carry us and open to us doors of opportunity. People will be able to recognise us as followers of the Lord Jesus.

6. Active in the service of the Lord Jesus

The main purpose for which we are on earth is to be witnesses for Christ and thereby to bear fruit which is worthy of repentance. In order to do so we need the power of the Holy Spirit, as promised to us by Christ (Luke 24:49). Since the endowment with power from on high is available to all of us we will not have any excuse if it is wanting in our lives. We should avoid living carnal and powerless lives which yield no fruit for the kingdom of the Lord.

All of us should in one or other way be involved with executing the Great Commission. If we cannot do it through our congregation then we should find suitable interdenominational structures, or do it on a small scale from our homes. We must never remain idle as there is still much work to be done (cf. Matt. 20:3). Time is running out in the dispensation of grace and we should use every opportunity for evangelisation and the spiritual building up of believers. We will have to give account of our lives to the Lord.

When we are actively working for the Lord we can expect to experience more resistance from the enemy of our souls as he will, in various ways, try to oppose and discourage us. But the power of the Holy Spirit is also available to us to remain standing against his attacks. We should learn to use the spiritual weapons at our disposal, namely faith, the blood of the Lamb, prayer, the word of our testimony, and the Bible as the sword of the Spirit. If we prevail we will be able to proceed with our spiritual work and be used of the Lord. But if we spiritually stumble and succumb to evil powers we cannot be instruments in the hand of the Lord as the Holy Spirit only uses clean vessels.

Our personal problems should first be solved before we can offer solutions to the problems of other people (cf. Luke 6:42). If others can see Christ in us they will also be drawn to Him.

7. With Christ in His kingdom

To a Christian, the best is always ahead and for this reason we forget the things which are behind and reach forward to those things which are ahead. The Lord is busy preparing a kingdom and an eternal home for His servants. Are we aware of this? Like Abraham, we should have a vision of a city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). That is the new Jerusalem in heaven, which will be a place of unspeakable joy (1 Cor. 2:9).

Paul said: "I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). To die would therefore be gain to him. We are working for the kingdom of Christ which is still hidden on earth, but we are looking forward to the day when He will return in power and majesty to reveal His kingdom. We are members of His heavenly kingdom, and for that reason we are sojourners and pilgrims in the present evil world (1 Pet. 2:11). Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

To a Christian, death is not bad news since it is only a transition from our imperfect earthly life to a perfect life in heaven. We should have the desire to be with Christ, where it is infinitely better than here on earth. Parting with this life is only traumatic to loved ones who remain behind, but they can take courage from the promise of our future reunion:

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel,

and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:16-18). That is our glorious destination. The end of our earthly pilgrimage is only the transition to a new beginning in heaven where we will have glorified and incorruptible bodies. Glory be to our Saviour!

After the final judgement the heavenly Jerusalem will come down to earth and God will live among the people. All the miseries of our present earthly life will be past.

Honest soul-searching

It is important that, from time to time, we ask ourselves critical questions on how we are progressing on the path which we are walking with the Lord Jesus. Not all of us assess ourselves with equal sincerity. Paul said to fellow believers: “Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves” (2 Cor. 13:5). This examination was firstly aimed at determining whether they were true believers or only nominal believers who were content with an outward form of godliness; and, secondly, if they indeed were true believers, to probe into the quality of their life of faith. Many people are inclined to avoid such direct, personal questions and, to their own detriment, keep on pretending that everything is in order with their dedication to the Lord, while it may not be the case.

When you approach the end of your life and are confronted with the reality of eternity, as well as the obligation to give account of your earthly life before the judgement seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-12), you often have thoughts which divest you of all pretence and insincere forms of self-assessment. You critically consider yourself – even to the point of questioning your integrity and worthiness as a believer. You are inclined to look into the precarious and less successful side of your life, and consider all your failures and wrong decisions. You have bitter remorse over the imperfections in your character, your career, your Christian ministry, your marriage, the handling of your finances, and also in your relations with other people. You are less inclined to criticise others but rather see yourself as the guilty party in many of the things that have gone wrong.

There are certain dangers that should be avoided when a Christian engages in introspection. The first one concerns our past sins. If we are truly born again with the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that we are children of God whose sins have been forgiven (Rom. 8:16), we must discipline ourselves not to think about these sins again and not to mention them in conversations. The enemy of our souls will always try to remind us of these sins in order to establish a renewed guilt consciousness in our mind. If we yield to his influence he will eventually instil thoughts in our heart which will question our salvation. The Lord said about His wayward people who will ultimately return to Him with repentant hearts: “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jer. 31:34). He also says the same to us, and therefore we should refrain from living in the past and reflecting on sins which have already been forgiven.

The second danger against which Christians should guard is to compare themselves with other Christians, and then regarding themselves as failures because they cannot do what others are doing. Our only example is the Lord Jesus, and we should follow in His footsteps (1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6). He guides us through His Holy Spirit and uses each one of us in a different manner. Not all of us are preachers, singers, writers, or good business people who can support the work of the Lord financially. But all of us can be good intercessors, witnesses for Christ, and committed believers who persevere on the way of the Lord without deviating from it. From those believers who may have received more talents, more will be required (Luke 12:48).

It is precisely with regard to Christian service that we should search ourselves. All Christians are saved by grace without works, but that is only the beginning of our new life in Christ. Subsequently, we are all commissioned to be witnesses for Christ in a dark world. This big task cannot be fulfilled in our own strength, and that is the reason why the Lord Jesus

commanded all of us to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

If we can testify of a surrender of this nature we should ensure that it is subsequently often renewed. The disciples who were filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, later called on the Lord for help during times of great distress, made a new surrender, and were again filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31; 13:52). If we fail to regularly renew this surrender we may drift away from the Lord, lose the power of the Holy Spirit, and again start relying on the flesh (our natural human abilities). There were even entire congregations that were guilty of such backsliding. Paul confronted the church in Galatia because of this problem: “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3).

There are various works which the Holy Spirit does in our lives and also various reasons why we should be filled with the Spirit:

- He firstly convicts us of our sin and lost state, as well as the righteousness of Christ who lay down His life as a ransom for the sins of the whole world (John 16:8).
- If we react positively to this conviction and approach Christ’s throne of grace with the confession of our sins, the Holy Spirit will regenerate us. This event is also described as a spiritual quickening, or baptism, whereby we are baptised into the body of Christ (John 3:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:13). This experience is not to be confused with water baptism, which cannot save a person as water baptism only testifies about the spiritual baptism, or regeneration.
- If we subsequently make a full surrender the Holy Spirit will fill us to become effective witnesses of Christ who are able to bear fruit which is worthy of repentance (Matt. 3:8).
- The Holy Spirit instils divine characteristics in us by which the Lord Jesus is formed in us, so the world can see that we are disciples of Jesus (Gal. 5:22; John 13:34). The most important of these characteristics is divine love (*agape*) which He pours out in our hearts (Rom. 5:5).
- The Holy Spirit gives us power to prevail over the lust of the flesh: “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). He equips us with spiritual armour through which we can prevail over the temptations and attacks of the devil (Eph. 6:10-11).
- The Holy Spirit is our Teacher who will guide us into all truth, and also tell us about things to come (John 16:13). He gives us enlightened eyes of the mind to be able to understand the Bible (Eph. 1:18), and reminds us of all things that Jesus had taught His disciples (John 14:26; 16:14).
- He is also our Comforter who comforts us during the physical absence of the Lord Jesus, while we have to find our way through a hostile world (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:17). He testifies about Jesus, and also about our reunion with Him after He has prepared a place in heaven for us (John 14:1-3).
- The Spirit also endues us with spiritual gifts. These gifts may also be described as a special anointing (1 John 2:20, 27). In this way the Spirit teaches and equips us spiritually to serve the Lord with our particular talents. A natural ability without the anointing of the Holy Spirit is of no spiritual value. Even if we have certain natural abilities, whether they are hereditary or developed through training, we still need the anointing of the Holy Spirit to sanctify these talents in the service of the Lord.

Why do so many believers lose direction and backslide? Because they do not rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Why are their priorities and decisions so often wrong? Because their fallen nature (the flesh) has not been surrendered to be crucified (cf. Luke 9:23; Gal. 6:14). This is the most important reason for their failures, “[f]or 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).

The Lord Jesus wants us to be faithful witnesses who can, with boldness, give account of our lives – also of the way in which we used our talents. It is in this regard that so many of us have

not performed well in the Lord's kingdom, with possibly only a very small contribution of works that have value for eternity.

It is advantageous to be aware of any deficiencies at an early stage, as that will allow us to ensure that we are not only saved but also filled with the Holy Spirit, which will enable us to be faithful servants of the Lord Jesus. All of us would one day like to hear the following words from the Lord Jesus: "Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matt. 25:21). To receive such a positive assessment we need to have undivided and pure hearts that are filled with the Holy Spirit. This will allow us to say with boldness and under all circumstances: "To me, to live *is* Christ."

8. The King Who Comes Again

The Lord Jesus is Head of a kingdom which is presently not of this world, but which will be revealed here at His second coming. During His long absence we are His representatives and ambassadors in a hostile world which is ruled by evil powers (Eph. 6:12). The King has given us the spiritual endowment and motivation to be able to successfully perform this task under difficult circumstances. This commission gave rise to the dispensation of world evangelism.

The disciples who recognised Jesus as Messiah and King during His first coming were not aware of the dispensation of world evangelism that would follow after His rejection by Israel. During the proclaiming of the gospel among all nations, the kingdom of heaven would function in a hidden form on earth while Israel would be dispersed among the Gentiles and the throne of David still in a state of disrepair. The disciples expected Jesus to restore the throne of David during His first coming and to rule in the re-established kingdom of Israel:

“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel? And He said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But 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” (Acts 1:6-8; cf. Luke 24:46-49).

The Lord Jesus did not deny that He would restore the kingdom of Israel but indicated that the time for that had not yet come. First, a world that is spiritually dark due to unbelief and the practising of pagan religions should be evangelised. The proclaiming of the saving grace of Jesus as Messiah among all nations is in accordance with a prophecy in Isaiah: “And now the LORD says, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him (for I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength), indeed He says, It is too small a thing that You should be my Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:5-6). In Acts 13:46-48, Paul refers to the same prophecy as the biblical mandate for his mission to the Gentiles.

After proclaiming the New Testament message that Jesus is the only Messiah and Saviour of Israel and the nations, thereby building up His spiritual kingdom on earth, He will return as King to publicly reveal His kingdom. Jerusalem will be the seat of His government and His rule will extend to the ends of the earth. But that cannot happen before the world has been evangelised, the enemies of His kingdom destroyed, Satan bound in a bottomless pit, and the King of kings has returned to the world.

Jesus also refuted the expectation of His immediate enthronement in Israel's kingdom in a parable by explaining that He would only return as King after a time of absence, during which His servants were to act as the stewards of His kingdom on earth:

“Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, Do business till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, We will not have this *man* to reign over us. And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Master, your mina has earned ten minas. And he said to him, Well *done*, good servant, because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities. ... But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay *them* before me” (Luke 19:11-17, 27).

The sequence of events is very clear: first, the man of royal descent appoints his servants to promote his interests during his absence. He also supplies to them the means to do this work.

Thereafter, he leaves for a far country where he assumes his royal status as king. When he returns, his first appointment is with his servants, who are appointed as co-rulers in his kingdom. After they have received their rewards he turns to his enemies to judge and destroy them.

Historic application

This parable, in the first place, alluded to Herod Archelaus who succeeded his father, Herod the Great, as king of Judea and ruled in Jerusalem for ten years after his father's death. After the birth of Jesus, Herod the Great ordered the killing of all the male children in Bethlehem and surrounding districts, from two years old and under (Matt. 2:16). He did this because the wise men from the East spoke about the birth of a King in Israel (Matt. 2:1-2), and Herod regarded it as a threat to his dynasty. He died shortly after the massacre of the children and his empire was divided among three of his sons – Herod Archelaus became king of Judea, Herod Antipas was appointed tetrarch in Galilee, and Herod Philip tetrarch of Iturea.

Caesar Augustus ratified the will of Herod the Great in Rome. He did so in spite of the pleas of a Jewish deputation that was sent to Rome to object against the appointment of Herod Archelaus as king because of his severe cruelty: "His citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, We will not have this *man* to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). After his return, Archelaus had all the men killed who rebelled against him by opposing his appointment as king of Judea.

Matthew 2:19-23 confirms the fact that Archelaus was a greatly feared man. That is the reason why Joseph and Mary did not settle in Judea with the Child, Jesus, after returning from Egypt, but went to Galilee: "When [Joseph] heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene" (Matt. 2:22-23).

In this parable, based upon well-known events in their recent history, the Lord Jesus explained to the Jews that Herod's son, Archelaus, was not the true king of the Jews who was prophetically destined to rule over Jerusalem in the kingdom of God. The true King, who was also rejected by the Jews, is Jesus Himself. He is the Nobleman who was born in humble circumstances in Bethlehem and laid down in a manger: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose going forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting" (Mic. 5:2).

Jesus Christ did not rule as king during His first coming. In the parable, He indicated that He was the Nobleman who would go to a far country to receive His kingship. Archelaus travelled to Italy where his status was reduced from king to governor; his reign was also short-lived. The journey of Jesus to a far country alluded to His ascension. In heaven, after having finished His atoning work as the suffering Servant who died for the sins of lost humanity, Jesus was exalted to the position of King and given a name which is above every name (Phil. 2:8-11).

When He returns from that far country (heaven) He will appear on earth as King in power and majesty. His coming will be announced by the sounding of a trumpet: "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15). The Messiah will set foot on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem and restore the throne of David: "I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins and I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things" (Acts 15:16-17).

Period of His absence

During the physical absence of the Lord Jesus between His first coming as a humble Servant and His second coming as reigning King, His disciples are commissioned to expand His hidden kingdom to the ends of the earth. He gave them the power of the Holy Spirit for the execution of this great task (Acts 1:8).

In the parable, Christ says that before His Ascension He would call His disciples and give each of them a mina together with the instruction, "Do business till I come." The mina does not refer to salvation but to a divine capacity for work. The servants already belonged to their Master – He bought them with His blood and now appointed them to active service in His kingdom. He would give them the power of the Holy Spirit without which they would not be able to do the very demanding work assigned to them.

All disciples should realise that they have a definite mission as witnesses of Christ. He said, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21; cf. Matt. 28:19-20). No disciple can fulfil his or her calling in a hostile world without being filled with the Holy Spirit.

When the King returns, His first appointment will be with His servants. They will appear before His Judgement Seat to give account of the work that has been assigned to them (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12). Rewards will be given to the faithful ones. Jesus said, "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work" (Rev. 22:12). Part of the reward to faithful disciples will be their appointment as co-rulers with Christ in His kingdom on earth.

After the King has rewarded His disciples He will judge those who rejected Him as King: "Bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay *them* before me" (Luke 19:27). According to Revelation 19:21, the enemies of Christ will be killed with the sword that proceeds from His mouth. He will but utter a word which will cause their sudden destruction.

The faithful disciples of Christ can look forward to His sudden coming for them, when they will be caught up to heaven to appear before His judgement seat (1 Thess. 4:16-17; 2 Cor. 5:10). However, a different future awaits the Jewish people who still, as a nation, reject Jesus as King and Messiah. They will only accept the Messiah at the end of the tribulation period as they will have to pass through this time of severe distress to be tested and purified. Jeremiah says, "It is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it" (Jer. 30:7). The same fate awaits the unsaved Gentiles.

During His first coming, the Messiah warned Israel against the false messiah and his collaborators who will offer themselves to Israel in the end-time: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ [Messiah] and will deceive many. ... For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, Look, he is in the desert! do not go out; or Look, he is in the inner rooms! do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:4-5, 24-27).

"Every eye will see Him, and they *also* who pierced Him" (Rev. 1:7). Those who pierced Christ are the Jewish people who surrendered Him to be crucified. "In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east" (Zech. 14:4). The entire remnant of Israel will then be saved and gathered under the banner of the Messiah (Zech. 12:10). A remnant of the nations will also be saved at that time (Matt. 24:30).

However, before the Messiah comes, Israel and the unsaved nations will make the mistake of accepting a messiah that comes in another way and offers to them a deceptive peace. The Lord Jesus warned them against this serious misjudgement: "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (John 5:43). The Antichrist will unite Israel and all other nations in a false world religion under his personal leadership. Those who refuse to join in and also worship the global messiah will

be harshly persecuted and killed (Rev. 13:15).

The false messiah will establish a kingdom on earth in an effort to prevent the revelation of God's kingdom under the true Messiah. The Antichrist will wield great powers during his reign of seven years. John says, "He was given authority over every tribe, tongue and nation" (Rev. 13:7). He will enjoy a world-wide following of people who will also worship him: "And all the world marvelled and followed the beast. ... [A]nd they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Rev. 13:3-4).

It is well known in the kingdom of Satan that Jesus Christ will return to earth, accompanied by His saints and a heavenly army, and that He will set foot on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4-5; Rev. 19:19). That will be the major reason for a world-wide mobilisation of military forces, so that the Antichrist can try to defend his satanic world empire against the coming of Christ and the establishment of His heavenly kingdom (Rev. 16:13-14, 16).

John says, "And 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. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh. Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished" (Rev. 19:19–20:3). Only then will the kingdom of God be visibly revealed on earth.

At present, the world is confronted by a choice to either accept the new world order and emerging kingdom of the Antichrist or to resist the philosophy of this deceiver while expecting the coming of the true King from heaven, who will destroy the Antichrist and establish His own kingdom on earth. All of us have to make a definite choice between these two kingdoms. They are completely incompatible and the one can only be advanced at the expense of the opposing kingdom. Christians can never accept the Antichrist's multireligious approach since no compromise is possible between Christianity and any of the other religions. The Lord Jesus is the only way to heaven. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Christ's kingdom is in no way associated with the present wicked world, and is committed to calling people to come over from darkness into the marvellous light of Christ (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). In this way, the Lord Jesus builds a kingdom which will soon be revealed in glory when He comes to destroy His enemies who reject His kingdom, and also to reward His servants who worked for the expansion of His kingdom.

Long ago, Isaiah also prophesied about the coming of this great King: "The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong *hand*, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward *is* with Him" (Isa. 40:5, 10).

All people on earth are divided into only two groups – the servants of the Lord who belong to Him, work for Him and will rule with Him, and the enemies of the Lord who are working against His kingdom and will be destroyed by Him. The enemies of God are usurping more and more power in their efforts to take over and rule the world. They will enjoy a short time of false peace under the rule of the universal messiah of all faiths, but will soon share his eternal fate with him. Their doom is described as follows in the Book of Revelation:

"If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their

torment ascends for ever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name” (Rev. 14:9-11).

All Christians should resist the emerging new world order because it is hostile towards Christianity. We should be prepared to suffer now if we wish to be glorified with Christ in His kingdom: “If we endure, we shall also reign with *Him*. If we deny *Him*, He also will deny us” (2 Tim. 2:12). Do not follow the example of the wicked servant who put away his mina and did not use it. Take a stand for the Lord Jesus and offer yourself to work for Him. Are you a faithful servant?

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed *is* that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, My master is delaying his coming, and begins to beat *his* fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him* and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites” (Matt. 24:45-51).

“Therefore... let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares *us* and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith” (Heb. 12:1-2). Do not lose your focus on the things of His everlasting kingdom. Persevere to the end on the way of the Lord!

9. Marriage of the Lamb

We should also be clearly conscious of Christ's quality as heavenly Bridegroom if we wish to be well acquainted with Him. All true Christians have a direct interest in this remarkable aspect of our relationship with Him, since we are the members of His bridal church. It is incumbent on us to know our Saviour in this capacity, to take notice of all His promises on the future marriage, and to know exactly what is expected of us to be worthy and prepared for this royal occasion.

The relationship between the Lord Jesus and His bridal congregation is strikingly described in terms of Jewish marriage customs in biblical times. In this chapter, the main emphasis is on the responsibilities that rested upon the bride during the long absence of the bridegroom. Her sanctified life and daily dedication to the bridegroom were of crucial importance for the day when he would come to collect her, and therefore also for the final consummation of their marriage.

After a young man had met a girl whom he liked, and she had agreed to enter into a relationship with him that would lead to marriage, preparations were initiated for a betrothal ceremony. The young man first had to obtain his father's consent for the marriage. Shortly afterwards, the young man and his father paid a visit to the house of the prospective bride.

The father of the house, who was aware of the intended visit, peeked through a little window to identify the visitors. He then looked at his daughter to confirm if her mind was settled. If she did not want to proceed with the marriage negotiations she simply said "no". The door would then not be opened and the visitors would return home, their mission not accomplished.

If she said "yes", for all practical purposes the commitment to work through the betrothal process and arrive at a full marriage contract was made at that moment. The young man and his father had carried with them a betrothal cup, unfermented wine, and the intended bride-price in a pouch. At different stages during the negotiating process they would drink wine from the cup to ceremoniously confirm and celebrate certain aspects of their agreement.

The first was *the cup of acceptance*. Members of both families, including children who had reached the age of accountability, concluded a blood covenant (also referred to as a servant covenant) through which they committed themselves to life-long service to one another. This cup was passed around shortly after the arrival of the visitors and the closing of the door.

The second was *the cup of betrothal and friendship*. The meal was served, and the eating was accompanied by haggling over the details of the marriage contract. Should no agreement be reached on this matter the negotiations could fail, thereby preventing the conclusion of a marriage contract. If all conditions were mutually accepted the contract was concluded during the meal and the second cup consumed. This cup was drunk by the prospective bride and groom and their two fathers only. By this act the two families covenanted to become eternal friends with their joint son and daughter, and also with one another.

The third was *the cup of inheritance*. At the end of the meal only the bride and bridegroom drank from this cup, indicating full acceptance of the marriage contract and sealing their relationship as future husband and wife. This was the moment when the girl became the bride. Young men of the family would then go out into the streets to blow their rams' horn trumpets (*shofars*), announcing to the entire community that the marriage contract (betrothal) has been concluded. From this moment onwards the couple belonged to one another and also owned a shared inheritance. If either one should die the survivor would inherit the deceased partner's possessions, even though the marriage was not yet finally consummated.

The marriage contract between them was binding and could only be broken under extreme conditions, e.g. by adultery. Joseph and Mary were such a betrothed couple when he planned to divorce her because of supposed unfaithfulness to him: "When ... Mary had been promised in marriage to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be pregnant [through the power of] the Holy Spirit. And her [promised] husband Joseph, being a just *and* upright man

and not willing to expose her publicly *and* shame *and* disgrace her, decided to ... divorce her quietly and secretly” (Matt. 1:18-19; AB).

When the marriage contract had been accepted and the couple drank from the third cup, the bridegroom gave gifts to his bride and, before he left, also promised that he would come back and take her to be with him after he had prepared a place for her at his father’s house. The bride, in the mean time, occupied herself with preparations for her married life. In her room she had an oil lamp which was to be kept burning during the evenings. Care had to be taken that she would always have enough oil in order that her lamp would not go out when the bridegroom comes for her. When going out into the streets during daytime she was always veiled to indicate that she was purchased at a price and already belonged to a man.

During this time the bridegroom prepared a suitable place at his father’s house, which often only consisted of one room. It was known as the bridal room (Heb. *huppah*). His father first had to express his satisfaction with the room before the bridegroom was allowed to fetch his bride. If anyone asked the bridegroom when he would bring his bride he always replied that only his father knew on which day that would happen.

The bridegroom came for his bride in the evening or at night – usually between six o’clock and midnight. When he and his friends got close to the bride’s house they would give a loud shout and blow on the *shofar* to let the bride and her maids know to come out immediately to meet the groom alongside the road. Those who did not have enough oil at that critical moment were late for the appointment and remained behind.

It sometimes happened that the bride lost interest in the consummation of the marriage, possibly because of unfaithfulness towards her groom, and consequently discontinued her preparations to meet him. In that case she would not have a burning lamp. When, on arrival, the groom noticed that her room was dark, he returned to his home, leaving her in the darkness. The bride-price then had to be returned to him. If it was revealed that the bride had committed adultery during his absence she was guilty under penalty of death.

If, however, everything proceeded according to plan the bride would have a burning lamp in her room when the groom arrived at night time. She would then meet him outside the house and immediately depart with him to his father’s house. There she would spend seven days alone with him in the bridal room where they were united as husband and wife. During these seven days the guests who were invited to the marriage feast started arriving. At the end of the seven days the groom introduced his wife unveiled to the guests, and the celebrations began.

During the feast the married couple alone partook of the fourth cup of unfermented wine, which was known as *the cup of thanksgiving*. That was the big moment of joy and thanksgiving for the consummation of their marriage after the long time of seclusion, waiting and preparing. The resplendent marriage feast dawned for them because they had remained true to one another.

Spiritual application

The Lord Jesus often made His offer of salvation to lost humanity in terms of traditional Jewish marriage customs. He is the heavenly Bridegroom who came from His Father’s house in heaven to seek and to save those who were lost (Luke 19:10). His purpose is not only to save lost sinners and appoint them in His service, but also to sanctify them completely and make them members of His bridal congregation so that they can share His heavenly kingdom with Him. All Christians received this esteemed call of God in Christ Jesus but not all of them comply with the conditions to actually attain it. This is something to which we should commit and for which we must exert ourselves (Phil. 3:14).

Like the prospective Jewish groom who knocked on the door of the girl whom he wished to marry, the Lord Jesus, in a spiritual sense, knocks on the door of our hearts and confronts us with the choice of either opening the door for Him or not. He says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with

him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20). Every person has a free will. People can decide for themselves whether they will invite the Lord Jesus into their lives. John says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

The message of the gospel is that the Lord has born the full penalty for our sins on the cross – that is the divine bride-price by which He redeems every sinner who comes to Him for salvation and wishes to belong to Him (1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 5:9). When we take up the communion cup as *the cup of acceptance*, we celebrate the fact that we were bought at a price, and now belong to the Lord Jesus to serve Him all the days of our lives. He is our Saviour and we are His disciples or servants.

Unfortunately, many Christians only abide by this initial surrender and do not pursue a deeper and more intimate relationship with Christ in order to receive all His promises. They are missing the fact that He does not only wish to be our Salvation but also our Sanctification and our Bridegroom.

Before the final confirmation of the Jewish marriage contract the two parties supped together while further discussing the conditions for this agreement and new relationship. When they had reached agreement on everything they took up *the cup of betrothal and friendship*.

God’s Word is spiritual food to us – the bread of life – and we are sitting at a table which was prepared for us. When we immerse ourselves in intensive Bible study we get to know the Lord Jesus better and our delight is in His Word. We fully realise what He has done for us and what the conditions of our relationship with Him comprise. These commands are joyfully observed. Under these circumstances the disciple of Christ draws nearer to Him and also becomes His friend and bride who understands and observes His Word. That places him in a relationship on a higher level than that between a servant and his master. Christ said, “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15). He reveals to us incredible things on the deeper aspects of our friendship and betrothed relationship with Him. Do you reconfirm your friendship and intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus during Holy Communion?

We should not be content with the first step of this commitment since the Lord Jesus has a higher calling for His disciples as members of His bridal congregation. This call demands that we live absolutely separated from the world while daily preparing ourselves on the appearing of the heavenly Bridegroom and our gathering together to Him. An important aspect of these preparations is to have a burning lamp with enough oil. This symbolism refers to the Spirit-filled life. The wick of the lamp should regularly be cleaned to ensure that it burns brightly. We should take active steps to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit so we can perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:18; 1 John 1:7). If we surrendered ourselves to the Bridegroom and are truly committed to Him we will, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, do works that are equated with a wedding garment. These works are described as “the righteous acts of the saints” (Rev. 19:8).

When this level of dedication has been achieved *the cup of inheritance* is taken up. Such believers are deeply conscious of the fact that they are pilgrims and sojourners in the present evil world, and they long for the kingdom of Christ where they will rule with Him as kings. Paul said that we are “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Rom. 8:17; cf. 2 Tim. 2:12). When introducing Holy Communion Jesus said, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood” (1 Cor. 11:25). The advantages of a covenant (or testament) are only in force after the death of the testator: “For where there *is* a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. ... Therefore not even the first *covenant* was dedicated without blood” (Heb. 9:16-18). When Jesus shed His blood and laid down His life on the cross He made us joint heirs of His everlasting heavenly kingdom in which we will be His “wife” and rule with Him as kings.

Did you ever get to the point where the Lord Jesus and the precious promises in His Word

mean everything to you, and where your values changed in such a way that you would rather lay up treasures in heaven than on earth? Then your light will shine brightly in a dark world, and you will refrain from any compromise with the evil world. You will not pursue earthly wealth (the prosperity gospel) and a man-made kingdom on earth before the coming of Christ. Our fervent hope is for a kingdom that will only be revealed when the King comes!

The Jewish bridegroom ensured that his bride knew exactly why he left, and also that he would return to take her away to their new home. We received a similar promise. Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

We should be mindful of the fact that our future lies with Jesus Christ and that, as members of His bridal congregation, we are living in the unseen reality of His heavenly kingdom which is yet a mystery on earth because the King has not yet come. We do not fit into the lifestyle of the present world and reject its evil practices, and for that reason the world hates us (John 15:18-20). We look forward to a wonderful future when we will be united with the heavenly Bridegroom.

It is vitally important to know the full implications of being children of our heavenly Father, and of being empowered by His Spirit to be able to remain true to Him under all circumstances while we are waiting on the sudden coming of the Bridegroom. We should not only honour and serve the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and Sanctification, but also as our Bridegroom and King with whom we will rule if we are found worthy. Do you know the Messiah in all these capacities, or are you still only a servant of Him? We should be conscious of our noble call in Him and actively pursue it.

Believers who do not have a clear understanding of their position in Christ suffer from a poor spiritual perspective, half-hearted dedication to their Saviour, a vague and doubtful expectation on His second coming, and consequently a frail motivation to remain true to Him to the end. They often neglect to walk in the Spirit, thus being easily deceived into apostatising by the flesh and the lust of the world. That may lead to serious unfaithfulness towards the heavenly Bridegroom. Paul said, "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" (2 Cor. 11:2-3).

Although the marriage contract which we have concluded with Christ is meant to be permanent and binding, and has also been sealed by the Spirit of God, it nevertheless imposes responsibilities on both parties and can therefore be nullified by the non-observance or breaching of its conditions. The Bridegroom can never become unfaithful and will always honour His promises (2 Tim. 2:13), but we can become unfaithful and even lose what we have obtained by faith in Him (cf. John 15:4-6; Col. 1:23; Heb. 3:12-14). The Jewish groom rejected his former bride if, by his return, it was evident that she had become unfaithful to him and no longer had a burning lamp.

Christians can also leave their first love and lapse into spiritual darkness. The Lord Jesus says, "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 was the container into which the oil that was symbolic of the Holy Spirit was poured. It enabled a person to let the light of the Messiah shine in a dark world. However, should such a person lose his love for the Messiah by being overcome by love for worldly things, he was in danger of losing his lampstand with its light, which refers to the Holy Spirit. Such believers will not be taken along at the rapture to walk in the ivory palace in heaven and to be united with the Lamb as His bride (cf. Ps. 45:9-10, 15-17). By their actions, backsliders have denied the Messiah before other people, and for that reason He will deny them in heaven before His Father (Matt. 10:32-33).

Members of the bridal congregation who will be worthy by having enough oil in their lamps and have as a result of their vigilance will not have lapsed into a state of spiritual darkness, will be caught up in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, when the Bridegroom comes (Matt. 25:6-10; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). Thereafter, for a period of seven days, which prophetically refers to a week of seven years (Lev. 25:8), the bride will be in the presence of the heavenly Bridegroom and consequently not be seen by any person on earth. That will be the seven years of tribulation on earth during the reign of the Antichrist.

After these seven years the heavenly Bridegroom will come, accompanied by His “wife” with whom He has been united, and establish His kingdom on earth. After He has destroyed the Antichrist and his powers (Rev. 19:19-21), saved a remnant of Israel and the nations (Zech. 12:10; Matt. 24:29-30), and restored the fallen tabernacle of David (Acts 15:16-17), the marriage feast of the Lamb will be celebrated on earth. Members of Israel and the nations who as a remnant were saved during the coming of Christ will be the guests at this illustrious feast: “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 represents the righteous acts of the saints” (Rev. 19:7-8).

It is on this occasion when *the cup of thanksgiving* will be consumed by the bride and Bridegroom. The great moment of the bride’s glorification dawns shortly after she is revealed on earth with Christ: “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3:4). The Lord Jesus referred to the Communion that He would again celebrate with His disciples after having been on earth for the first time to provide for our salvation and the conclusion of a marriage covenant with Him: “Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:25).

The kingdom of Christ will only be established on earth after His second coming. That is the reason why the wedding-feast of the Lamb will be celebrated here and the cup of thanksgiving will also be taken up here after we have finally inherited the kingdom. This Communion and thanksgiving ceremony cannot occur directly after the rapture, since the rapture will be followed by the bride’s seclusion of seven years with the Bridegroom.

Deep symbolism is hidden in the coming Communion. During Communion unfermented wine is consumed, which alludes to the blood of Christ that was shed for the remission of our sins. The Lord Jesus is the true vine and we are the branches. We draw our sap, or life-energy, from the vine in that the Holy Spirit pours out the love of Christ into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). We are then expected to bear fruit which is also described as the fruit of the Spirit. Only after the harvest of all the fruit has been gathered into the kingdom of the Bridegroom, a Communion can be celebrated which will represent the spiritual fruit of the true vine. A strict evaluation of this fruit will be done at the judgement seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:9-16; 2 Cor. 5:10). Only the righteous acts of the saints will pass the test as gold, silver, and precious stones that will be accepted and rewarded. The carnal works of Christians who did not appropriate their full inheritance in Christ, and who did not spiritually mature after partaking of the first cup, will be rejected as vain human efforts (1 Cor. 3:15).

The important question to all Christians is this: “Did you only proceed as far as the first purging of your sins and fell short of appropriating your full inheritance in the Messiah?” If so, you are moving backwards in your spiritual life and not forwards. Peter says that Christians should add to their faith godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. “For if these things are yours and abound, *you will be* neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is short-sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Pet. 1:6-9).

Are you among these blind and short-sighted Christians who have not yet surrendered themselves for sanctification, and committed themselves to the service of the Lord Jesus? In that poor state of dedication you will spiritually be almost barren. If so, it will be revealed one day that you have spent almost all your time, energy and money in building with perishable things (wood, hay and straw) upon the foundation of your repentance.

To the faithful disciples who served the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord will say: “Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matt. 25:23).

10. Excellence of the Messiah

It is fitting to praise the Messiah, to exalt His Name, to proclaim the excellence of His redemptive work, to show gratitude for His loving care, and to look forward to the glory which He has promised to His faithful disciples in the future revelation of His kingdom. Jesus Christ should be exalted above our chief joy. Our thoughts on Him should invigorate a strong sense of hope in our hearts to cause us, even during the darkest hours of our earthly pilgrimage, to look up to the Bright Morning Star who announces the coming of a bright new day.

Our faith in this wonderful Saviour should be strengthened by systematic Bible study, as that will spur us on towards creative thinking and greater dedication to Him. We should gain new insights into His infinite love and grace, and also on the righteousness of His judgements: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33). The mysteries of the gospel were revealed in the Bible to enable us to comprehend fully with all the saints what is the height and depth of Christ's love which passes knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:17-19).

An unshakable faith in Jesus Christ will make you soar with eagle's wings to the sanctuaries of the Lord where you can experience His presence in your spirit. You will have the desire, like David, to inquire of the Lord, to know Him in all your ways, and to ever walk in His presence. In this way alone you will be able to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18), and to always rejoice in the Lord.

The virtues of our Saviour are like the many facets of a diamond which reflect the radiance of His glory. When we wish to know Him better we should always begin with a study on His deity and eternal self-existence, then we will never be followers of those who try to relegate Him to nothing more than a mere mortal human being. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all the biblical prophets had the correct perspective on the Messiah.

The Messiah who is also God

Micah looked beyond Israel's long history to the timeless past when he said of the Messiah who would be born in Bethlehem: "[His] goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting" (Mic. 5:2). The scribes should certainly have known about this prophecy and should have expected that a very special, divine person would be born in Bethlehem. This was not such a strange idea, as Isaiah had already said: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace *there will be* no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever" (Isa. 9:6-7). The title "Everlasting Father" is not here used in a begetting sense but in a creatorial sense, referring to the Messiah as the Father (i.e. Originator) of creation, the One who made everything (John 1:10; cf. Reeves, 2011a&b). When He is revealed as King, there will be no end to His kingdom of righteousness since it will continue forever on the new earth and in the New Jerusalem.

Why were the religious leaders so surprised when the Lord Jesus said that He and the Father are one, and also told them that He already existed long before Abraham, the founding father of Israel, was born? (John 8:58). In Zechariah 13:7, before His incarnation, He was described by the LORD of hosts, as "My Shepherd, ... the Man *who is* My companion" (MKJV), thereby further proving that He was an eternal divine Person before He became a human being at His incarnation and will remain so for ever. Duane Lindsey (1985:1569) says: "In Zechariah 13:7 the Lord is claiming identity of nature or unity of essence with His Shepherd, thus strongly affirming the Messiah's deity."

But the Jewish scribes could not comprehend the fact of the Messiah's deity and eternal self-existence, so He asked them: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He? They said to Him, *The son* of David. He said to them, How then does David in the Spirit call Him

Lord? ... If David then calls Him Lord, how is He his Son? And no one was able to answer Him a word” (Matt. 22:41-46). In Psalm 45:6-7, the Messiah-King of Israel is also called “God”.

Even Jesus’ own disciples were slow to understand that He was not only their teacher but also their God who is one with the Father (John 14:9-10). They beheld all His amazing miracles, that He had power over life and death, and still they did not realise who He truly was. To their utter amazement, even the powers of nature were subject to Him: “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!” (Mark 4:41).

Only after the ascension of the Lord Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit did His disciples fully understand that He is also Lord and God. Peter said, “We did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16). Peter undoubtedly thought of the transfiguration on the mount, where he and two of the other disciples beheld Jesus in His majesty (Matt. 17:1-8). A week before this event the Lord Jesus said to His disciples: “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Matt. 16:28). On the seventh day after He had said this, three disciples had a preview of Christ’s future revelation in glory:

“Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, brought them up on a high mountain by themselves and was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him” (Matt. 17:1-3).

This statement is prophetically significant, because in the “week” of the divine history of humanity there are seven days of about one thousand years each – two thousand years from Adam to Abraham, two thousand years between Abraham and Jesus, followed by about two thousand years of church history before the dawning of the Millennium. At the beginning of the seventh millennium, Jesus Christ will be revealed in glory as King of kings and institute His reign of peace on earth.

But the ignorance on the Lord Jesus largely still prevails. It is a perplexing phenomenon that many of the modern scribes among Israel and the nations still maintain that Jesus was only an ordinary human being who was erroneously declared to be God by His disciples and other followers. These theologians do so in spite of the fact that they have the full revelation of the deity of Jesus Christ in His Word, as well as a cloud of historical and contemporary witnesses who all testify to these truths. All agnostic arguments, from God’s point of view, only render people fools. Paul, a theologian who later gained new insights and repented, confronts these deluded academics on who Christ really is:

“Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Cor. 1:20; NIV). He then adds that these scholars, through their worldly wisdom, did not know God. In terms of their humanistic rationalising the message of the crucifixion of Christ is foolishness because they cannot, or will not, understand it. The Jews were looking for a mighty King to liberate them by military means from the Roman domination, while the Greeks were looking for a learned philosopher who could reveal new knowledge of the glorification and further development of humanity. “But”, says Paul, “we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23-24).

All people are called to share in the wisdom and glory of the Lord (Acts 17:30; Col. 2:2-3), but the way to His salvation leads to Golgotha where the perfect Lamb of God paid the price for our sins. The origin of a magnificent new life is only in Him, but to agnostic and self-justifying scholars this divine life is an illusion and an elusive dream which is only pursued by fools. But to those who believe, Jesus Christ becomes “wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

The love of the Messiah

The *agape* love of God is a major topic in the Bible. Because God is love and also loved us in our sinful state, He gave His Son to die for us so we can be saved: “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13-14).

Jesus Christ is the manifestation of God’s love and grace towards sinful humanity. He enables us to have faith in God and gives us hope, both for this life and the life hereafter. Our lives should be a living testimony of divine love; we should be rooted and grounded in the love of God; we must grow up in it, and its influence must be seen in our character and in all our conduct. Yes, we must become perfect in love (1 John 2:5).

How do you experience this love which is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit? (Rom. 5:5). We should be able “to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height ... of the love of Christ” (Eph. 3:18-19). The love of God is not only infinite, it is also indestructible. “Love *is* as strong as death Its flames *are* flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it” (S. of S. 8:6-7). It is indestructible and endures forever. Neither death nor life, nor tribulation or distress, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:35-39).

The flame of love is unquenchable, and even a flood of hatred and negative emotions cannot destroy it. This bond of love is so strong that not even death can overcome it: “Greater love has no one than this, to lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Paul said: “But God demonstrates His own love, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

The love of God that was imparted to us by the Messiah never fails (1 Cor. 13:8). It is the only lasting thing in a perishing world in which everything slowly but surely ages and suffers destruction. If this love is in our hearts, we will survive this relentless process all around us: “The world is passing away, and the lust of it: but he who does the will of God abides for ever” (1 John 2:17).

During the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus there were, like there are today, theologians who only had a form of godliness. They had formulated for themselves a doctrine of justification in which the Messiah does not specifically feature. They based their doctrine on the covenant which God concluded with Abraham, as well as covenant signs and law-observance, rather than approaching the Lord for the forgiveness of sins. But their biased knowledge of Scripture was a stumbling-block to them as they did not realise that all the sacrifices and covenants were fulfilled in the new covenant of the Messiah. He said to them: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you” (John 5:39-42).

The disciples of Jesus received a clear command to abide in His love: “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love” (John 15:9). That was the New Testament law of love which they had to observe, as do all of us today. Love for Jesus Christ embodies deep gratitude for the great sacrifice He had made on behalf of us, and also willingness to render service of love in His kingdom. It also gives rise to a new bond of love towards our fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord – they are fellow members of the body of Christ, and together we have the obligation to evangelise the world. It further arouses a love for the lost world. We should intercede for the lost and also evangelise them, so that many of them can come over from the darkness of sin to the marvellous light of the Messiah’s kingdom.

We owe the love of Christ to all around us, and we should express it vocally and also by our lives. “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever” (Dan. 12:3).

We are eagerly expecting the second coming of the Lord Jesus, who said: “I make all things new. ... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts” (Rev. 21:5-6). Have you approached Him with

your spiritual thirst? His invitation still stands: “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).

Evangelical confession

It is important that, during this time of great falling away, each of us will confess the Lord Jesus before people in all His uniqueness, deity, and glory:

- 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). During His birth in the royal lineage of David 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.
- 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 is truly Immanuel – God with us.
- 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, so He could say: “Before 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).
- 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).
- I believe that the Lord Jesus, the Word, is the glorious Creator who, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, created “the worlds”, i.e. the universe (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).
- 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).
- 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).

- 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.

If we fail to acknowledge and confess Christ in this way now, we run the risk of lowering His status by making Him one of many messiahs of human origin, to deny His deity, to despise the significance of His crucifixion, and ultimately to be deceived to accept a false christ in His place (John 5:43). In the emerging new world order in which all faiths are to be regarded as equal, the deity and unique position of the Lord Jesus are denied. Through these false beliefs, people are giving the god of this age, Satan, the opportunity to blind their minds, “lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Cor. 4:4).

If we remain true to the Source of our life and keep on walking in the light of His Word, we need not fear deception of this kind. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (John 1:4-5). If we remain ever close to Him, His presence will illuminate our way. All those who do not walk in the light, are in danger of getting lost in deceptive pathways: “The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble” (Prov. 4:18-19).

Disciples of Christ among all nations

Let us always remember that Jesus Christ came into the world to form for Himself a church, comprising Christians from every nation. He loves the whole world and opened the door to all people to enter into His kingdom. Because of this invitation, there will eventually be an innumerable multitude from every people, tongue, tribe and nation who will form part of this heavenly kingdom. Christ will “be glorified in His saints”, which are the fruit of His re-creating grace, and He will be “admired among all those who believe” (2 Thess. 1:10). We should exalt His Name and proclaim His praises.

Although Christianity is worldwide in its extent, the Lord Jesus maintains a personal relationship with each of us through His Holy Spirit. This intimate relationship is fittingly expressed in a hymn: “On the Jericho road there’s room for just two; just Jesus and you”. He is the Good Samaritan who had mercy on you after you had been fatally attacked by the great Robber (Satan) and left along the wayside to die. After Christ had raised you up, you resumed your journey in His company – He even carries you and supplies all your needs according to the riches of His grace.

It is wonderful to know that there are millions of people all over the world who can also testify of a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. With them we constitute the body of Christ, and together we reach out with a life-giving message to a lost world. In the same way that Christ had mercy on us, we should also have the desire that other people who are without hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12), will also experience the wonder of rebirth and the beginning of a new life.

The gospel is destined for all people, since it is crucially important to every person on earth to be informed about Jesus Christ and His redemptive work. Accepting the gospel in faith by receiving Christ as your Saviour, transforms you into a *Christian*, i.e. *someone who belongs to Christ*. The word *Christian* occurs three times in the New Testament, and is used beside other names such as *disciples*, *believers*, *saints*, and *members of the body of Christ*. The three references to *Christians* are focusing on different aspects of being a Christian:

In Acts we read: “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). The local community recognised them as followers of Jesus Christ, thereby clearly distinguishing

them from the Judaists and the adherents of all other faiths. Can people see in your life that you belong to Jesus Christ because you heartily and openly follow and serve Him? Apart from what we say, our life should also be a “letter” of Christ to the world, which has been written by the Holy Spirit on the tablets of our hearts (2 Cor. 3:2-3). This “letter” must be read by all people who behold our behaviour and listen to our conversations.

We also read about the name *Christian* in a statement made by a king who heard the gospel, but to whom the cost of surrendering himself to Christ was too high: “Then Agrippa said to Paul, you almost persuade me to become a Christian” (Acts 26:28). He preferred rather to be known as a king and an esteemed member of the Roman Empire, than being a Christian who had to forsake his sins to become a follower of the Lord Jesus in His hidden kingdom. Many people, also today, seriously consider repenting to become Christians, but are not fully prepared to confess and forsake their sins in order to enter in through the narrow gate (Luke 13:24).

A third reference to *Christian* is found in Peter’s first Epistle: “Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter” (1 Pet. 4:16). Christ walked the way of suffering and rejection, and warned that His followers should expect the same treatment (John 15:19-20; Acts 14:22; Phil. 1:29; 1 Pet. 4:12-13). But if we prevail over rejection and still persevere on the way of the Lord, we will be able, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to do works that have value for eternity.

We should examine ourselves as to whether we are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). Can the personality and works of Jesus Christ be seen in our lives? If society can see Jesus in our lives, then we have succeeded in being exemplary followers and worthy representatives of Him. If we are also actively engaged in His works, we will be successful witnesses of Christ who will one day appear before Him with confidence.

We should be able to echo the following words of Christ: “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4). There will be an end to everything. The public ministry of the Lord Jesus ended with His crucifixion. After that, the command was given to His disciples to proclaim the gospel message everywhere on earth. But the time of grace will also pass for the world when the time of reckoning dawns and the judgements of God will be poured out upon the wicked.

In the meantime, we should confidently proceed with our mission: “Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (Heb. 10:23-24). That is the disposition which faithful disciples of Jesus Christ should demonstrate while they daily look up to Him for strength, help and protection: “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever” (Jude v. 24-25).

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About the Author

In August 1978, Johan Malan was appointed professor of Anthropology at the University of the North (presently the University of Limpopo) near Polokwane in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, and in January 2006 he retired. He and his wife now live in Mossel Bay. They have two married sons.

As the son of a missionary, the late Rev. J.S. Malan of the Dutch Reformed Church, Johan, from a very young age, received thorough training in the Bible at home. This knowledge gave rise to an experience of rebirth which he had in 1972, when he surrendered his life completely to the Lord Jesus. He regards himself as an evangelical Christian who observes the literal, grammatical-historical method of interpreting the Bible. Even where symbols are used in Scripture, he maintains that they mostly have a literal antitype, e.g. the Lamb which refers to Christ, the beast with the seven heads, which is a metaphoric description of the Antichrist, and the dragon which is a symbol of the devil.

Johan has adapted his academic career to his Christian worldview, and consequently did not accept or teach the theory of biological evolution. Through self-study he further qualified himself in theology and started a part-time Christian ministry. His Christian outreaches are interdenominational, mainly by way of the Internet, but also through the distribution of books and other publications in printed form, and he visits organised groups on invitation. On his website are currently articles and books in eight languages: English, Afrikaans, Portuguese, Swahili, Finnish, Estonian, German, and Russian.

As a cultural anthropologist, and also as a Bible scholar, Johan took a special interest in the people of Israel. In 1993, he and his wife visited various kibbutzim in Israel, where he conducted research on communal farming and also wrote two articles on this subject for a scientific journal (Malan, 1994, 1995). At the same time, Johan made contact with Messianic Jews in Israel. One of them later translated his book on Israel into Russian, mainly for distribution among the large number of Russian-speaking Jews who immigrated to Israel. Visits to Finland and Estonia gave rise to the translation of some of his books into Finnish and Estonian.

Johan's interest in Christology is mainly based upon the clear, Biblical teaching on who Jesus Christ is and what he has done in the interest of our salvation. The relevance of a study of this nature has increased due to the growing movement in favour of a "historical Jesus" who does not have the divine attributes which the Bible ascribes to the true Jesus. It is in the interest of each of us to gain clarity on this very important matter.

Back Cover

Jesus Christ and our Life in Him by Johan Malan

The significance of Jesus Christ as Creator, Saviour, and King is so profound that it cannot be overstated. The truths about Christ and His offer of salvation form the core of the gospel message and no person on earth can afford to contemplate his/her life or future without it. There is indeed “no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

It is vitally important that these great truths about the One who Himself is The Truth (John 14:6), should not only be proclaimed to a new generation of lost sinners but also to churches in which the knowledge of the truth has eroded to dangerously low levels. What Paul said to the Corinthians applies to many of the modern-day churches: “But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3). Through satanic deception, a “historical Jesus” is pursued who falls totally short of the true Christ of the Bible.

The “doctrine of Christ” (2 John v. 9) in all its fullness was the secret of the spiritual fulfilment enjoyed by evangelical Christians throughout the many centuries of church history. It was the central theme of the early apostles’ preaching, and they were more than willing to lay down their lives for Christ, firmly believing in the resurrection of the saints, and expecting eternal life in “the city which has foundations” (Heb. 11:10; cf. John 14:2-3).

Throughout the long period of the Dark Ages, when an unbiblical form of ecclesiastical dominance threatened to silence the biblical message of salvation by faith in Christ, small groups of true believers kept the witness of Jesus Christ alive and continued to spread the Good News.

During revival times in the 18th and 19th centuries, the message of salvation in Christ was proclaimed with great boldness, leading to the repentance of millions of people. Missionaries went out to unreached peoples, and for the first time the Great Commission was fulfilled on a global scale. Sanctification was also preached, giving rise to a movement emphasising holiness. The high standard of faith and practical living maintained by the Puritans was part of this movement.

In the 20th century, however, the true gospel message was gradually displaced by secularism which was introduced by great scientific and technological advances, as well as humanist thinking which paved the way towards globalism, postmodernism, and an interfaith ideology. This new mindset strongly favours a compromising, emergent church, as well as the rise of a universal messiah of all faiths – i.e. the Antichrist, who will rule over the entire world during the period directly preceding the second coming of Christ (2 Thess. 2:8).

Now, more than ever before, the true Christ of the Bible should be exalted in all His excellence as the only solution to a perishing world, and preached anew to carnal believers who are faltering because of a lack of knowledge.