

THIS WORLD IS HIS
— Six Studies —

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This World is His

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INTRODUCTION

For some time, I have been aware that Christians tend to live in two worlds. One of these is a religious world where the creed sounds right and faith seems viable. It may be a retreat but it does provide some security. The other world is the one that is seen, where an income must be earned, bills payed, people helped and problems solved. It is the world which we hope will be favourable to us, but in which, we know, we must finally die.

Against this tendency, it must be asserted that this world is the one in which our religion is based. It is the world God loved and to which he sent his Son. It is in this world that Jesus came to most clearly reveal the Father—so much so that even angels long to see what is happening here. It is in this world that God is working out his purposes and preparing his People. Everything about it is under his control.

The thing that many Christians have been unable to understand is how one can see God's love in all the earth when the earth is so full of wrong. Where this question has not been answered. Christians have tended to resent the way things are and have reacted to life's pressures in a range of ways, very similar to the ways unbelievers have reacted to them.

Yet it was in the midst of life's adversity, unfairness and seeming rampant disorder that the gospel was first given. Those who discover God's good news are able to see beyond life's harshness to God's love. They find they have a new dignity, and because they know God, they want to live by love in his world.

These studies try to show that the gospel of God is not a retreat from reality, but the only way in which our world can be understood, and certainly, the only power whereby it can be changed.

At the end of each study are suggestions for group, family, or personal study. Use all or part of these as desired, but be prepared also to deal with the natural questions which may arise spontaneously.

Study One:

CREATION—A WORK OF LOVE

The Christian Church stands on the conviction that God has revealed himself, and that he is still revealing himself in numerous ways. Those who set out to complete these studies probably already believe these things or believe that they are possibilities, but let us consider together how God chooses to reveal himself throughout creation and history.

John the apostle said, 'God is love' (1 John 4:16). If this basic belief of the Church is true, we would expect that love to be apparent in all of the things that God has made. In fact the OT psalmist discovered God's love in all the creation (Ps 33:5). Is the earth full of the steadfast love of the Lord?

Many people find evidences of God's love in his provision for their needs, or in his revelation to them through the Bible, the coming of Christ and so on. But any honest observer must acknowledge that to see God's love in all of creation and history is not a simple observation. Many, in fact, have come to an opposite conclusion.

That God is love can be seen, but only by looking at the whole wide scheme of things as they really are. Let us do that now.

The crowning work of God's creation was to place man over everything he had made; to enter into every part of it (fill it), enjoy it, use it, work in it, and give names to what he discovered (Genesis 1:26-31, 2:4-19).

This was an appropriate task for man because he was made in the image of God, and in fellowship with God, would be able to find out what God wanted done. God has always wanted people to know his will and so share in the completing of creation (Ps 32:8f). In this way, man would come to know God intimately.

Sin has not altered the fact that God's nature can be seen in creation (Rom 1:19-25). Man does not acknowledge this but it is there for him to know, and from God's point of view, he does know it. History also is shaped

so that people can seek God and find him.(Acts 17:24-28) Every generation has been confronted with the knowledge of God in creation (Acts 14:17), and so with the need to do what the Creator wanted done.

In the book of Genesis, two stories illustrate two different attitudes to this knowledge of God. At Babel men gathered to build a city and tower, to avoid being scattered, i.e., to fill the earth. They rejected the knowledge of God. (Gen 11:1-9) Abram, on the other hand understood that God was calling him to play a significant role in the creation (to be 'great', and 'a blessing'). He received the knowledge of God. (Gen 12: 1-9). All of us, in ways appropriate to our gifts and opportunities are to play a significant role in the creation under God's direction (Eph 2:10, Titus 2:14, James 1:27).

The sinfulness of mankind has not altered God's plan that man should manage the earth (Ps 8:3-9, Heb 2:5-8). God has never taken from man the responsibility of tending and subduing the earth.

It should be possible to see now, that if God is love, his love must be expressed in actions. It should be clear too, that if man was intended to share in all God's actions, seeing God's love would necessarily involve him in active loving.

Here lies the problem. When people do not want to love, they will not be able, or more accurately, will not want to see, that God is love. So, in fact, the earth lies polluted under its inhabitants (Is 24:5). Man has fallen short of God's glory for him (Rom 3:23). As yet, all creation has not been subdued by man (Heb 2:8). The revelation of God's love and working with him in love go together. In losing one, we lose both. However, as we shall see later, in regaining one, we regain both.

It remains now to note how Jesus walked in his Father's world. The following are illustrations only, and many more could be added.

Jesus learned about his Father's nature from what he saw (Matt 6:26-33, John 12:23-25).

He trusted that his Father could adequately supply all needs (Matt 16:5-10), and that nothing was out of his Father's power to control (John 19:11).

He obeyed his Father when he saw what his Father wanted done. Only he has fully seen the love of God in the earth because only he was fully willing to reveal it (John 6:38f).

It must be clear that mankind has not learned from creation, nor trusted, nor obeyed God - and therefore has forfeited the knowledge of God (Rom 1:21f) and the earth is not subdued (Heb 2:8f). This could be depressing, but the writer of Hebrews continues: 'But we see Jesus -- crowned with glory and honour -.' He reigns now, waiting until all his enemies will be made his footstool (Heb 1:13).

Part of the glory of the gospel is that God will not accomplish the completing of creation apart from man. What he purposed at the beginning he will do (Eph 1: 9-12). Jesus will bring many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). We reign in life now, by Christ (Rom 5:17), and in ages to come, in a new heavens and new earth, we will reign with him forever (Rev 3:21).

Because God is love, all his works reveal love. But we cannot watch these works as we would watch a television programme. From the beginning, we were meant to be involved. So it is those who have a mind to obey who will know God's love in creation and see that all this world is a work of love.

Let us be encouraged to discover all the dimensions of the love of God as it is revealed to us. So much depends on this. We can only discover ourselves as we love. The earth can only be subdued by love. And more especially, the very nature of God can only be discovered by those who will give way to the revelations of his love and let themselves be carried in its flow.

GROUP OR PERSONAL STUDY

Read some of the following Bible passages, and try to answer some of the questions raised.

Genesis	1:26-31, 2:4-19
Psalms	8:3-9
Matt	6:26-33
Acts	17:24-28
Romans	1:19-23
Hebrews	2:5-10

1. What does God want done in the earth? Try to work from a general answer to some specific answers.

2. Why does God want these things done, and why does he want them done by man?

What have you learned about the nature of God through considering the things that have been made?

4. What characteristics did Jesus have that enabled him to walk so certainly in this world?

Consider what kind of world we would have if man filled and subdued the earth and, out of love for God, used what he found to fulfil God's plans. Could this be what eternity will be like in the new heavens and new earth? (Rev 21:22-27, 22:3-5).

6. Why does God persist so long waiting for man to fulfil his plan? (Cf. 2 Peter 3:3-13).

CREATION

Creation, creation; all things that have been made,
 Declare a living Maker to whom they give their praise.
 And we who are made like God, have charge of what he made,
 That we may share in all his works and understand his ways.
 Our Father's gracious nature to us has been made clear,
 And no-one has a reason for not knowing he is here.
 Creation is a work of love, and love controls it still;
 And those who love will know him as they choose to do his will.

Creator & Father, with grace you labour still
 to make a world where all men delight to do your will.
 But we have chosen our way, and lost the power to rule,
 And you have sent your only Son, our broken world to heal.
 For he has come, the true Son, to do his Father's will,
 And gather 'round him many sons God's pleasure to fulfil.
 We Christ's brothers, like him, who mind not toil or pain,
 Shall reign in life, and in the end time, share his kingly reign.

Father, dear Father, your love is waiting still
 That we forgiven may upright stand, our task to yet fulfil.
 And though all things 'till now are not subdued beneath our hand,
 Christ our Saviour rules in heaven, in sea, and sky & land.
 Our Father's gracious nature to us has been made clear,
 And no-one has a reason for not knowing he is here.
 Creation is a work of love, and love controls it still;
 And those who love will know him as they choose to do his will.

Study Two:

AN ACHING WORLD

At some time, everyone must have to ask the question: 'What is God doing in our aching world to show his love?' Sometimes this question is very personal and urgent.

One thing must be seen clearly. God is sovereignly shaping all things for the good of his elect people (Rom 8:28f). That is not to say that all things are good, but when man insists on being evil (James 1:13-15), God is not caught, as though he had been put in an impossible situation. In this sense, God has a purpose for everything, even for the wicked (Prov. 16:4). Again, God is not the author of evil; he cannot create what is foreign to his nature; but knowing the extent that man's evil would go, he planned its purpose from the beginning. The most incredible example of this is the crucifying of God's own Son (Acts 2:23). This should help us to understand that man's evil can do nothing that does not help to work out God's purposes of love. (Cf., Psalm 76:10).

This world is not shaped ultimately by the malice of man or even the stratagems of Satan (although check I John 5:19), but by the providence, mercy, and judgement of God. This does not excuse man or make the devil less damnable, but it does assert that Satan can do no more than he is permitted to do (see Job 1:12, 2:6, Daniel 10:12-14), nor man go further than he is permitted to go. Nebuchadnezzar said: '-- (God) does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand --' (Dan 4:34f).

In Study One, we referred to God's providential care over all things. We must now speak more concerning his judgements. All the earth is under judgement. The ground is cursed; tilling the earth and populating the earth (the two things God wanted man to do) both involve pain (Gen 3:16-19); search as he will, man will never find a purpose within the world system as it is (Eccles. 1:2-14); everything is subjected to futility

(Rom 8:18-25); finally, this is the world in which we die, not just because flesh has a limited life, but because of judgement (Rom 5:12).

These are judgements which all share while on earth. The 'Romans' passage cited above makes it clear that Christians 'groan inwardly' waiting until the creation is set free. God in his wisdom sees that it is helpful for us to experience these judgements. It must be good that Adam and his wife were driven from Eden, or they would have lived for ever, presumably perpetuating without check the evil they had let loose (Gen 3:22f, cf., Gen 11:6-8). The fact of death teaches us to 'number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom' (Psalm 90:9-12). It must be good also that the earth is subjected to futility so that we may learn not to make idols of the creation, but worship God only and seek his kingdom (Heb 11:13-16). Being sinful, we would forget the extent and wrongness of our fall and become presumptuous and ungrateful were it not for these judgements.

Where men continue to ignore God, he shows his wrath by giving them up to their own depraved desires (Rom 1: 18-32). The clear implication in this is, that while men go astray of their own will, they cannot pollute themselves or the earth one speck more than God allows them to do. But he has relaxed his restraints that men may 'receive in their own persons the due penalty for their error.' The effects of this wrath extend to those who are hated, deceived, murdered, etc. The true effects of sin cannot be seen without it touching both the sinner and those who are sinned against.

There are also specific acts of judgement against nations who persist in evil, and godly people within ungodly nations often suffer the fate of their people, though not without being surrounded with many providences (eg Ps 33:19). God leaves his own people among the ungodly in order to show the ungodly how to respond positively to God's actions in history.

Isaiah is one such case. He could see that it was good that God's judgements were in the earth, because

without them, people would not learn righteousness. With a peaceful mind, he waited for God in the path of his judgements (Isaiah 26:3-10).

God does not afflict people for his own pleasure (Lam 3:20). He wounds in order that he may heal (Hos 6: 1). The prodigal needed to be humbled by famine, but only so that he would return and discover the graciousness of his father. Never in this world will we find a graceless judgement. It is tempered with mercy and is designed to lead men to repentance (Rev 14:6f, 15:4, 16:8-11). The goodness and severity of God go hand in hand. (Rom 11:22-24).

When Jesus came into our world, in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom 8:3) and became the friend of sinners, he did not try to avoid the realities of God's judgements, (See Luke 13:1-5), although he did temper the unfair way in which his contemporaries viewed them. And when he bore the sin of his friends and was made sin for us (Isaiah 53:6, 1 Peter 2:24, 2 Cor. 5:21) he did not avoid the judgement that necessarily followed, but bore it to its end. This incredible act of judgement (Rom 3:24-26) has become for us the proof beyond all others of God's gracious love for our world (John 3:16, Rom 5:6-11). His benevolence has not by-passed justice but been revealed in judgement. And, far from being a change from judgement to mercy, it was a revelation that God had been revealing his love, in mercy and in judgement.

Those who believe in Jesus Christ escape the judgement and wrath to come, because for them it has been borne already (John 3:17-18, 1Thes 1:10). But they are sent into a world where judgements are still operating, as was Christ, and cannot expect to be insulated from its suffering. They share its pains because they also are flesh (Rom 8:18-25). They bear its injustices that they may demonstrate the grace of Christ (Heb 12:3f, 1 Peter 2:20-23). They are chastened or pruned in order to be more fruitful (John 15:2, Heb 12:5-11). Judgement begins with the church - - that it may be pure. (1 Peter 4:17).

David was forgiven for his sin, but bore in his life-

time, the consequence of his actions (2 Sam 12:9-14). Another psalmist said it was good for him to be afflicted, because, before that, he went astray (Psalms 119:67,71,75).

These various and varied examples of judgement show that God shapes his people by numerous experiences, including those which they find grievous (Heb 12:11). But in none of this does God condemn his justified people, and in all of life's experience they are never separated from the love of God (Rom 8:1 and 31-39).

Some people become embittered by life, and by doing so reveal their hostility to God because he is working in all things to draw people to himself. They claim, or perhaps secretly believe, either that God does not exist, or that he is not gracious, or that he has no control over events in the earth. Such people are likely to become hardened, grasping, resentful, or irresponsible. But those who have faith in God believe in his goodness and the rightness of his purposes regardless of circumstances that seem contrary (eg. Daniel 3:16-18,28, Heb 12:3f). In fact, they rejoice in tribulation because of its benefits (Rom 5:3-5), and cannot consider these sufferings worth comparing with the glory that is yet to be revealed (Rom 8:18).

So true believers do not need to give way to pessimism or retreat into an unrelated doctrinal theology, but may enter into life as it is, not without pain, but not without joy either. They know that this world is their Father's.

GROUP OR PERSONAL STUDY

The following references gather together some of the points made in this study. Re-read them to refresh them in your mind and discuss the questions that follow.

Gen 3:16-24

Eccles 1:12-14

Isaiah 26:4-14

Daniel 4:34f

Romans 1:24-32, 8:18-25,28f,31-39, 11:22-24, 11:33-12:1

Hebrews 2:5-10

1. Discuss the effects that pain, frustration, and death have on people.
2. Why should difficulties which people face bring meekness to some and bitterness to others?
3. In your own words, describe the extent of God's rulership over all things.

Look at your own political, social, economic, and community scene, and ask what God is doing to make himself known.

If you encounter someone (perhaps yourself) who has experienced great suffering, injustice, or meaninglessness, what factors would you keep in mind in standing with them.

Describe the difference between condemnation and chastening, and relate this to God's judgements in the earth, and perhaps, in your own life.

(Other questions of your own may be added or used instead of those above.)

SOVEREIGN LORD

Sovereign Lord your hand is guiding
All the destinies of man.
Nations, families, cultures, kingdoms,
Flow as water through your hand.
Yet your rule is kind and good,
Strong and wise and gentle;
Leaving none who seek you crushed
But calmed and gladly humbled.

Sovereign Judge the world is aching
Through its shame and wrongful ways.
You are showing your displeasure
In the tumults of our age.
Yet your wrath is righteousness,
Purging our pollution;
Wishing not we be condemned,
But that we be chastened.

Sovereign Father, all your actions
Lead us to your own dear Son,
By whose death all failure's terrors
Are absolved, forever shunned.
By your unexpected love
You have won us Father.
Let us do what pleases you,
Be your new creation.

Sovereign Lord & Judge and Father,
Hallowed be your holy name.
May your kingdom come in glory,
May your gracious will be done.

Study Three

THE SHAPE AND CAUSE OF OUR DEFIANCE

One of the most natural things for a human being to do is to respond positively to love. No-one should want to deny that when they are confronted with a simple love, they respond warmly to it. So if it is true that God is love, and that his love is being revealed in the creation and through history, to know God and to do what he wants done should be quite natural for man.

In fact, at 12 years of age, Jesus thought it to be a very natural thing for him to be about his Father's business (Luke 2:46-49). He was eager to know what his Father was doing, and what people in Jerusalem were doing in regard to what his Father was doing. During his adult ministry he said that he always did what was pleasing to his Father (John 8:29). The burden he invited others to take up was, he said, a light one (Matt 11:28-30, cf 1 John 5:3).

We need to ask what it is that would stop a person knowing and doing what God wants. Surely it could only mean that the person was hateful, distant, distrustful, or bitter.

Children have a natural capacity for trust and they accept many things. (They may also be gullible and therefore need protection). It may be this willingness to trust that made Jesus say that adults needed to become as children to enter the kingdom of heaven.

However, as people grow up and they encounter hardship, malice, manipulation, and tragedy, they learn not only to be wary, which is necessary, but to react, and resent or rebel against things that are happening. They find themselves complaining about the government, their neighbours, their husbands or wives, their parents or children, the educational system, wages, the economy and so on. Some commence hateful struggles for certain rights, and others resentfully retreat from reality into endless diversions and irresponsibility.

But if all things are under the control of love and

are working together for good, they can be accepted, not fatalistically, and not without resolute attempts to change them, but with meekness none-the-less. Those who become bitter or defiant show they are in rebellion against God. (Cf Heb 12:11-15)

The statement by Paul, 'All things work together for good to those who love God' (Rom 8:28) may be one of the most hated statements in Scripture. Who wants to believe that sufferings, sins and seeming hopelessness could work together for good? Who wants to see that their own failures have worked together for good? (Check 1 Tim 1:15f & Luke 15:11-24).

Where bitterness is held by religious people, it is repressed, and religion becomes a duty, devoid of joy, because deep-down, the person does not believe that God is good. Legalism follows - doing the things that are necessary to maintain appearances, and self-esteem. Such people have no real interest in what God is doing in the world even though they would claim otherwise.

Because this condition is frequently encountered, either in ourselves or others, we will look at it more closely. And because the forces at work in such cases are powerful and deadly, we will not seek to suggest trite ways of overcoming the problem. Nor will we assume that it is everyone else's problem.

Think again about the first family to inhabit this earth. Adam and Eve sinned, and became ashamed. They hid from God, but were confronted by him. Adam and Eve became evasive and accusing. They had lost their sense of worth and felt that God was accusing them. In turn they passed accusations on to others, introducing suspicion and non-acceptance into their relationships. This is the pattern that all human relationships tend to take. Failure, which of course is universal, leads to shame and criticism, and this in turn leads to justifications, earning of merit, compensating accusations - all because persons have lost their sense of worth.

In fact God came to Adam and Eve with judgements which limited their life and abilities and comforts, but also with a promise of restoration (Gen 3:16-24)

both of which gave dignity and hope to man. God is direct and gracious in his dealings and never purposelessly critical.

So two factors are now operative in the human family; on the one hand is man's consciousness of failure with all its release of accusation, and having to achieve to compensate; and on the other hand, are God's gracious responses to our sin in which he surrounds us with judgement and mercy, which deliberately limit our ability to live self-sufficiently.

Cain and Abel grew up in a family under these two influences. Both were sinners, but Abel responded with faith in God's goodness and received God's approval (Heb 11:4); Cain responded with bitterness. He must have seen God as demanding and condemnatory, a judge without mercy. He would not let God reason with him or love him. Yet strangely, he was peeved with God's non-acceptance of him. He chose to be jealous and hateful, and destructive.

A very similar story occurred in the life of Jesus. Two of his disciples struggled with events that promised to dash all their hopes to the ground. Neither of them wanted Jesus to die, although for different reasons. Yet his death seemed inevitable. In the midst of their crumbling worlds, love and mercy were given to both. Both failed. Judas callously betrayed Jesus; Peter hopelessly denied him. Under the impact of their fallen world and sense of personal failure, one man closed the door to grace by suiciding; the other, with hesitant wonder, discovered grace, and a whole new life, to which all other events had been leading him.

(John 13:21-30, 36-38, 18:1-11, 15-18, 25-27, Matt 27: 3-5, Luke 22:54-62, John 21:15-19)

To accept judgement and pain are unavoidable if one does not rebel against God. This is a judged world in which even Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered. (Hebrews 5:7-9) He did no wrong but lived in a world where judgement was operating. Because God had given men up to their sins, Jesus had to endure the hatred and selfishness of others against himself as others did. Because the world was given up to futility,

he must have had to come to terms with earning his bread by the sweat of his brow as do all other men.

Dignity will not come by avoiding life's realities, but by seeing how God leads us through them to discover his love. Here all defiance is defused. Instead of endlessly debating the rights and wrongs of God's dealings with our world, we accept what we have no power or right to change and see how it helps to shape us into the image of Christ. We are then at liberty to see what our Father wants us to do in his creation and do it simply and with a ready will.

GROUP OR PERSONAL STUDY

IN ALL OUR HISTORY

Re-read some of these passages referred to in the study, as preparation for dealing with the questions that follow.

Genesis 3:16-24, 4:1-8

Luke 2:46-49

Luke 15:11-24

John 13:21-30, 36-38, 18:1-11, 15-18, 25-27.

Matt 27:3-5, Luke 22:54-62, John 21:15-19.

Heb 12:11-15

1. Describe what it means to accept God's judgements in the earth.
2. What was the difference between Cain's view of God and Abel's view of God?
3. Compare the eager seeking of Jesus to know and do his Father's will with the seeking and obeying done by yourselves. Try to find the reason for any discrepancy.
4. How does man seek to establish his own self-respect? Why is this always self-defeating?
5. Trace the reason for the failures of Peter & Judas, and the positive role it had in the life of Peter.
6. How does judgement lead some to resentment and others to repentance?

IN ALL OUR HISTORY

In all our history we have had
And ride a narrow ledge
'Tween personal gain and pleasing all
Their judgement lies ahead.
They only sought to keep their rank
Their judgement lies ahead.

We hear the cries of discontent,
Of hate and jealousy,
From those who say life's given them
No opportunity.
We see the silent moody crowd
Who give less than their best,
For reasons best known to themselves,
Withdrawn to wishfulness.
We see the silent moody crowd
Withdrawn to wishfulness.

But we must search until we find
What our vocation is,
For all of us are called to live
For God - this world is His.
The people who retreat from life
Are hostile to their God,
And welcome life's unfriendliness
As a welcome alibi.
The people who retreat from life
Seek a welcome alibi.

The failure of the many gives
 No cause for us to wait,
 For Jesus blazed a trail of love
 Through envy, pride, and hate,
 And by his work has shown to us
 The Father's kingly plan
 In which we live as his own sons
 Within a rebel land;
 For Jesus blazed a trail of love
 Within a rebel land.

We are now responsible
 Under Christ as Lord,
 To fill the earth with useful works
 His gospel to adorn.
 And this no longer seems too hard
 For we have been made one
 With the Father & with all his saints
 In the kingdom of his Son.
 And this no longer seems too hard
 In the kingdom of his Son.

Study Four:

JESUS—THE TRUE SON

In each of the preceding studies, we have needed to bring the focus onto Jesus Christ before it was possible to see clearly how this world reveals the love of God. This, of course, is how it should be. It is because God has not spared his own Son, but sent him to us and for us, that we can know - this world is his.

Although God spoke clearly in other ways, his ultimate revelation has been in a Son who 'reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature' (Hebrews 1:2f). This is the one who was finally recognised as the eternal Son (John 1:1-5) and worshipped (John 20:28, Rev 5:11-14).

For our purposes however, we need to see that he was first recognised as the Messiah/Son. (See Luke 3:21f, John 1:34, 41,45,49,51). Israel had long expected a Deliverer who was identified as a Son (Psalm 2 Cf., Psalm 89:19-37), and so the term 'Son of God' was understood to refer to the Messiah or Christ (Matthew 26:63).

The Messiah, or Christ, both meaning 'anointed one', was to arise from within the human scene, not from outside of it, (see Isaiah 9:6, 53:1-3) and this is consistent with God's desire that everything in his earth be done by man (cf Ezek 22:30, Jer 5:1, Psalm 106:23), including its redemption. Therefore the eternal Son needed to come from within Israel's history as its Messiah, and in human form as the true man, living in sonly glory.

This is the message of Hebrews 2:5-18, & 3:6. Jesus has become man and triumphed in life where we failed. He became a son in a way that we can become sons. He came into the household of God and showed in that scene what it meant to be a son. Let us see what this means.

The task which God gave to man, filling and subduing the earth, could only be done by people who would relate to God. It must be clear also, that it could only be done by people who would relate to one-another and

work together for the accomplishment of God's plan. So when Cain defied this principle and killed his brother, God asked him where his brother was. Contrary to Cain's expectation, he was meant to be 'his brother's keeper. (Gen 4:8-12).

Throughout the OT are examples of men and women who saw how to live responsibly as brothers or sisters, in this world, providing for each others' needs. Joseph interpreted the malice of his brothers as God sending him before them to preserve their lives (Gen 45:4-15). Moses identified with Israel of his own will (Heb 11:24-26) and showed he would rather die than fail to lead God's people to their goal (Exodus 32:31f). Esther had to understand that her greatness was to be used for her people (Esther 4:13-16). These are only some of the examples that show people acting as their brothers' keepers.

This thought comes to its focus in the book of Isaiah where the prophet shows that the Lord's servant 'will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth' (Isaiah 42:1-4). The servant encounters great difficulty (49:1-7) and suffering (50: 4-9) and finally death (52:13 - 53:12). But he is told he will restore Jacob and be a light to the Gentiles as well. He will bear the iniquities of his people but afterwards, 'the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand' (53:10). The servant addressed is Israel. God wanted Israel to bring Justice to the nations. The true Israel suffered as they grappled with the immensity of this task. Finally, he who was truly Israel, came as its Messiah, and died not only to restore Israel, but to gather together the whole family of God. (John 11:49-53).

We should be able to see now the incredible proportions of what Jesus has done. He came into the world, eager to do his Father's will. He saw around him, a whole humanity that was estranged from his Father, confused about what was to be done, and hostile towards one another. While he had no guilt of his own, he deeply understood that of others (John 8:1-11). He even had power to judge (John 5:22f), yet would not, because

he had come to save (John 3:17).

He saw the horror of sin, and being holy, he would have seen it more clearly than us. Then, in Gethsemane, as his brothers' keeper, he accepted that he was to bear that burden of guilt and shame. He was 'sorrowful unto death' and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling on the ground. (Mark 14:34, Luke 22:44). He did this in his manhood, longing for the understanding of his disciples and upheld by angels. Then, bearing our guilt, he was led to Golgotha and suffered the logical consequence of bearing his brothers' burden. In bearing our shame, it seems he could not sense his Father's presence. Being the eternal Son, Jesus was one with the Father, and God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. (2 Cor. 5:19). But being the Christ/Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, he was one with man, experienced separation from the Father, and died for sin. So he finished the work of providing for his brothers (Hebrews 2:9-18).

Then he rose. This was a great moral victory. Here is the man for all men, alive, after bearing their sin. He has destroyed their alienation, and won for them a restoration to sonship. We could not identify with his perfect sonship, let alone his eternal Sonship. But we can identify with him - become one with him by faith at the point where he bears our sin - and he bears us with him as he rises to a new post-guilt life (Rom 6:1-11). Astoundingly, we are now free to share with Christ, the broadness, and depth and strength of his relationship with his Father. (John 17:22f)

The gospel was conceived in the Father's mind before creation, but it has been revealed in this earth by one who became man with us and for us. This fact, beyond all others should show how deeply God loves this world and how dynamically his love is working in every part of it. Doubtlessly, in the life to come, we will see the love of God more clearly than now, but only because we will then have a less obstructed view of what God did in this earth through his Son.

Let us be resolved not to give way to pessimism or hopelessness, but to see this world as the scene where love, the very nature of God, has been most clearly portrayed.

GROUP OR PERSONAL STUDY

Re-read some of the following Scriptures with a view to answering the questions below them.

John	1:34,41,45,49,51 with Psalm 2 and Matt 26:63.
Ezekiel	22:30, Jeremiah 5:1, Isaiah 9:6
Hebrews	2:5-18
Genesis	45:4-15
Isaiah	42:1-4, 53:1-12, John 11:49-53
Romans	6:1-11

1. What is meant (in the above references) by the term 'Son of God?'
2. Is man saved by someone outside of humanity or within humanity?
3. Describe the role of a 'brother' in the true meaning of the term.
4. How did Jesus fulfil the true role of manhood?
5. How has Jesus brought others into full manhood?
6. What place do the death and resurrection of Christ play in bringing man to completeness of life?

WHO IS HE?

Who is he? Who is he?
Who the people talk of -- who is he?
Jesus - of Palestine;
Lived among us, yes, but who is he?

I have heard that he lived for his Father
And for those he longed to have as brothers,
That he felt their longing and their sorrows,
Knew the way of freedom they could follow.

It was he who saw life's meaning clearly,
Was not fooled or swayed by what he saw,
Did no wrong nor restlessly accused us,
Saw that we were hiding from our sin.

All the Father's love was then released,
Waiting not 'till all men understood.
Jesus bore the wrongness of our blame,
Led us to his Father, free of shame.

He is here and given to us freely.
Let us see his patience with us all.
Let his grace defuse all our defiance,
Form in us a mind to do his will.

Who is he? Who is he?
Who the people talk of, who is he?
Jesus - Living Lord,
Here among us, this is he.

Study Five:

SURPRISED BY LOVE

All through these studies, we have sought to show how God's love is working in this world. But love finally is a personal experience. The question that begs for an answer is: 'Does God love me?' In order to answer this question let us try to understand ourselves more clearly.

Natural man is subject to a life-long bondage because of the fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14f) Some may seem not to fear death but beneath the bravado must be a gnawing uncertainty that subtly influences the whole of life. Death is the great 'leveller' that finally requires of every person a ruthless honesty and stark reality.

Paul (I Cor. 15:56) explains that the sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. Our problem is that we know we must come to this 'moment of truth' with only our moral bankruptcy to reveal. The law legislates condemnation for our sin unyieldingly. Being condemned, all dignity and hope is gone - except the vain and struggling hope that we may be able to make amends.

This great human dilemma destroys all true awareness of the love of God. In fact the very kindness of God that may be formally confessed only drives the person further away because they feel unworthy of such a favour. Paul says of such people that they have no hope and are without God in the world (Eph 2:12).

It is clear that no-one wants to live with such a crushing sense of failure. Proverbs says: 'A man's spirit will endure sickness; but a broken spirit who can bear?' (Prov. 18:14). Therefore, in order to maintain the semblance of dignity, persons justify their behaviour, seek status symbols, extract from others by manipulation a sense of belonging and worth, and many other such things.

But God has met our need. There is forgiveness with God in order that we may fear him (Psalm 130:3f). In

Jesus' name, forgiveness is offered to us - not simply a passing over of sins, but a full exposure of them in the cross, and a clear victory over them and the judgement that fell on them when Christ rose from the dead (Rom 3:21-26 and 4:25).

This is the meaning of faith in Christ. Confronted by him who has become one with us in our need, love makes us trust him and become one with him in his victory

(Cf 2 Cor. 5:21). Faith works by love (Gal. 5:6). Yet faith is a struggle because we are being asked to believe something so contrary to our pessimistic memories of human love, and so unexpected by us in our shame and self-sufficient pride. Paul said that it was like Abraham learning to believe that he would have a son; he finally became convinced that God was able to do what he promised and in his faith he was reckoned to be righteous (Rom 4:18-25). This is the model for our faith: we must turn away from human probabilities, to God's provision, and let our lives be shaped by love.

Those who believe discover God - so uncomplicatedly gracious. They have peace with God, access to grace and they rejoice in hope of sharing God's glory (Rom 5: 1-5). And because this has happened, there is no longer an adverse reaction to adversity. They can feel at home with all manner of circumstances because they have discovered the love that is behind it all. Life never leaves them entirely ashamed or disappointed because God's love is poured into their hearts by the Spirit of God.

We must conclude that hostility to life is caused not so much by the wrongness of things as by inability to receive the love that is offered. But those who will humble themselves to become as little children will understand forgiveness.

After all of the gruesome events surrounding the execution of Jesus, including the failure of the Romans, the Jews, the disciples, and all semblance of order, Jesus rose and commanded that forgiveness be preached everywhere (Luke 24:47). Peter had to come to terms with this on very personal grounds. He had denied Jesus and perhaps no longer thought of himself as an apostle.

But he was mentioned personally when an angel first reported the resurrection (Mark 16:7) and Jesus appeared to him personally later on that first day (Luke 24:34). Having re-assured him, Jesus seems to ferret out any last vestiges of self-trust, or of self-deprecation by asking him three times: 'Do you love me?' (John 21:15-29). Earlier, Jesus had said to the disciples: 'You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you' (John 15:3). But Peter must now have known an inner cleanness superior to anything he had known before. No-one could feel as clean or as secure as when he knows he is totally dependent on the forgiveness offered by Christ.

In the OT, God encouraged his people to enter into a new era of their history in which judgement was past. Through the prophet, he said: 'Comfort, comfort my people --. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned' (Isaiah 40:1-3). These words are doubly suited to the era of grace.

Like Peter, or like the OT people of God, let yourself be surprised by love. God's love has been expressed in Christ's offering for our sins, and love is perfected in us when we have confidence for the day of judgement. Fear has to do with punishment, but perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:10, 14-19). The bondage of fearing death is eradicated (Hebrews 2:14f).

Day after day, and throughout our life, the surprise continues. We are prompted by our failures to suspect that his forgiveness is suspended, but his love is total. Christ has, by his single offering, perfected for all time those who are sanctified. (Heb 10:14). We love simply, because he first loved us.

GROUP OR PERSONAL STUDY

Check these references and discuss the questions that follow.

Hebrews	2:14f
Romans	3:21-26
Romans	4:18-25
Romans	5:1-5
John	21:15-19
1 John	4:10, 14-19
1 Corinthians	15:56

1. In what ways does the prospect of death affect the lives of people who have no faith in Christ?
2. How has Christ demonstrated love in a way that meets our need? (Note: the answer must deal with the question of condemnation.)
3. What are the difficulties we have in believing we are righteous in God's eyes? If appropriate, answers should be personal.
4. What changes in attitude to life may be seen in a person who is secure in the love of God?
5. What was the basis of Peter's love for Jesus? What made it so secure that Jesus could anticipate Peter's willingness to die for his Lord?

SOMETHING THAT'S MAKING ME SHOUT

Hey, I have found something that's making me shout
And it isn't because all my plans have worked out.
Yes I have found something that's making me shout,
And I'd love you to hear and know what it's about.

I fought to uphold my own pride and esteem,
But the Lord has done more than I ever did dream,
For now I am his and he's keeping me clean
And I'm only beginning to see what this means.

In Christ I am blameless and share with the Son
All the Father's own love for his greatly loved One.
And still there is more - we have only begun:
We will share in his glory in ages to come.

I'm sure that by striving no person could gain
Such a love that's so strong and unlikely to change
And pardons my failures again and again,
And shows me the prize I am sure to attain.

Well now I am his and this world is his too,
I am looking about for some work I can do.
I know that my Father has plans that are true,
So I'm ready to do what he shows me to do.

Study Six:

LIVING BY LOVE IN A WORLD OF HATE

Throughout this series of studies, we have asserted that this world is God's and that it must therefore be ruled by love. This is the faith-view of things, and Christians cannot walk other than by faith. However, with our eyes, we see man's hate, greed, jealousy, and rebellion.

But Jesus came into this very real, evasive, restless, accusing world. And he came to us, without accusation but with forgiveness. We must see now, that as Jesus has been sent into this world, so have we. Let us see what this means.

No-one can truly live in this world other than in the context of Christ's love. Paul said (2 Cor. 5:14-16) that he would no longer look at anyone from a human point of view, and that the love of Christ controlled him. He could see that Christ had died for all so that none need live selfishly any longer. If ever this vision of Christ's love is dimmed, all possibility of loving fades away. It remains a principle of our life that we love, because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). Jude warns: 'Keep yourselves in the love of God' (Jude 21).

Because love is actional it must flow in order to remain. That is, it must be shown to others. Paul had a vision of the church as a whole community building itself up in love (Eph 4:15f). In so many ways, all of us have deficient capacities for receiving God's love and giving it. But in a community of love, these capacities may be enhanced and encouraged. Mysteriously, love for God and man are intertwined, and one cannot learn one without it affecting the other (cf. 1 John 4:20).

Love is not weak. God's grace trains us to renounce irreligion and to live godly lives (Titus 2:11f). Some fear that the availability of forgiveness opens the door to licentious living. But this is to misunderstand grace and love. The grace was first revealed to

us as an act of judgement. Jesus bore our curse. And God's love cannot be treated as a deposit to be held.

It is more like an electrical current that must complete a circuit to have any effect. For example, to be forgiven and not to forgive is a contradiction in terms. So grace, or love, trains us in living by love.

If the Spirit of Christ is given freedom in us, we will let go of all accusation, and resentment, which as we have seen arise mostly from our own sense of guilt, and we will discover a whole new world-view. God is being patient with sinners in this age of grace. Some presume on God's kindness and assume that a day of reckoning will not come. But the return of Christ is locked into God's patience (2 Peter 3:3-10). We long for the return of Christ, and so we should. But we must learn the patience of God who waits to be gracious (Revelation 6:11).

Love is not without wisdom. Jesus warned his disciples of the troubles they would encounter from civil and religious authorities and from their own families. He sent them out as sheep among wolves but told them to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16-23). Paul knew what rights he had as he travelled as an apostle, and he used them to good effect. Love needs to correct and discipline. It can believe all things and hope all things but need not be naive. Our belief and hope for people are grounded in the power of God and not in the goodness of people.

The principles of love need to be applied in all areas of life: in marriages, families, employment, business, citizenship. We are not at liberty to compartmentalise life, or to select the areas where love does not need to apply. God himself chooses the path of our life, and it is at the point where we touch life that his love must be revealed.

Grace cannot be understood out of the context of sin. Paul shows how God chose people before they had opportunity to be deserving (Rom 9:10-18), or when they were least deserving (Ezekiel 36:22-32). If a Christian understands the grace of God, all his attitudes and actions will grow from it (2 Peter 3:18). Because he

fears no punishment from God, he will not need to punish others by hating them (1 John 4:13-21). This opens up a whole new field of relationships in which no one needs to deserve the love they receive or insist that others be deserving of the love they give.

Paul was determined to glory only in the grace that had been shown to him. He could never forget the wrongness of his own sins and the grace that was shown to him. So he felt well qualified to enter into a world of sin and to show the grace that had been extended to him (1 Tim 1:12-17).

God has plans for a new heaven and a new earth in which there will only be righteousness. But for the present, this world is his. It is here that he has displayed his grace and it is here that he calls us to reflect that in all our living.

FOR PERSONAL AND GROUP STUDY

Check these references and discuss the questions which follow.

2 Corinthians 5:14-16

1 John 4:19f

Ephesians 4:15f

Titus 2:11f

2 Peter 3:3-10

Matthew 10:16-23

Ezekiel 36:22-32

1. What is involved in keeping oneself in the love of God? (Jude 21)
2. In what ways does the church assist in a person's understanding of love? What are the limits to this process?
3. In what practical ways does God's forgiving grace train people in righteousness?
4. What is involved in being 'wise as serpents' and 'harmless as doves'?
5. Should Christians of long-standing lose their ability to communicate the freshness of God's grace to sinners?

THIS WORLD IS HIS

Our God has made all things;
In all things we see
His hand as it shapes us
His people to be.

This world is His.
This world is His.
This world is a work of love.
This world is His.

Our Lord who bore all things
That we may be free,
Is risen and reigning,
His people to lead.

This world is His.
This world is His.
In loving we know him.
This world is His.

This world is the Father's.
This world is the Son's.
And we by the Spirit
With them are made one.

This world is His.
This world is His.
And his will is our will.
This world is His.