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# Christ's Message for Today's World

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# Introduction

Few would dispute the fact that there are many enemies of the gospel today. Some would be surprised to know that they, personally, are virtually enemies of it because of the reduced or truncated gospel they preach. The nature and content of the gospel certainly determines the ways and modes we have of preaching the good news. So we have ‘soft sell’, ‘hard sell’ and—as it ought to be—‘true sell’.

In this series of Studies we seek to get back to the substance and heart of the apostolic gospel in order to preach it without fear and favour. We seek to discover afresh the word which the early Christians knew, and in which they lived. Not much will be served by examining and decrying the deficient and wrong ways in which the message is preached in these days. We can use our time more profitably in seeking to clarify the powerful work of the Cross and the Resurrection.

Deficient proclamation of the word has resulted in deficient pastoral understanding and pastoral care. That is why we have chosen the subjects under consideration in this School. We are hopeful that sharing them together will freshen us all, and perhaps stir up the fire in us until it blazes and others catch alight.

## STUDY ONE

# *Kerugma—* Proclaiming the Gospel

### INTRODUCTION: THE MATTER OF THE PROCLAMATION

It is a simple matter to know what the apostles preached. We need read only the relevant chapters of the Book of Acts. If we abstract the various apostolic sermons and compare them we can easily deduce a synopsis of the *kerugma*, the proclamation. The primary Proclaimer is God Himself<sup>1</sup> and He proclaims via His Son Jesus Christ. Thus Acts 10:36–38:

You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

This, then, was the word God sent to Israel through the incarnation of the Son. It accords with Peter’s word on the

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<sup>1</sup> Note how many times in the NT that the gospel is called ‘the gospel of God’. God is the prime mover.

day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22–24):

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

We have to remember that both John and Jesus proclaimed the 'gospel of the Kingdom' (Matt. 3:2ff.; Mark 1:14–15), and also that Jesus said that 'repentance and remission of sins would be proclaimed in his name among all nations' (Luke 24:47; cf. John 20:23). The form of the gospel was known, but we must keep in mind two things: (i) the matter of the Kingdom which Jesus came to proclaim, and (ii) the context in which the gospel was preached, namely that of salvation history. We need to study Paul's 'form' of the gospel, which can be seen in (i) Acts 13:26–41, and (ii) Acts 20:20–27. The first reference shows Paul preached in the same pattern as Peter (cf. Acts 2:22–39; 3:12–26; 5:29–32), and the second passage has the following features:

- (a) The gospel is 'repentance to God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ'.
- (b) It is 'the gospel of the grace of God'.
- (c) It is 'preaching the kingdom' (Acts 8:4, 5, 12; cf. 19:8; 28:23, 31).
- (d) It is 'the whole counsel of God'.

In I Corinthians 15:1–3 Paul speaks of the gospel he preached:

Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

In Romans 10:9 he also gives us a further aspect of preaching which comports with Peter's proclamation, namely, 'if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved'. Acts 13:38 also adds an element: justification:

'Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is freed [justified] from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses'.

Perhaps the best survey of *kerugma* or *euaggelion* is Acts 26:16–18:

'But rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles—to whom I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

#### THE FORMAL PRESENTATION OF THE *KERUGMA*

- (a) Jesus is the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament prophecies. His ministry of teaching, his actions, his

death, resurrection and ascension all comport with the prophecies and affirm him to be Messiah.

- (b) His death was God's act to deal with sin. His resurrection attested to the effective power of the Cross, and affirmed Jesus as Lord over life, death, creation, and all history.
- (c) Men and women must, therefore, believe his Lordship, believe on him, repent of their sins and receive forgiveness from their Saviour, Jesus.

Finally, we have to see that this *kerugma* did not of itself produce results. Only when it was preached in the power—i.e. the fullness—of the Spirit did it bring its fruits (cf. I Cor. 2:1–5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12; cf. Acts 1:8). No other word could have produced these results (cf. Rom. 1:16–17; I Cor. 1:17–18; 2:1–5).

## STUDY TWO

# The Practical Results of the Proclamation

### THE APOSTLES PREACHED AND SOMETHING HAPPENED

The early chapters of Acts tell us what happened when the apostles preached. At Pentecost some three thousand were converted to Christ (Acts 2:41). Shortly afterwards the number was 5,000 (Acts 4:4). In at least one case the whole city came together after the first preaching to attend the second preaching (Acts 13:44).

In all these events two significant things happened. The primary thing that happened was the birth of the church—at Pentecost—and the birth of churches, as described in the ministries in Samaria, Syria, and other places to which the apostles went. The second thing that happened was the change in the listeners who came into new life when they received the gospel. We will now try to trace both these elements.

### The Birth of the Church

Acts chapter 2 gives us a full description of the birth of the church. Both John and Jesus emphasised the need to be baptised in (or with) the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> The gift of power<sup>2</sup>, the gift of the revelation of the Son and the Father<sup>3</sup>, as well as the gifts of love, unity and fellowship would result from this baptism. Both the Acts and the Epistles show that the church had all these gifts and many more beside. Such gifts would enable the church to survive in the face of the odds against it. Not only would it survive, but it would become powerful in bringing fallen humanity to God, and under its Lord, finally achieve the victory described in the Book of the Revelation. Jesus had said, 'I will build my church.' In Acts 1:1–8 Jesus had told his disciples that they would be baptised in the Holy Spirit<sup>4</sup>, receive power and become witnesses to him throughout all Palestine and then to the ends of the earth. A similar message was given in the final sections of the four Gospels<sup>5</sup>, even though often in different words. The apostles would go into all the world, would preach the gospel to every person, would preach repentance and the remission of sins, would baptise nations into the Triune Being of God, and would teach them what Christ had taught them as his disciples. Acts 2 tells us the following things:

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 3:11; John 1:33; Acts 1:5, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 1:8.

<sup>3</sup> John 16:12–15.

<sup>4</sup> How easily the mind slips over the words 'you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit'. This was to be the event of all events for the apostles and the rest of the one hundred and twenty (Acts 1:15). It was to bring in the new era of the day of the Spirit, the day of the Kingdom. See my *The Day of the Spirit* (NCPI, 1985). If we do not understand the coming of the Spirit we will be left with human experience of power, human reasoning only.

<sup>5</sup> See Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:14–18; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:19–23.

- (a) The waiting 120 persons were all filled with the Holy Spirit, having been baptised by him.
- (b) All present heard—via the various tongues in which the group were speaking—'the wonderful works of God'.<sup>6</sup>
- (c) Peter explained to the astonished audience the meaning of the phenomena they were seeing. All was in accordance with a prophecy in Joel, chapter 2.<sup>7</sup> This meant that they were now at the commencement of 'the last days'. The Spirit was being given to create the prophetic community.
- (d) Peter explained that the crucifixion of Jesus was not a terrible accident, but had been planned by God<sup>8</sup> Who Himself had witnessed to Jesus by the doing of signs and wonders.
- (e) Peter told the listening thousands that Jesus had been raised from the dead—particularly according to the words of Psalm 16<sup>9</sup>—and God had raised him up to His throne, from which Jesus was now sending the Spirit, not only pouring him out at Pentecost (Acts 2:33; cf. 5:31–32), but in Samaria (Acts 8:14–17), Caesarea (Acts 10:44; 11:17), and Ephesus (Acts 19:1–6), as indeed throughout all this present age, the age of 'the last days'.
- (f) Peter further explained that Jesus was now Lord over all

<sup>6</sup> For an exposition of the significance and the nature of tongues (i) as a sign on the day of Pentecost, and (ii) as one of the *charismata* (spiritual gifts), see my *Spirit-Baptism: Spirit-Living* (NCPI, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Joel 2:28–31.

<sup>8</sup> See Acts 2:22–23; 4:27–28. Jesus had explained to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus that this was how it had to be (Luke 24:25–27). He had told the disciples three times in Mark's Gospel that the death of the Cross was indispensable (8:31; 9:31; 10:33, 34). They, too, had been scandalised by the thought of the Cross.

<sup>9</sup> Ps. 16:8–11. This Psalm must have been widely known. Paul also used it in Acts 13:35.

things in accordance with the words of Psalm 110:1f.<sup>10</sup> Israel must now see Jesus as its Lord, as well as Lord over all things.

- (g) The effect of this message was to cut to the heart<sup>11</sup> those who heard what they had done—crucified Christ. So afraid were they that they asked the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'
- (h) Peter's response was, 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'
- (i) The response of 3,000 of the hearers was to do just that—repent, be baptised, so receiving both forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit. By baptism they separated themselves from the crooked generation which had crucified Christ and would not repent.
- (j) The new pattern of living<sup>12</sup> formed itself into four significant activities, (i) devotion to the apostles' doctrine, (ii) devotion to the new fellowship, (iii) devotion to the breaking of bread<sup>13</sup>, (iv) devotion to the prayers, i.e.

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<sup>10</sup> This Psalm was well known to the Christians. It is used some 27 times in the Acts, Epistles and the Revelation.

<sup>11</sup> The listening 3,000 were cut to the heart and received forgiveness of sins. The Jewish Sanhedrin heard the same message from the apostles (Acts 5:33) and 'when they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them'. These occasions comport with John 20:23 in regard to the forgiveness and retention of sins. At Pentecost forgiveness came, but in the Sanhedrin the sins were retained.

<sup>12</sup> We ought to recognise that the new warmth of love is linked with the forgiveness of sins. Three thousand persons found the utter cleansing of their guilt and pollution and were liberated to live in the love of God brought to them by the Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5). All too easily do people assume the forgiveness of God—as though it were of no great cost to Him, i.e. that the matter of the Cross was so simple!

<sup>13</sup> This is generally understood to be the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the simplest way possible at each communal meal. In I Corinthians 11 we find mention of 'the love feast', which may have been the same thing, though at Corinth the practice was being abused by some. Some scholars think it was not the eucharist but was spiritual social fellowship of the simplest nature, the same as Acts 2:46.

gathering at the temple for the hours of prayers.

- (k) All who heard came into fear, and many signs and wonders were done by the apostles.<sup>14</sup>
- (l) A new experience of fellowship—the fellowship of the Spirit—manifested itself in the sharing of what they possessed, in sharing meals in one another's homes, and in a new life of praise to God.
- (m) All the while God was adding to the fellowship, day by day, 'those who were being saved'.

This is what we call 'the birth of the church' or—in the words of Christ—his building of his church. All of this was the communal change effected by the proclamation of the gospel.

#### The Personal Change Effected by the Gospel

We can easily trace this in the accounts given in the Acts and in statements in the Epistles. In Acts 2–6 we saw the personal change effected by the acknowledgment of Christ's Lordship, by repentance, the forgiveness of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit. The communal or social change was for them to form into the church of God and to be caring for one another. We see also that there was great joy at the liberating power of the gospel, and the defeat of evil spirits, along—on some occasions—with the healing of many sicknesses. Undoubtedly those hearing the word were born again (I Pet. 1:3), were reconciled to God (Rom. 5:11; I Cor. 5:19–20), became new creatures

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<sup>14</sup> For a useful understanding of the matter of signs and wonders see my *God and Man in Signs and Wonders* (NCPI, 1988).

(II Cor. 5:17), lived in the security of justification (Rom. 3:24; 5:1f.), and in the warmth and wonder of sonship of the Father (Gal. 4:4–6; Rom. 8:14–17).

What we need to emphasise is that none of this takes place without the pure preaching of the gospel in the power of the Spirit.

## STUDY THREE

# The Scandal and Wisdom of the Word by the Spirit

### INTRODUCTION: 'NOT ASHAMED'

In Romans 1:14–17 Paul says he is obligated and eager to preach the gospel at Rome—the centre of the Western world of the day. He said he was not ashamed to do so, and if we wonder why he was not, when every promoter of his own ideas did—and does—this sort of thing, then we must remember that preaching the gospel was different. Other 'gospels' were man oriented. Paul's was a scandal. It was a scandal because it was the message of a man hung on a gibbet who was said to be—by this hanging—the Saviour of the world!

We know that death by crucifixion was considered the most degrading form of punishment, and that no Roman—no matter how criminal he was—was ever subjected to this form of punitive death. In Matthew 10:38 and 16:24 (cf. Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; 14:27), Jesus demanded that anyone who would be his disciple must identify with the Cross on which he—Jesus—would be nailed at the end of his journey.

We certainly have to conclude that central to all proclamation was the Cross. Whilst the form of death was

a scandal, the real scandal was, and is, the fact that humanity needs Christ's Cross to redeem it. An event so terrible as Christ's judgement and crucifixion indicates the dreadful evil of the human race. If it required that sort of death, and all that is implied in the death, then humanity must be very evil.

#### Excursus: The 'Soft Sell'

It is a fact of history that preachers approach their task in the light of 'soft sell', i.e. play down the evil of Man, and seek to show the Cross is the evidence of God's love. Often this has caused us to romanticise the event of the Cross in terms of 'greater love has no man' (etc.), without showing the stark elements of the Cross. Then there is 'hard sell', which almost harshly presents the Cross with a rough 'take it or leave it' presentation and a diatribe against those who won't. The apostolic approach is different, and it is all contained in a passage such as I Corinthians 1:17—2:5. This is what we may call 'true sell' or, better still 'true proclamation', since the gospel is never 'sold'. It is a command, an exhortation, and even an invitation.

#### THE ESSENCE OF I CORINTHIANS 1:17—2:5

In **verse 17** Paul is saying that there is a kind of eloquent human wisdom which might rationalise the Cross into something acceptable, but he refuses to tamper with the true word of the Cross (cf. II Cor. 4:2) lest its truth be obscured, and so its power be lost. Rhetoric may influence people, but the gospel does not comport with the wisdom of Man (cf. 2:5).

**Verse 18** tells us *the word of the Cross is the power of God*, for there is no other way to redeem sinful Man. It prevents Man perishing, and saves him. Paul then launches in the following verses on the themes of human wisdom being foolish, unable to save Man. Thus **verse 19** (cf. I Cor. 3:19–20), quoted from Isaiah 29:14, shows that human wisdom will perish without accomplishing redemption.

**Verses 20–25** can be paraphrased as follows, 'Where is the so-called wise man, scribe or debater—all looked up to by this world, this aeon or era, which thinks in terms of human wisdom—who can effect human redemption? No such person exists, since God's inflexible principle is that by its human wisdom the world cannot even know God. By contrast, the facts are that when the gospel—which seems foolish to the worldly wise—is preached, then men and women are actually saved through this so-called folly: that is, men and women come to faith in the work of the Cross and are saved. What folly do we preach? Well, the religious Jews think of it as scandalous that a man should hang upon a criminal's cross and be regarded as the true Messiah and the Saviour of the world by this repugnant death-action. Jews believe in 'the living God' and they often ask for signs of His livingness by demanding signs from Him (Mark 8:11f.; Matt. 16:1–4; John 2:18); that is, signs confirmatory of His power. The Greeks demand a brilliant rationale of all things: this they call 'wisdom', but then, what wisdom could be discovered in a hangman's cross? When we preach this 'scandal' and this 'folly' the fact is that those called come to know Christ crucified as 'the power of God and the wisdom of God'. They are saved by this folly. This is God's true wisdom and His true power.

In **verses 26–29** Paul shows that it was not great religionists or brilliant philosophers who responded to the gospel. In any case, the believers, for the most part, came from humble origins, so there was nothing in them that aided God in saving them. In fact, it was God who chose them in their weakness and foolishness—as the world regards weakness and foolishness. Yet despised, being nothing, the work of the Cross transformed them and brought to nothing the religion and wisdom of Jews and Greeks of some reputation. Thus, in verses 29–30 Paul makes it clear that everything has come from its true Source—God. It has come through Christ who is our ‘wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption’. In this way Paul dissolves human pride in its religion and its wisdom.

For our preaching purposes, **chapter two, verse 5** is most important. Paul has claimed that the ‘word of the Cross’ is the power of God, and now he says he had spurned ‘disgraceful, underhanded ways’ (II Cor. 4:2) in order to gain their hearing and acceptance of his gospel. The gospel he preached was that of ‘Christ crucified’ (cf. Gal. 6:10). It was the *kerugma* we have outlined in our first Study. He refused ‘lofty words or wisdom’ and felt inadequate for the task, for he was ‘in weakness and in much fear and trembling’; but he did not withhold the ‘scandalous’ and ‘foolish’ message. It came through to them by the Holy Spirit (cf. I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12; Heb. 2:2–3) and was effective. He had told the gospel ‘as it is’, and the faith evoked was not from clever and brilliant preaching and reasoning, but from presenting the *kerugma* (cf. Gal. 3:1). Because his converts were moved by and rested in the true gospel, their faith was valid.

**CONCLUSION: OUR RESPONSE IS TO REJECT HUMAN RELIGION  
AND WISDOM AND TO REST IN THE GOSPEL WHICH WE NOW  
PROCLAIM**

We can explore the Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles for the *kerugma* we proclaim. Each detail can add to the revelation we bring to our people. It is a liberating thought—that we only have to preach what is, and so see the Holy Spirit bring it to the hearts and minds of the listeners, either causing them to reject the truth or to accept it. This is true preaching, in freedom and with anticipation of God bringing the results and founding men and women in the true faith.

## STUDY FOUR

# The Promise of Freedom

### INTRODUCTION: FREEDOM IN GENERAL

Israel knew God's freedom in His deliverance of them from Egypt where they had come to know slavery and its misery. We can draw the conclusion that a covenant people is a free people, free to live under the Kingship of God, free from idols and the oppression of political powers. They know the *shalom* of God in the midst of His protection and providence. This is the teaching of Deuteronomy. At the same time in Deuteronomy Moses warned his people that should they bring themselves under the power of idols, and should they transgress the covenant, then they would come under the bondage of the idols and the judgements of God. Yet even before they resorted to such rebellion God promised them He would further deliver them if they repented. Exodus 34:6–7 disclosed the nature of their Covenant-God. In the new covenant of Christ the same freedom is promised. Freedom is what is essential for human beings to live properly and fully, even in a sinful world.

### Prophetic Freedom

When Israel rebelled against Yahweh He visited them through the prophets. They were called to repentance and obedience. Sometimes their situation seemed so hopeless, but passages such as Ezekiel 36:24–28, 37:1–14 and Jeremiah 31:31–34 were greatly encouraging. God would deliver them from the power of their idols and their evil and bring them to a place of true freedom, as *from the heart* they would come to obey His laws, His statutes, and His ordinances. In Luke 1:68–79 Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, in referring to the covenant promises to the patriarchs, says prophetically:

he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we should be saved from our enemies,  
and from the hand of all who hate us;  
to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us  
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

This freedom was to come through Messiah, who was even now at the portals of Israel. The angel had told Joseph, 'Call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.'

### Christ's Promises of Freedom

Christ made promises of freedom. Luke 4:18–19 is the first pronounced promise:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

'The acceptable year of the Lord' was the Jubilee Year—the fiftieth—in which all slaves, debtors and prisoners were set free, their obligations and punishment being remitted.

In John 8:31–36 Jesus deals with the matter of human freedom, saying that the one who commits sin becomes the slave of sin, but if the Son, who ranges free in the household of the Father, would find one willing to be free, then he would free that person, *indeed!* For the rest, Christ just freed people from their guilt, from demonic forces and sicknesses. He speaks to the woman who was 'bound eighteen years of Satan', and frees her. Others are freed from the guilt of their sin: and so on.

As for the powers of darkness, Jesus has much to promise in regard to freedom from them. In Luke 11:14–23 he speaks of 'the Strong Man' who has his victims in thrall, and then speaks of 'the Stronger than the Strong Man', that is, himself, who will rescue the prisoners from the powers of darkness. In John 12:31, 14:30–31 and 16:11 he spoke of overcoming the prince of this world—Satan—and so setting free those under his bondage.

### The Apostolic Kerugmatic Freedom

By this time Christ—through the Cross and the Resurrection—had liberated men and women from the guilt and power of sin, from the law—a formidable foe. Paul's statement in Acts 13:38–39 shows us the new freedom, so that always the apostles can promise freedom:

Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

Many passages which we will look at in future studies show that Christian freedom was the order of the apostolic day.

### Conclusion: We Must Preach Freedom

We can either preach, teach and counsel from the horizontal position, or from the vertical–horizontal vantage point. The freedom we preach must be total, even if it also has its eschatological dimension. We must be liberators in our proclamation. 'The Son shall make you free' is in some sense our proclamatory banner.

## STUDY FIVE

# Sin's Power: Christ's Liberation

### INTRODUCTION: THE ENEMY IS SIN

Sin is a powerful enemy. We can talk about **four** elements of sin, i.e. its power, penalty, pollution and presence. *Its power* lies in (i) its guilt (Rom. 6:12, 14; I Cor. 15:55–56); (ii) its habituation, i.e. constant practice (cf. Prov. 5:22–23; II Pet. 2:19); and (iii) its alienation of the person from God (Isa. 59:1–2). *Its penalty*—adjudged by God—is linked with guilt, so with the law, the conscience, and the judgement (wrath) of God. *Its pollution* is a fact, for pollution comes when man is separated from God (Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:20ff.; Titus 1:15). *Its presence* never ceases to be present with man (cf. Rom. 6: 12, 14; 7:13–25), at least not until ‘the redemption of the body’ (Rom. 8:23).

### Christ Has Overcome Sin in the Atonement

(a) He has overcome *sin's power* by bearing the guilt of sin, himself (see I Pet. 2:24; 3:18; Isa. 53:4ff.; II Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:24; I John 4:10). The power of sin lies in its

objective guilt, so by bearing the guilt he has broken the power (cf. Rom. 6:7, 10, 12, 14; I Cor. 15:55–56).

(b) He has borne *the penalty* by bearing the guilt of sin (see Gal. 3:10; Col. 2:14–15; and other references above). Man, then, is free from law (Gal. 2:19–20; Rom. 3:24f.) and thus there is no fear of death (I Cor. 15:55–56; cf. Heb 2:14–15; I John 4:18), i.e. of judgement (see Rom. 8:1).

(c) He has borne *the pollution of sin*, taking it upon himself in the atonement (Heb. 1:3; 9:14; cf. John 1:29; Matt. 26:28; I Cor 6:11; Titus 3:4–7).

(d) *Sin's presence* has not yet been overcome, although being present (indwelling sin) it is yet without *effective* power through the atonement. Ultimately it will be utterly banished.

### The Practical Understanding of Liberation from Sin

Romans 6:7 (cf. Acts 13:38–39), with Luke 7:50 (*passim*), provides the key. To be justified from sin (Rom. 6:7; cf. 3:24; 5:1, 17) means Man is in the clear with God (II Cor. 5:19; cf. Isa. 59:1–2), has been forgiven by Him (Jer. 31–34; with Matt 26:28; Heb. 10:10–18). The total cleansing (Acts 22:16; I Pet. 1:22; 3:21; Heb. 10:22; I Cor 6:11; Titus 3:5) means a pure conscience (Heb. 10:22; Titus 1:15), and a breaking of *the habituation* of sin (II Cor. 5:17).

All of this understanding is without value if there is no faith. Romans 1:16–17; 3:22, 25; 5:1; Gal. 2:16–21 all show (i) that grace is prior to faith and so is its initiator and founder (i.e. the grace of God in Christ, cf. Heb. 2:10; 12:2), and (ii) that faith rests on grace and appropriates its gift. Thus Romans 6:1–23 speaks of power over sin because of faith in Christ's death and resurrection. Without

the 'knowing' (v. 9), 'considering' (v. 11), and 'yielding' (vv. 13, 16, 19) of faith, this freedom from sin is not practical.

### **The Continuing Practice of Freedom from Sin**

**Note:** *The following points are not, strictly speaking, part of our subject. They simply show that once having obtained freedom from sin we can live in this freedom. The points are given for pastoral development of the subject.*

(a) The 'knowing', 'considering' and 'yielding' of faith (Rom. 6) has to be habituated. This refuses power to sin (Rom. 6:12, 14).

(b) Sin which is unacknowledged (I John 1:9) becomes a problem. Confession does not obtain forgiveness, but forgiveness demands and constrains to, confession. Thus 'the blood goes on cleansing' (I John 1:7) and Christ goes on being 'the propitiation for our sins' (I John 2:2). Thus, daily, pollution and guilt are cancelled.

(c) Sin, of itself, is always more powerful than 'I, of myself' (cf. Rom. 7:13–15). That is why it must be 'I, in Christ, by the Spirit' in order to have power over sin (Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:6; Rom. 8:13, 37; Phil. 4:13; Gal. 5:16, 18, 25).

(d) One must live in a good conscience (I Tim. 1:5, 19; Heb. 10:22; Titus 1:15; cf. Acts 24:16; I Tim. 4:1–4).

(e) One must live in constant vigilance (Eph. 4:26–31; 6:10–18; I Pet. 1:13; 5:8; Eph. 4:26–31), for 'eternal vigilance is the price of liberty'. Sin has its own deceit (Heb. 3:13), so that the principle of 'flee' or 'shun' is profitable (II Tim. 2:22).

(f) 'Putting to death', 'putting off', and 'putting on' are

all necessary in the constant battle against sin (see Col. 3:1–17).

(g) We must understand the nature of temptation, which is primarily a 'testing', as in James 1:2–4. We are always enabled in this (I Cor 10:13) to overcome. Temptation is not sin, but see James 1:13–15.

(h) We must go on using 'the means of grace' such as prayer, the Word of God, worship, fellowship, ministry, the sacraments (etc.). These will help us to grow and mature. They will confirm us in Christ's Lordship and the love of the Father.

### **Conclusion to Christ's Liberation from Sin**

Through Christ's work of the Atonement—the Cross and the Resurrection (Rom. 4:25)—we are now totally free from sin's penalty, its power and its pollution. This must be conveyed by the proclaimer. It is all part of the full *kerugma*.

## STUDY SIX

# Satan's Power: Christ's: Liberation

## SATAN'S BEGINNINGS

If we use the resource materials of Isaiah 12:12–21 and Ezekiel 28:1–19, which are prophetic oracles against the kings of Babylon and Tyre respectively, and adduce from them the *principles* by which Satan works, then we have some indications of his origins. That is, he was an angel—a son of God (see Job 1:6ff.; 2:2ff.)—and probably an archangel (see Rev. 12:3–4; cf. II Cor. 11:3, 14). That he was linked with the tempting serpent can be seen from Revelation 12:9, and possibly John 10:10a. Whatever these beginnings, we must not be ignorant of Satan's devices (II Cor. 2:11), and of course, of Satan himself.

Pastorally a discreet and careful teaching of the prince of evil and the powers of darkness can be most helpful. A wrong teaching may bring people into states of irrational fear and morbidity. The following should be helpful as basic doctrine.

**(1) Satan seeks to build a system which will at least rival that of God.** On this basis we would expect to see a

counterpart of everything that is God, and this we find:

- (a) God is Father: Satan is a father (I John 3:10ff.; John 8:44f.)
- (b) God is King over all: Satan has a kingdom (Luke 11:18).
- (c) All nations are under God: Satan claims all the kingdoms (Luke 4:5–6; cf. Rev. 13:7–8).
- (d) All worship belongs to God: Satan seeks that worship (Luke 4:5–7; Rev. 13, 4, 8; cf. II Thess. 2:4).
- (e) God is Triune: Revelation 13 shows us the dragon as ruler of all, the first beast as himself incarnate, being wounded but rising from the dead (a mortal wound which was healed), and the second beast who is as a lamb with horns and has 'breath' ('spirit') and who prophesies, i.e. who is an unholy spirit.
- (f) God has His woman (mother, bride, wife) and Satan has Babylon, 'the mother of harlots'.
- (g) God has His Holy City: Satan has his unholy city, Babylon ('that great city').
- (h) God's people have His name ('Father') written on their foreheads: those of the dragon have the 'mark of the beast' inscribed on them.

**(2) Satan has a power complex by which he seeks to achieve his goal,** composed of one third of the angels, including special principalities and powers (Rev. 12:4, 7). He also has demonic forces (see Rev. ch. 9), and captive mankind (I John 5:19; Eph. 2:1–3) which has rebelled against God.

**(3) Satan uses many means to trap and keep his**

**victims** (cf. II Tim. 2:26). He threatens (I Pet. 5:8), deceives (Rev. 12:9), seduces (II Cor. 11:4), lies (John 8:44), blinds man's eyes to the truth (II Cor. 4:4), and is a killer (John 8:44; cf. Gen. 3:3:4; John 10:10). He rules man by fear of death, i.e. fear of judgement (Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15). This comes through accusation via the conscience.

**(4) His character is shown in names or descriptions of him**, i.e. 'devil', 'dragon', 'tempter', 'accuser', 'destroyer'.

### OVERCOMING THE ENEMY, SATAN

(i) Christ has already overcome Satan (John 12:31; 16:11; [cf. John 14:30–31]; Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15) by destroying human sin and guilt, thus destroying the fear of death.

(ii) Christ lives in us—greater than Satan, who is, anyway, only a creature (I John 4:4; 5:4; cf. I John 2:12–14). It is he who leads us in victory (I Cor. 55–58; II Cor. 2:14).

(iii) Thus we overcome Satan daily by faith (I John 5:4; I Pet. 5:6–9; James 4:7; cf. I John 2:12–14). This faith must be entirely in Christ, his atonement and his present working, and must be wholly in humility, since pride—even of defeating Satan—is dangerous (cf. I Tim. 3:6).

(iv) This faith is in the finished work of Christ, and so it refuses accusation (Rev. 12:10–11). Even so, the believer seeks to have a clear conscience in this faith (Acts 24:16; Heb. 10:22; Titus 1:15; cf. I Tim. 4:1–4).

(v) Constant vigilance—though not fearful and nervous

apprehension—must be exercised (I Pet. 5:6–9; cf. Eph. 6:18; I Pet. 1:13).

(vi) We must live daily in the security and strength of the armour of God (Eph. 6:10–18). This means practical living in truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, and in proclaiming the Gospel of peace, using the Word of God.

(vii) We must have no links with darkness by occultic practice (see Acts 19:11–22) and we must refuse idolatry in any form (i.e. 'covetousness'; Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5). I Corinthians 10:19–22, Leviticus 19:31, and Deuteronomy 18:9–14 show us that demons are linked with human idolatry.

(viii) We must be careful not to 'give a place to the devil' (Eph. 4:26ff.), especially by having anger, even 'righteous anger'.

(ix) We must recognise that we are in a constant battle, but that we do not fight a lonely, individualistic warfare; we are in company with Christ, his people, and his celestial powers.

### CONCLUSION

The pastoral use of the defeat of Satan is evident. It is also part of the *kerugma*, since Jesus told us Satan would be defeated at the Cross. Also I John 3:8 speaks of Jesus destroying the works of the devil. From the kerugmatic point of view, Christ's Lordship is over every adverse power and so over all idols. Undoubtedly we have covered too much detail for one study, but the material here could be drawn out into a series.

## STUDY SEVEN

**Death: Man's Liberation****MAN A SLAVE TO DEATH**

Death is called 'the last enemy' in I Corinthians 15:26. Hebrews 2:14–15 shows us that human beings are all their lifetime, through fear of death, subject to Satan's bondage. Paul Tillich once said, 'Man fears death, not because he has to die, but because he deserves to die.' He deserves to die because of sin. Hence Romans 6:23 says, 'The wages of sin is death'. He means that the outcome of sinning is death. I John 4:16–18 shows us that the fear of death is the fear of judgement. The writer of Hebrews (9:27) says—in the midst of a wider argument—'It is appointed for men to die once and after that comes judgement'. So this whole matter of death troubles the human race, since it will come to every one, and so 'fear of death' shows itself, really, as 'fear of life'. All life is troubled by the fact of coming death. Of course this is not always a conscious fear, but it is present, without doubt.

**What the Fear of Death Does to Man**

When Hebrews 2:14–15 speaks of human persons being all their life subject to the bondage of Satan, it is telling us a significant story. All human beings try to secure themselves against death. All are in competition with one another to preserve themselves. Hence the rivalry, emulation, and extent to which some go to gain what they seem to think is security. There is the dreadful guilt that dogs all persons in their consciences. The rivalry and elements of self-preservation reach into the heart of the church, into the family, and into all society. Anxiety, enmity and hatred grow, and social evils spring from trying to win the best positions, or trying to compensate for the *angst* we have towards the matter of death.

**Satan and the Reign of Death**

Satan's lie to the primal couple was, 'You shall not surely die!' If John 10:10a refers to Satan, then it is most appropriate. The serpent led humanity into death. At the same time Man was responsible for his decision, 'Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned' (Rom. 5:12). Paul tells us that 'because of one man's trespass [Adam's trespass], death *reigned* through that one man'. Man is under the reign of death, which is a terrible thing.

Paul also tells us that 'the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law'. Satan as 'the accuser' constantly brings the judgement on sin to Man, and terrifies Man to dread of that judgement. Pastorally we ought to understand the fear and dread of death, the weight of guilt that keeps

persons in restlessness of spirit, and the rivalry of which we spoke above. We need to know that part of the *kerugma* which we can share with our people.

### Christ's Triumph Over Death

We must realise that Satan only has one weapon, namely 'the fear of death' which is at the same time 'guilt of sin'. Christ 'bore the sins of many', 'bore our sins in his own body on the tree', was 'made to be sin for us', so that he effectively suffered our guilt, the curse, and wrath of God on sin. It is clear from John 12:31, 14:30–33 and Luke 22:53 that Satan came at the Cross to accuse (cf. Jude 9) and Christ took the accusation (cf. Ps. 22:12–18), and in bearing the guilt liberated us from it, and so from the fear of death. He was 'put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification'. That means he 'abolished death and brought life and immortality to light' (II Tim. 1:10). He had told Martha that he was 'the resurrection and the life', and so the sting of death was withdrawn, and the power of sin was broken, and Jesus 'destroyed him who had the power of death, even the devil' (Heb. 2:14–15). He made an open show of Satan's evil principalities and powers (Col. 2:14–15), triumphing over them in the Cross by destroying the 'handwriting of ordinances that was against us'. This is the same as saying, 'He gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age [*aeon*] according to the will of our God and Father' (Gal. 1:4). In every way, then, Christ triumphed. So the hymn-writer sang:

When Satan tempts me to despair,  
And tells me of the guilt within,

Upward I look and see him there,  
Who made an end to all my sin.

### The Application of the Defeat of Satan to the Pastoral Situation

We can conclude that by accusation Satan can stir guilt in the conscience and remind of terrible events of the past. He can keep men and women in fear of death and judgement. However, 'Perfect love casts out fear, for he who fears is not made perfect in love'. The 'perfect love' of the Cross has dealt with Man's sin and guilt and set him free from accusation and the Devil's power. Sin's sting has been withdrawn, and sin's power has been broken. Now the believer is free. John could write and say, 'I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one,' and could add, 'Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world' (I John 2:13, 14; 4:4). Henceforth, when we stand in faith, the devil flees from us (James 4:7; I Pet. 5:8–9). As Lord of all, Jesus stands at the heart of the *kerugma* and bids us be free from the old sin and guilt, and so break the power of Satan forever.

Of course, many cannot grasp the theology of death. Some of our people are not given to theology, so that it is our ministry and responsibility to open to them the wonder of liberation from the fear of death. The defeat of Satan is seen in Revelation 12:7–11. He is presented as 'the accuser of our brethren', and the saints scorn that accusation, for 'they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for *they loved not their lives unto death*'. These last words constitute the triumph. The saints reject accusation, for they are justified and so they do not fear death: 'perfect love'—the love of the Cross—

has cast out all fear. The use of Scriptures such as John 11:25; Philippians 1:23b; II Corinthians 4:16–5:9 and I Corinthians 15:35–58 give great comfort both to those facing death, and those who are bereaved. The little book *Dear Death or Dark Devourer* (NCPI, 1989) is a useful book for pastor and people.

## STUDY EIGHT

# The Law, the Curse, God's Wrath: Christ's Liberation

### THEOLOGY AND PRAXIS

Many pastors are so busy with the matters of people in trouble, with births, weddings and burials—to say nothing of the constant calls to help the flock—that they slip out of the mode and mood of study, of meditating personally on the word, so that they just 'get by' with the sermons and Bible studies they have to give. They come to look upon theology as something they covered in seminary, and they minimise their reading and study. This is a great shame, and leads to thinness in ministry, lack of substance in teaching, and diminished life of power and holiness. It also helps to drive pastors to methodologies for freshening the life of the church, and keeping or enlarging their congregations. Most tragically of all, such pastors tend to pass over the problems of their people. Where there is wounding 'they treat it as though it were a scratch' (Jer. 6:14; 8:11–12). They are not doctors of the soul. In no place is this more evident than where they fail to understand the place of God's law, the curse of the law, and the wrath of God. Ministry always seems to tend towards the horizontal and leave out the vertical. This is a deep tragedy. We must

see Man in the light of the law, of its curse, and of the wrath of God.

### **THE RELATED ENEMIES— LAW, THE CURSE AND THE WRATH OF GOD**

#### **The Wrath of God**

The wrath of God is His inexorable opposition to all that is evil, unholy, and destructive to His creation. There is no such thing as abstract evil and abstract good. When God created He saw that all was 'very good', that is, functional and in conformity with its Creator, the Holy God. Wrath is His way of going about to destroy all personal forces that are evil and finally impenitent. In the Old Testament all nations came under His wrath, as at the Flood, as at Sodom and Gomorrah, and, later, as in the judgements of the both kingdoms of Israel. His wrath was on persons (Ps. 7:11) and nations (Ezek. 7:5–9).

In the New Testament it is shown that His wrath is being revealed from heaven upon all who suppress the truth in (acts of) wickedness (Rom. 1:18–32). The *mode* of His wrath is to give men and women up to their sin, and to the guilt of their sin. This giving up serves to compound the sin and the subsequent wrath. The New Testament also speaks about a 'day of wrath', and this is a theme in the Old Testament, especially through the prophets. This wrath will be shown on 'the Day of the Lord'.

#### **The Law of God**

For kerugmatic and pastoral purposes folk must come to know that the wrath of God is felt in the conscience and

that it is directly connected with law. His law is personal. It is not 'the law *from* God' but 'the law *of* God'. Hence just as the law is personal, so is His wrath linked with that law (Rom. 1:18). Briefly we think of the law inherent in Man and corresponding to the functional nature of the creation. The law given in covenant at Sinai was not the first law humanity knew (cf. Rom. 2:14ff.) but was the first written or coded law prescribed by God. Psalms 1, 19 and 119 show its innate beauty, glory and functional usefulness. Paul was one of Israel who had 'a zeal for God but not according to knowledge'. He, with others, saw the works of the law as a way of self-justification. He was abysmally wrong and, on meeting Christ, warned both Jews and Gentiles against his former error. He shows that the law brings us under wrath (Rom. 4:15), increases the transgression and delineates it (Gal. 3:9). It acts as a medium by which sin is incited and increased (Rom. 7:5, 7–12. It slays men and women on the basis of judgement (Rom. 7:5, 9; Gal. 2:19). It finally shuts Man up to the way of faith—since there is no other way to true justification.

#### **The Curse of the Law**

The law demands death of those who transgress it (Deut. 27), but its terror, pain and horror are contained in the curse (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26; 21:23). The curse, in practice, is really the wrath of God. God's wrath is linked with rebellion against His holy law, and so it works in the conscience of the sinner, even exacerbating sin through the law's prohibition (cf. Job 1:5; Rom. 7:5, 9).

Thus the three things of which we have spoken are in essence the one. We cannot oppose the law of God without

opposing Him, and so wrath and the curse come upon us. What is the way out of all this?

### **FREED FROM THE LAW, THE WRATH, AND THE CURSE OF THE LAW**

Romans 3:19–20 tells us that the law brings us to the universal place of guilt: all human beings are guilty before God. The law does not justify us, but it does bring the 'knowledge of sin', which is a fearful thing. The self-justification of Man and the failure to see God's way of righteousness (Rom. 10:1–4), which is justification by faith, cannot be understood until God's righteousness which is 'apart from the law' comes to us as a revelation. The law will have its due judgement and punishment of us, and this it does by slaying us (Rom. 7:9–11; Gal. 2:19), but then it did that in the Cross (Gal. 2:19–20) and we died to the law in the body of Christ's death (Rom. 7:4). That is why in Romans 6:7 Paul says, 'He who has died is *justified* from sin'. Romans 3:24–31 tells us that Christ's death satisfied the law, and Colossians 2:14–14 indicates that the 'handwriting of ordinances that was against us' has been paid—so to speak—by the death of Christ who became sin for us, and bore our sins in his body on the Cross: hence there is 'no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus'. Believing Man is freed (justified) from the law (Acts 2:38–39), and this is a vital part of our *kerugma*.

The wrath of God and the curse of the law are virtually one. The term 'propitiation' (Rom. 3:25; I John 4:10; cf. Heb. 2:17; I John 2:2) means that 'satisfaction' has been given to God, in the face of His wrath, for the violations of His holiness which our sins have executed. In the Old

Testament, God provided the means of propitiation as a gift (Lev. 17:11). In the New Testament, God sets forth His Son as a propitiation so that His wrath is averted from us, to be borne by the Son. This 'bearing of sins'—that is, their guilt—is the same as 'the bearing of wrath' and must be seen in the light of Romans 3:14–25; I John 4:10; II Corinthians 5:17; I Peter 2:24; 3:18 and similar Scriptures. In other words, we must preach justification by grace, through faith, as the way out of the torment of guilt into the liberty of the Christian person.

### **THE PASTORAL USE OF THE *KERUGMA* OF CHRIST AN FREEDOM<sup>1</sup>**

In the face of many therapies which attempt to help folk such as are members of our congregations, it is helpful to bring flock back to 'the great eternities'—the things of the *kerugma/euaggelion*. Many of us pastors will have to be renewed in these, or even perhaps discover their reality for the first time, by revelation. The preaching of the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians is a good way of proclaiming the gospel, and the gospel will do its own work. Because so much confusion reigns about the matter of human guilt, it may be necessary to help people personally, but we should always avoid mediatorial ministry. We should take them to the clear word of forgiveness of sins and

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<sup>1</sup> I would suggest the two booklets *The Cleansing of the Memories* and *If We Say that We Have No Sin* (NCPI) could be well used; also the NCPI booklets *Commanded Repentance and Full Forgiveness* (CTS. 4) *Faith, Justification, Conversion and the New Birth* (CTS. 5) and the larger treatment *Freely Flows Forgiveness*. Two other NCPI books could also be helpful: *Where I Love I Live* and *The First Principles: Studies in the Basics of the Gospel*.

justification from the guilt of the law. We must remember there is no justification as a theological entity but the *action* of God the Justifier through Christ who is our wisdom, justification, sanctification and redemption. Likewise Romans 8:1–2 (cf. I Cor. 2:4; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12) is useful to show that the Holy Spirit is the one who applies the justification of grace to the believer.

The teaching of justification by faith—rightly done—will clear our congregations largely from both legalism (nomism) and antinomianism, and help to heal relationships and reconcile differences.

## STUDY NINE

# Recurring Legalism: The Freedom of True Law

### THE NATURE AND DANGER OF NOMISM

Nomism is ‘conduct in a religion based on law or laws’. Theologically it is the use of the law as a way of life and the only way of life. In practice it is generally the endeavour to justify oneself by works of the law. Where a person has come to justification by faith, that one can often revert to law as a way of maintaining, retaining and sustaining his/her justification by law. Legalism is the attempt to justify oneself by works, but often even the idea of justification is not in mind so much as a slavish adherence to law in every detail. Lutheran and other Reformed doctrine constantly had nomism and legalism in mind.

Because sanctification is stressed in the New Testament, and holiness is commanded, the gospel of sanctification seemed to bring people to again set about obeying the law. Thus—in some minds—the keeping of the law equalled sanctification. In some cases nomists insisted that the law demanded full obedience (cf. Rom. 8:3, ‘the just requirement of the law’) when one became a Christian, and more so since obedience to the law was the way of experimental

holiness of life. Some Reformers saw this as reverting to law as a way of (self)-justification. In their reaction to this danger they tended to minimise law. Often they went over into the camp of antinomianism.

### The Heresy of Antinomianism

The antithesis of nomism and legalism is antinomianism. The teaching of justification by faith alone was often followed by an antipathy for law because of its onslaughts on the human spirit relating to sin, the wrath of God<sup>1</sup>, and the impossibility of being justified by works of the law. Rather than fall into the danger of nomism many rejected the law as being harsh and legalistic, and not a fit entity to be followed by the person of faith. Moreover, they understood themselves to be free from law because of statements such as 'you are not under law but under grace' (Rom. 6:14), 'you have died to the law . . . We are discharged from the law' (Rom. 7:4, 6). Since, too, law is 'the power of sin is the law' (I Cor. 15:56), it was assumed that law no longer applies to the believer. Of course, some simply said it was 'the law of Moses' to whom Paul referred, whilst others said it was law in any form. Some insisted that there is a law of the Spirit and a law of Christ (Rom. 8:2; I Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2), and linked this with the comments in Romans 13:8–10; Galatians 5:13–14 and James 1:22–25; 2:8–13, and came up with a law which was flexible, generally not prescriptive and based on love, being directed inwardly by the Holy Spirit (cf. Ezek. 36:24–28; Jer. 31:31–34). This later has often been looked upon as a milder form of antinomianism. An interesting

comment is that folk such as the scribes, Pharisees and lawyers who were seemingly nomistic were yet really antinomian in that they altered the law of God. Whilst we call them legalists, they were those who 'passed over the weightier matters of the law' such as 'justice, mercy and faith' (Matt. 23:23; cf. Micah 6:8) and really plotted out a way of giving which was not difficult and certainly not essentially nomistic.

Nomism and legalism are deadly in a congregation, and 'safe evangelicals' seem often to walk this path.

### Wrong Reaction to Nomism

Whilst nomism is against God's grace in its essential form, yet in reaction to nomism many have landed in antinomianism. We must stand free of both heresies. Nor is there a middle course between the two. There is only the true way: being given the gifts both of justification and sanctification by grace (*justification*: Rom. 3:24–25; 5:1, and *sanctification*: Acts 20:32; 26:18), these being received by faith. Whilst the law had to deal harshly with us in order to be a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, yet law should not be looked upon as harsh. Paul, who spoke much about the difficulties in relation to law, spoke of it as 'holy, 'just', 'good' and 'spiritual' (Rom. 7:12, 13, 14; cf. 7:22). Nothing higher or better could be said of it. It is the law *of* God, and not primarily the law *from* God.

### The Freedom of the Law

If Romans 7:1 (*AV*) is taken as a dogma, 'As long as a man lives he is under the law', then Man is never without law. It is a self-evident fact that humanity has to have its

<sup>1</sup> See for these things Study Eight (above).

laws to be socially operative. At the same time, it could have many laws of its own making, and this is, in fact, the case. What we are concerned with is whether the Christian person and community is under *a* law, and if so, *what* law? Primarily the Christian should be under the law of God. In Romans 8:1–4 the believer has been released from law's condemnation in order to have fulfilled in himself<sup>2</sup> 'the just requirement of the law'. This he/she does by walking not after the flesh but after the Spirit. Such a person has 'the mind of the Spirit' or 'the mind-set of the Spirit'. If the one having the mind-set of the flesh is inevitably against the law and refuses to fulfil it, then the one in the Spirit does not rebel against the law of God but rather fulfils it and so 'pleases God'. We should be able to take it, then, that the believer looks to have the law of God—that is, the 'just requirement of the law'—fulfilled in himself.

Of course, in all of this Christ has already fulfilled the for the believer the entirety of the law, for he is 'the end (*telos*) of the law' (Rom. 10:4). The believer has no aim of self-justification in mind, since he/she is already, and for ever, justified.

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<sup>2</sup> We need to keep two things in mind, (i) the believer does not set out to fulfil the law as though put upon to accomplish this, for the law is fulfilled in him, and this means (ii) that when he appears to fulfil the law it is neither monergistically nor synergistically that he does this. If we look at such passages as Philippians 1: 2:12–13; 4:13; I Thessalonians 2:14; 5:24; Ephesians 3:20, then we see that we neither work from our own resources, nor float passively on the stream of God's action. Our relationship with God is the context in which we are constrained by Him (II Cor. 5:14) and assisted by Him, so that by Him the just requirement of the law is fulfilled in us. Another way of saying this is, 'It is all by faith which works through love.'

### The True Law of the Triune God

The law is constantly called 'the law of God', and so must never be seen or contemplated apart from God, as though it could possibly be detached from God and be an ontological entity existing on its own! In this sense it is not a law from God, but—rightly understood—God Himself. It has been called 'the outshining of His Nature'.

In the New Testament the so-called 'hard' elements of the law relating to sin, wrath and death are not of the inner essence of the law, but are elements which operate in Man's sinful, fallen condition. Primarily the law is to give life (Gal. 3:12; Lev. 18:5; Rom. 7:10; Ps. 1:1–3; 19:7; 119: 77), though never 'to make alive' (Gal. 3:21). It is the way of life for those who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. Hence the beauty and wonder of the law in Psalms 1, 19 and 119—to name a few! What is, then, 'the law of God' is also 'the law of Christ' and 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus'—however that verse may be exegeted! Only if it is the law of the Father, the Son and the Spirit can it be wholly called 'the law of God'. If it is the law of God, then it must be the law of love, for the Triune God is love. Love is what Christ calls it in the Gospels (Matt. 22:34–39; Mark 12:29), and Paul and James say the same thing (Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:13–14; James 5:8 *passim*). Now, love is the only way of freedom, but it is love which is holy, ethical, and the outworking of the twofold injunction to love God wholly and one's neighbour as one's self. That is, it is *agape* which has its origin in God, comes to Man (Rom. 5:5; I John 4:7f.) and—so to speak—continually circulates from God to Man to God to Fellow-Man in a divine perichoretic movement. We can call this 'relational freedom'. Man, made in the image of God,

has affinity with God, and so is at home and lives in His law.

When James (1:25) talks of 'the perfect law, the law of liberty', then he is saying exactly what the Psalmist said (119:32): 'I will run in the way of thy commandments when thou enlargest my understanding [heart]'. Enlarged by gospel love, this is what happens. Likewise (119:45), 'I shall walk at liberty, for I have sought thy precepts'. Jesus said, after giving commandments, 'If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them'. Psalm 19:11 says, 'In keeping them [the commandments] there is great reward', and James echoes, 'a doer that acts is blessed in his doing'. To all of this we could add that the precepts of the law are the functional way of life. The Preacher says (Eccl. 12:13) 'The whole of Man is to fear God and keep His commandments'.

#### **THE PASTORAL VALUE IN THE FREEDOM *FROM* LAW AND THE FREEDOM *OF* THE LAW**

This scarcely needs to be said. Freedom *from* law is freedom from its condemnation and its horrific elements always condemning and making restless the sinner. The freedom *of* the law is that the person who walks not after the flesh but after the Spirit delights to do God's will. He pleases God, and to please God is to get great pleasure for oneself. Both of these facts are of immense pastoral value. One is freed from nomism and legalism, and then kept from and prevented from falling into the heresy of antinomianism, and so one lives in freedom. A congregation which lives this way is a free one, but has no tug to licentiousness or a judgemental spirit.

## **STUDY TEN**

# **The Cost of the *Kerugma*—The Price of Grace**

### **NO CHEAP OR EASY PROCLAMATION**

We should be aware that there is no such thing as an easy gospel or cheap grace. The gospel and grace are free, not cheap. They are neither hard nor soft. They are of God, that is, of His very Nature. and are thus strong whilst at the same time showing the so-called 'weakness of God' (I Cor. 1:25: II Cor 13:4; cf. 12: 5–10; 11:29). In one sense, the making of the gospel—the proclamation—is immensely costly to God, and the proclaiming of it, by us, costly also to us. In another sense, it flows from the sweet grace of God, and its gift of proclaiming given to us is rich and wonderful, the greatest gift and highest privilege we possess.

For this Study—one which is most important—I thought it would be good to show something of the cost to God and Christ, and to look at the cost it is to us in ministry (cf. Luke 14:25–33), always keeping in mind that God's love did not look at the cost, and our 'counting the cost' is in regard to ministry, and not in regard to salvation which is free.

### The Cost to God the Father of Our Redemption

'God so loved the world' is the key to His great grace in redeeming Man. Hence the Father sent His Son into the world that we might live through him and not perish, and He set forth His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. He withheld not His only Son, but abandoned him up for us all (John 3:15; I John 4:9–10; Rom. 8:32; cf. Romans 8:1–3). He also had in mind our adoption, that we might be sons of the Father (Gal. 4:4-6; Rom. 8:29; cf. 8:18–21).

### The Cost to the Son of Our Redemption

A passage such as Philippians 2:5–11 spells out the *kenosis* of Christ in coming into this world, and we do well to explore it. At the same time, no 'cost' is indicated, but only the expression of his great humility and love. More powerful—in regard to 'cost'—is II Corinthians 8:9, on which text we comment briefly.

***For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.*** Paul is now speaking of something even greater than what the Macedonians had been doing. It was right for them to so do, but the great *example* and *principle* of Christ's grace is what the Corinthians must look to. This must be their constraining and motivating drive and force. The aim Paul has for the poor saints is that they might become rich as all God's people are rich through Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension. At the same time his aim is that the Corinthians might become poor as Christ became poor, for such poverty was the very essence of the nature of the Son, and indeed the very Godhead. Ephesians 5:2 shows

us the *manner* of Christ's giving of himself, i.e. walking in love, 'as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God'. So, too, John 1:14 and Philippians 2:6–11 show us 'the mind' of Christ in all this action. As to 'the poverty' of Christ, it was not in the fact of his *incarnation*, but in the degrading horror and pain of his saving work—his becoming sin for us (II Cor. 5:21), his bearing our sins (I Pet. 2:24), and in his becoming *as* unjust (I Pet. 3:18) and thus in his bearing of the Father's wrath in the atonement (Rom. 3:24f.; I John 4:9–10). That was when 'he descended to the lower parts of the earth'. The enrichment of us was that he took us out of the death of sin into the righteousness of life, and into the abundancy of the new life, giving us great hope of our inheritance (cf. II Cor. 12:9; Rom. 5:1ff.; Eph. 1:3f; 1:17f.; 2:4ff; Phil. 4:11–13; 18f.; I Pet. 1:3f; 1:13f.).

### The Cost of Proclamation to the Proclaimers

It is well for us not to take our calling too lightly. Paul said 'We are stewards the mysteries of God', and this is a high—a very high—calling. Many passages in the New Testament testify to this. Our point is that it is a cost, and yet no cost in the light of the joy of ministry. If we remember that 'by the mercy of God we faint not', then we will take up all suffering as we go, and cheerfully endure. For the cost to Paul read II Corinthians 6:3–10 and 11:22–29. In fact, II Corinthians is the greatest exposition of suffering for Christ's sake. For purposes of our present Study we present some exegesis of II Corinthians 4:7–16.

***4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.*** The treasure is *the light of the knowledge of the*

*glory of God in the face of Christ*—surely something of incredible wonder and beauty—but it must not be mistaken for the person who carries it. The *but* shows that by contrast the earthen vessel is frail and not a primary thing of beauty. The weakness of the human vessel shows *the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us*, for if it is a light in a pottery lamp, then the lamp has no glory glowing of itself. If—as seems to be the better image—it is a pottery vessel containing great treasure, then the pottery will never be mistaken for the glorious treasure. So then, it is God's power, but the marvel is that the treasure is in the human vessel! Paul now proceeds to show how weak the vessel is, and yet how that weakness actually shows the power of God.

**4:8** *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;* Paul is now showing the *way* of ministry. Whilst 'all men who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' (II Tim. 3:12), yet the adverse things happening are the *way* the gospel is proclaimed. The persecution, therefore, does not depress or destroy the proclaimer. To the contrary: he is always (4:10) *carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies*. The *death of Jesus* here is 'the killing' (*necrosis*). In this sense the proclaimer is actually bringing the event of Calvary to the viewer-listener. He sees in the receiving of persecution the very life that Jesus manifested at the time of the Cross. The believer who has been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20) is now expounding in his suffering the event that happened long ago, *so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh*, i.e. the life that gave itself in death is shown vividly. In Galatians 3:1

Paul said that through his preaching 'Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified'. What we have to understand is that just as the watchers at the crucifixion were enraged by Christ, so they are now enraged by these who show forth that death, particularly in its significance, for the Cross confronts all humanity with its own rage at the Holy One, and its own need for such a Cross, and this is the hardest blow to human pride. The rest, then, naturally follows, i.e. (4:11–12) *For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you*. That is, that as the *necrosis* is carried about and confronts those who see and have it expounded, this rage provoked will seek to damage the 'earthen vessels'. Yet this is not 'a useless being given up to death', for it is a dynamic and vivid portrayal of Calvary and the saving event which brings life to the hearers who will receive it. So the suffering is not useless but life-giving, although it is death to those who oppose the death of Christ (cf. 2:14–16). Without it, the Cross could not be truly expounded, and as the word of the Cross is the power of God (I Cor. 18; Rom. 1:16–17), then the priceless treasure within the earthly vessels is displayed, and indeed the treasure requires the *earthen vessel* in order to be expounded. That *mortal flesh* can be the agent of life coming to those who hear the gospel is a remarkable thing.

**4:13** *Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we too believe, and so we speak:* we need to read Psalm 116 to get the full import of this saying. The Psalmist has suffered greatly and has prayed for deliverance from enemies. Verse 10 (which is quoted here, though somewhat differently) says, 'I kept my faith, even when I said, "I am greatly afflicted."' '

What Paul is saying is, 'My suffering did not cause me to lose faith in God. Indeed, it was in the midst and depth of that suffering that my faith was strengthened.' He is also saying, 'As the Psalmist said he believed God even more so in the suffering, so we have believed God, and it is out of that experience that we speak.' That is, when you are in the business of the gospel you speak from personal conviction and reality, and cannot but speak. If speaking brings death to the mortal body it brings life to others, and that is where the reality of ministry is so rich.

**4:14 knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.** Paul knows that death has no sting, and causes no real fear (John 11:25; I Cor. 15:55–56; Heb. 2:14–15; I John 4:18). He and his Corinthian readers will be raised by God as Christ was raised 'by the glory of the Father' (Rom. 6:4). So they will all come, ultimately, into the presence of God. How little powerful, then, is suffering to cause fear in the proclaiming believer! The text below amplifies this thought of Paul.

**4:15 For it is all for your sake:** In verse 12 it is 'for Jesus' sake'. Here it is *for your sake*. This is the principle of Philippians 2:3–8—the considering of others before oneself. **as grace extends to more and more people:** grace is abundant (cf. Rom. 5: 17, 20, 21; Acts 4:33) and thus full in its action. The true response to grace is gratitude—indeed, the return of gratitude after Man's refusal to thank God (Rom. 1: 21). **it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God:** thus the fruits of the Cross and the suffering of Christ's servants will bring great glory to God as believers make their response to 'abundant grace'.

**4:16 So we do not lose heart.** Paul is repeating 4:1, but whereas there mercy aided him to proclaim the new

covenant, here he is speaking about enduring suffering and truly preaching the gospel so that fruits ensure from it. **Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day.** The **outer nature** is the 'outer humanity, the body, the bodily humanity'. It is being worn down by the suffering that comes to it as 'mortal flesh', and one day will die and decay. The inner nature is 'the inner man' (Eph. 3:16; Col. 3:10; cf. II Cor. 5:17), which the context shows is really the essence and building up of that which shall appear in glory. The renewal of this inner nature is not merely keeping it at a steady level, but—as in 3:18—is causing it to expand and grow 'from one stage of glory to another'.

**4:17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison:** Paul is saying that the present affliction believers suffer is quite light. This is, of course, *by comparison* with the **eternal weight of glory**, for glory is substantial. *Kabod* in the Old Testament carries the idea of 'weight' and 'substance'. Undoubtedly Paul's sufferings were heavy enough (cf. 11:23–27). In one sense Paul is saying (as in Romans 8:17ff.) that suffering not only prepares us for glory, but prepares glory for us. Thus glory is superlative—the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the glory of the gospel, and the glory the gospel promises (cf. I Cor. 2:6–10).

**4:18 because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.** The verb here 'to look' is 'to concentrate upon'. There is no dualism here, no putting down of what is seen, as though—in the Platonic sense—it is not what matters but is only a shadow of the reality. No: he is saying that as

we face the difficulties—the tearing down of our bodies because of persecution—we do not count these the abiding realities. The principle of Colossians 3:1–3 is partly found here. We are ‘citizens of heaven’ (Phil. 3:20–21) and we concentrate on the matters of eternal life, glorification, the inheritance; and so on. The present is real enough, but it is the outcome of this process of the outer humanity wearing away and the inner humanity moving to its glorious completion that keeps us going in the face all pain and suffering. The even greater glory of the gospel is as yet unseen, but to the eyes of the faith it is seen, and so it is on that we concentrate. Colossians 1:24–29 is somewhat of a parallel passage to our present one. The unseen—but not unknown —mystery is perceived in the reality of suffering, namely ‘the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory’.

Now that glory is not only future, for it is present (II Cor. 3:18). It is not only present, for the glory has always been, since it is God’s glory. It is the past present in the now-time as also in the coming future in the sense that the sight of celestial glory has been almost wholly hidden from us—the things that are unseen’, but at times this has been manifested in such events as theophanies, the coming of angels, and heavenly announcement at Bethlehem by the angelic choir. It is that to which we are going, so that suffering is—by comparison—a light thing. The things of the *telos* will also be new and better even than what has been, since there will be a new heaven and a new earth, with all that pertains to it for the members of the great Kingdom of God. This is why now the ‘inner man’ has his being in relation to all God’s glory and is one with the ultimate *telos*. So he concentrates upon that, to the exclusion of all other things.

### **CONCLUSION: THE COST OF THE *KERUGMA*— THE PRICE OF GRACE**

What we have not included in the cost to the Triune God is the pain and suffering of the Three Persons in regard to the Cross, and the going down into human death. For the moment we must leave any exposition of that mystery, but unless we personally understand that ‘the ransom of a man’s soul is very costly’ and constantly ponder this mystery, we will make overmuch of our own suffering, and too little of God’s. Our suffering is for the glory of others (Eph. 3:13) and even of God—the Giver of ministry.