

**‘THE APOSTOLIC FAITH
IN TODAY’S WORLD’**

PASTORS’ SCHOOL 1998

Evening Sessions

by Geoffrey Bingham

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Copies of the Morning Studies are available in a separate volume

STUDY 1

THE APOSTOLIC TRUTH BURSTS ONTO THE WORLD

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

BEFORE THERE WAS THE APOSTOLIC TRUTH: THE TRUTH THAT WAS BEFORE IT

Biblically we say that there has always been the truth of God. Jeremiah 9:23–24 had said:

Thus says the LORD: ‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the LORD.’

Hosea had cried, ‘Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD’. Israel in its life and scriptures assumed its knowledge of God. Without the Old Testament, the New Testament would have been unintelligible. It not only recorded God’s dealings with Man in general and Israel in particular, but it also gave the eschatology we find when John the Baptist speaks of Jesus; the forgiveness of sins, the outpouring of the Spirit and the coming of the Kingdom. Jesus likewise speaks of these things; speaks of his own work, ultimately declares himself as Messiah and the Son of God, and speaks of the future of creation.

There was certainly, in his life and work, the *forming* of the gospel, but not yet its completed truth, for that awaited his death, resurrection, ascension and reigning. It awaited the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to give the gift of the gospel, the whole counsel of God, and the full understanding of it all.

THE HOLY SPIRIT TO COME AT PENTECOST & THE WORK HE WOULD DO

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus told his disciples that he would pray to the Father and that the Father and he would send the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Spirit would be: (i) to bring everything he had said, to their remembrance; (ii) to teach them all things—that is the ‘all things’ he had done, been and said—so that they would

understand them; (iii) to lead them into all the truth; (iv) to glorify Christ and the Father to them; and (v) to convince (convict, rebuke) the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. After the Resurrection, he said they would testify to him in all the world after the Spirit had come upon them. To testify or witness meant they would tell the truth. We ask ourselves, ‘What was the truth the Spirit would lead them into?’, and the answer is ‘the gospel’, or ‘the apostolic truth’, which Paul would later call ‘the whole counsel of God’. Whilst in John 20:21–23, the disciples are given—and must receive—an affusion of the Spirit, yet in the main the disciples, Jesus’ other followers and, in fact, the whole world, awaited the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, for that day would open the new era. Of course the Spirit had been in the world from its creation, but the world awaited his coming in order to understand the truth of God, as it is the gospel, the gospel formed by Jesus’ incarnation and all his works.

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AT PENTECOST

We know that Jesus had taught his disciples well, but we also know they grasped little of what he said and did, and certainly there was no theologian—say, like the later Paul the Apostle—to interpret all that had happened. Certainly his death was unintelligible to them and they had no expectancy of his resurrection, although he had told them of both. Saul of Tarsus would never have understood what had happened in and through the man Jesus. No one would have grasped this truth. Study 9 on Thursday morning will speak of Jesus’ references to the Spirit during his ministry, and what would be the constant work of the Spirit from Pentecost onwards. Here, at this point, we wish to see the acts and significance of the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost.

We note that, as a matter of time, Jesus had ascended into heaven ten days before. There were fifty days between the Passover and Pentecost, forty of which Jesus had used to teach his disciples about (i) the kingdom of God, and (ii) the coming of the Holy Spirit to baptise his followers. We take it that 120 followers had gathered together ‘in one place’. It was early in the morning when the Spirit came, attended by certain signs. There was a sound from heaven *like* a rushing mighty wind. Tongues *as* of fire being distributed to all, resting upon each head. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in tongues. The listeners who came together at the time of this happening heard the apostolic band speaking in the varieties of the tongues of the listeners.¹ That is, they spoke and all listeners heard what they said in their own languages or dialects. It appears that the theme was the extolling of God and the recounting of ‘the amazing works of God’.² Let us never forget that the sound of a rushing mighty wind, the total filling of a certain location and its people, tongues of fire, are not to be taken casually. Acts 2:17–38 not only

¹ There are three opinions regarding the tongues spoken at Pentecost: (i) that they were human languages, the native languages of the hearers; (ii) that each of the 120 spoke in tongues such as described in I Corinthians 14, but that they came through to the hearers as intelligible tongues; and (iii) they only spoke in unintelligible tongues but that the Holy Spirit caused the tongues to be understood by the listeners. It is difficult to come to any conclusion. The most obvious one seems to be ‘(i)’.

² In Acts 8:17, the Samaritans who had heard Philip’s word and had been converted were ‘filled with the Spirit’, but there is no mention of tongues or of praising, though they may well have been present. What is different about this event is that they had experienced great amazement and joy before this infilling (8:6–8). In Acts 10:44–46, the Gentiles to whom Peter had gone in Caesarea were filled with the Spirit and seemed to act as had the 120 at Pentecost in Jerusalem. It is fair to say that at Samaria the Spirit had shown them much of Christ, and they had seen the work of the Spirit before they were infilled. In Caesarea it was the gospel—‘the word of truth’—which brought the hearers to experience being filled with the Spirit.

point to the wonder of the day and its significance: they point to the Man, crucified and risen and now Messiah of God and Lord over all the universe. Forgiveness has come, incorporation into Messiah and the continuing gift of the Holy Spirit. Laud Pentecost so that its power and meaning may never be ignored.

What we are in danger of doing is hearing the story of Pentecost—we have heard it so many times—nodding our heads in sincere agreement that it happened as an historical event, and yet be missing the wonder and the significance of it. It was a most unusual and supernatural event by which God brought full revelation of the truth to Man for the first time. Undoubtedly what happened on the day of the Cross was changing the history of the world. Never before could the world be forgiven—as a world. Never before had Satan and evil and death been decisively defeated. These are soul-shaking and world-shaking matters, revealed for the first time at Pentecost. Likewise, what happened in and through the Resurrection was an irreversible and transforming event: never before had the reality of a person being resurrected for ever been known to the world, nor had the promise of the resurrection of all who believed in God even been envisaged! In the event of the outpouring of the Spirit, there had come into history a radical change. Human beings could now know the truth of God in a way never before possible. That truth would be the revelation of the work of the Triune God. It would be the truth of God worked out in Jesus Christ in history and wholly unveiled by the Holy Spirit so that human beings could understand God!

If, previously, the disciples were so often bewildered by what Christ said and did, and if the truth of God seemed covered by many veils, then this was no longer the case. Pentecost altered that for all who would believe. The truth had so come to those filled with the Spirit that everything was now known to them. No wonder they were given the signs of holy wind, holy fire, and holy utterance! Notice that the signs are unashamedly overt, real and unmistakable as to their significance. This was a once-for-all happening. The truth had come as a full blast of wind, and filled every part of each and of all of them. Now they understood. It may well be that the equivalent of revelation came at Samaria and Caesarea, but before the filling was the preached word in all its power. The word preached, received and fully revealed by the Spirit, firstly to them and then in them, meant they also understood the apostolic truth. The preached word and the filling of the Spirit added up to Pentecost in its effects, the difference being that the Spirit came first at Pentecost and the word was liberated by that infilling, mainly because the truth had become explicit.

The Apostolic Truth Set for Ever

In one sense, the first part of the apostolic truth was the Old Testament, that is, all that is contained in ‘the law and the prophets’,³ both in what had happened in all history up to the Incarnation, and in the prophetic predictions concerning covenant, Israel, the person of Messiah and the future of Israel and the Gentiles. The climax of all these things would be what is known as the *eschatos* and the *telos*—the last age and its climax.

The second part of the apostolic truth was Christ himself, the Incarnation, his person and works, and him as the fulfilment of all the prophecies. The two parts come together forming one whole, and this new whole is the apostolic truth, the whole

³ The habit some have of referring to the Old Testament as ‘the law’ is regrettable. It is ‘the law and the prophets’. ‘Law’ without ‘the prophets’ casts law in a fashion other than it is cast in the Old Testament; ‘the prophets’ without ‘the law’ are unintelligible.

counsel of God, and the understanding of it all is by the Holy Spirit. This is what happened at Pentecost so that the gospel was now formed and complete, and could be declared in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

What is heart-warming and mind-calming is the *fact* that the truth—the gospel—is now formed and, in the best sense of the term, immutable. Modes of presenting it and explanations of it may change from generation to generation and culture to culture, but the truth is unchangeable. We may have to work at this truth, in some cases, in order to know what was said and written, but we cannot depart from it when it is fully known. This may appear to present the apostolic truth as static. Far from that, it is dynamic. If it is changeable then it can never be properly known.

THE WAYS IN WHICH THE APOSTLES KNEW THE TRUTH & PROCLAIMED IT

In Acts we see the Apostle Peter's sermons and the Apostle Paul's sermons. We also see the 'apostolic' teaching of Stephen, Philip and others. In Acts 2:42–47 Luke wrote:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

This passage describes two things: (i) the constant life of fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers, and (ii) with this was daily attention to the Apostles' teaching. We assume that whilst the Apostles received a full revelation of the truth of the gospel at Pentecost, many elements were constantly coming to them, and that they passed all of these things on to the community. This was a new age, *the* new age, the *age* of Messiah, the *age* of the Covenant come to its new fullness. The truth had come cleanly, freshly and clearly to all recipients of the Spirit, and they understood all 'the wonderful works of God'. Thus they lived in fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. They lived in the truth. They lived in the presence of Christ, and they knew the truth which had set them free, and was continually setting others free. Satan had been defeated. The new life was the life they lived. The result was the love and social care and concern for all, shown in the daily distribution to those who had need. We need to capture this, in our minds, as the outcome of the salvation all had come to know and continued to experience. The way of life was as much the apostolic truth as were the elements of the *kerugma* or *euangellion*.

Only the Apostles Were Pre-eminently the Tellers of the Apostolic Truth

In one of our coming Studies we will be talking about the Apostles being the primary witnesses to Christ (cf. Acts 1:8), as Jesus had said they would be. Briefly, here, we saw that the apostles had to be those chosen by him, who had been with him from the time of John the Baptist and had witnessed his resurrection. Paul does not quite fit this although he was a witness to the Resurrection. Certainly he was commissioned as an apostle by Christ. *The concept of witness has some juridical sense.*

The Apostles were placing evidence before their hearers so that they would have to make a decision about truth. The Spirit was, and is, the Spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit was to lead them into all the truth. Pentecost unfolded this truth to them.

This does not mean other—indeed all—Christians cannot know and proclaim the truth. They can: they ought to do so, but their source of that truth must be from the Apostles. We may venture to say, ‘By the Spirit now opening up to us the truth as the Apostles received it’. This means that what comes to us can and must be checked out by what is in the New Testament, and that the Holy Spirit is as necessary for us to do this today as he was to guide the Apostles to their understanding. He is here for that very reason and purpose, and it is he who keeps fresh and astonishing the Apostolic truth which burst onto the world at Pentecost to the Jews, in Samaria to the Samaritans and in Caesarea to the Gentiles—thence to the whole world. The truth keeps peeling out today to the uttermost parts of the earth. No wonder the Apostles are firm about the truth they expound, are jealous for it and oppose anything which departs from it, or seeks to be a substitute for it. For example, when Paul says in the beginning of his letters, ‘Paul, an apostle, by the will of God’, he is stating that what he has preached, written and is presently writing is that apostolic truth.

How weighty a matter, and how thrilling! The apostolic truth has burst onto the world, being revealed by the Triune God and revealing the Triune God. To know that truth is to know God, and to know Him is life eternal.

STUDY 2

THE APOSTOLIC WITNESS FOR ALL TIME

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

THE DISCIPLES ARE TO BE WITNESSES

In John 15:26–27, Jesus spoke to his disciples about witnessing:

But when the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.

The important point he makes is that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit will bear witness to him. The disciples *are* witnesses for they have been with him from the beginning, and are qualified to *be* witnesses. In Luke 24:44–49, Jesus tells the same disciples again that they are witnesses of the things he says will happen in the world—such as repentance and remission of sins—because they have witnessed what has already happened in Christ’s incarnation and ministry. They are not to attempt to be witnesses until they are ‘clothed with power from on high’, that is, with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, ‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth’.

Our conclusion from these sayings of Jesus is that the disciples have witnessed the life and ministry of Jesus, and now they are to bear witness to Christ, but this will not be possible until they are baptised with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and receive power then to carry out such witness. The Book of the Acts is studded with references to witnessing, which was borne not only by the disciples—they having become the apostles—but by others also who were Christ’s followers and servants (cf. Acts 2:4ff.).

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY WITNESSING?

‘Witness’ in the Old Testament

What, then, do we mean by the terms ‘witness’, ‘testimony’, ‘witnessing’, ‘bearing witness’, ‘bearing testimony’, and so on? The original thrust of witnessing was to

testify to the truth. It was a term mainly of the law court, that is, juridical. A witness was one who testified against a person, or for him. Technically, a witness should simply tell what he/she saw and leave it at that. It was the business of the judge to decide the case as he assessed the witness or witnesses, and the substance of their testimonies. In the Old Testament, witnessing was so significant that a whole commandment is given over to saying, ‘You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour’. Behind this precept is the aim of preserving the truth. False testimony was wrought with heavy punishment, for it is sheer lying. In the Old Testament, God often witnessed, that is, stated the truth about a thing or person. Sometimes He was called upon to do so. It was basic that God was the truth, that His truth reached to the heavens. The word ‘truth’—from which ‘amen’ derives—is often understood as ‘faithfulness’ or ‘trustworthiness’, for nothing false or untrue is present. Hence, ‘Thy word is truth’ speaks of God’s word. We are not speaking an abstraction when we say ‘God is truth’. In showing He is the True One, God speaks to Israel in Isaiah 44:6–8 (cf. 43:8–13):

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel
 and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
 ‘I am the first and I am the last;
 besides me there is no god.
 Who is like me? Let him proclaim it,
 let him declare and set it forth before me.
 Who has announced from of old the things to come?
 Let them tell us what is yet to be.
 Fear not, nor be afraid;
 have I not told you from of old and declared it?
 And you are my witnesses!
 Is there a God besides me?
 There is no Rock; I know not any.’

Israel is to witness to God, that is, say Who He is, what He has done and will do (cf. Isa. 43:10–13). The ‘David’ is a witness to the people (Isa. 55:3–4). Israel was always fed the truth from God. They must never deviate from the pure truth. Idolatry is the worst form of false witness. In one sense everything witnesses to God: the creation, the media of God such as His word, theophanies, angels, His covenant, His law, His people and His prophets. Powerful is Psalm 36:9, ‘For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light do we see light’. They who are idolaters and apostates witness against that which is true. God is true, and what He does is all part of the truth of Him.

‘Witness’ in the New Testament—I: Its Order

The same idea of setting forth the truth of God is found in the New Testament. The juridical element is almost always present. Humanity has to be faced with the truth of God, as it is in Christ Jesus and as made dynamic by the Holy Spirit. As of old, those faced with truth must decide for or against it, for or against God. Witnessing is direct to each person, and demands an answer one way or the other. Refusing the evidence for the truth, the person comes under judgment. It is in Acts 14:17 that Paul said, ‘[God] did not leave himself without witness’. He does not amplify his statement. In the context, providence was one of those witnesses, but the principle is general enough to include all witnesses.

The order of being a witness and witnessing must be seen and understood:

- (a) *God as the I AM witnesses to Himself and will countenance no other as truth.* Whilst His media also witness to Him, Jesus Christ is ‘the true and faithful witness’, the witness above other witnessing elements. He has come from God and speaks only God’s words and shows only God’s acts, and in this sense witnesses to God as the incarnate truth.
- (b) *In John 3:11–13 Jesus shows he is the witness to where he has been, with God and so, to God:*

Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man.

This thought is expanded in 3:31–36:

He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth belongs to the earth, and of the earth he speaks; he who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony; he who receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit; the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.

Christ has witnessed to the Father, and the truth of Him must be received or rejected. In Revelation 1:5, ‘Jesus Christ the faithful witness’, is firstly witnessing to God the Father, and then to the truth. John 18:37 gives us perhaps our strongest verse in this regard, ‘I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth’. John 1:18 contains the equivalent idea.

- (c) *The Father witnesses to the Son in the pronouncement at the Baptism and the Transfiguration* (cf. II Pet. 1:16–18). Undoubtedly it was the Father who sent John the Baptist to bear witness to ‘that Light’, to say, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’, and ‘You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth’. In John 5:30–47 is a general passage on the witness to Christ. He prizes the Father’s attestation. In 5:34–37 Jesus says:

Not that the testimony which I receive is from man; but I say this that you may be saved. But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me.¹

- (d) *The Apostles are to bear witness to Christ, as we have seen in John 15:26, Luke 24:44–49, and Acts 1:8.* We will enlarge on this in the text below. They cannot bear witness apart from the Holy Spirit.
- (e) *The Holy Spirit directly bears witness to the Father and the Son, and then through the apostles and the apostolic people and the word of truth.* I John 5:7 says, ‘And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth’. John 16:13 calls him ‘the Spirit of truth’, and adds that he has the power to lead them ‘into all the truth’.

¹ Note that in this context Jesus has many testimonies to his being true, namely John the Baptist, the works the Father has given and enabled him to do, and the Scriptures.

Thus the Spirit bears witness to the Father, which is seen in 16:14–15.

‘Witness’ in the New Testament—II: Its Action²

From the above we grasp the idea that witness in the New Testament is directly witness to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that that witness brings the revelation of the whole truth of God such as is called variously, ‘the wisdom of God’, ‘the counsel of God’, ‘the mystery of God’, ‘the whole counsel of God’, ‘the plan of God’ and ‘the plan of the mystery’. It is really ‘the truth of God’ or ‘the apostolic truth’. It is this witness which the Church is supposed to bring. For the people of God to be God’s witness to the world in the manner in which Israel was intended to be to the world before Christ became incarnate (cf. Exod. 19:5–6; I Pet. 2:9–10), was for the people not only to witness to Christ, but also to the Father and His truth. This truth we call ‘the apostolic truth’.

On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of truth came and revealed the truth to the apostles and the remainder of the assembled company (Acts 2:4ff.). The truth was Christ; the truth was the Father; the truth was the Triune God, His creation, its history especially as it was in Christ, and the things yet to come in history.

Because the apostles and the people understood the truth of God they could now witness to it in the power of the Spirit, though not otherwise.

The Church the Prophetic Community

What we need to see is that on the day of Pentecost there was raised up a prophetic community. This is seen by the passage of Acts 2:16–21:

... this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

It is clear that this is the prophesying community. It will remain thus until ‘the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day’. The Holy Spirit has turned the community into witnessing people, for ‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’ (Rev. 19:10). The Holy Spirit has shown them ‘things to come’, and what is coming is part of the prophetic message—it is the truth of God from the beginning to the conclusion of history. Shortly we will look at the witnessing community in the Book of the Revelation.³

The Acts portrays a witnessing community. Jesus had said the apostles would be witnesses (1:8), and yet the whole community became that (2:4ff., 16ff.; cf. 32). Constantly the statement is ‘whereof we are all witnesses’ (3:15; 5:32; cf. 10:39; 41:13:31). Paul, who was not a witness to the whole of Jesus’ ministry, is named a

² There is much that is missing in this Study which needs to be supplied, and that I have sought to do in the Pastors’ Monday Study Group for July 1998 under the title, ‘The Continuing Apostolic Witness’.

³ Christ has been shown to be Prophet, Priest and King. It is obvious that the Church must be the Prophetic Community, just as it must be the Priestly Community and the Royal (Kingly) Community. Even so, we have not used this doctrinal argument in order to set forth the Church as the Prophetic Community.

witness, personally, by Christ (Acts 22:15, 18, 20; 26:16). In Acts 2 the witness of the community begins with the revelation of the apostolic truth and it is in that truth that the community operates (Acts 2:42). The whole truth of God is lived out in the life of the community which is first in ‘Jerusalem and all Judea’, which spreads to ‘Samaria’ and then flows out ‘to the uttermost part of the earth’ (Acts 1:8).

The Book of Revelation and the Witnessing Community

The New Testament has no message for the Church or the world today if the Church has ceased to be the witnessing community. When we say ‘witnessing community’, we mean ‘the prophetic community’. We mean the community constantly receiving the apostolic truth through the Holy Spirit⁴ and proclaiming God, fully, to the world. This community we find living in the Revelation.⁵

The Book is, itself, clearly a prophecy—‘the revelation of Jesus Christ’.⁶ At the beginning (1:1–2) we are told that John ‘bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ’. Revelation 19:10 says, ‘the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy’, that is, the testimony is the subject and substance of prophecy. In this case ‘the word of God’ is the truth to which testimony is borne. In 1:9, we see John is ‘on the Island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’. We have the first intimations of the cost of prophetic preaching and witness.

We must describe ‘the testimony of Jesus’. It is first the testimony which Jesus completed towards God and His truth, His word, by his life and ministry. It is the witness Jesus began in his incarnation and goes on giving in his present reigning at the right hand of God as he continues the Father’s plan (cf. I Cor. 15:24–28), and this compasses all that is in the Revelation. For believers who are the prophetic community, it is that to which they witness, and they do this by ‘holding’ or ‘having’, through the Holy Spirit, the apostolic truth, which they proclaim by lip and life. To ‘have’ or to ‘hold’ the testimony means the person (community) proclaims prophetically and cannot do otherwise. The prophetic community lives in the testimony of Jesus, and its actions are part of the working out of that testimony. That testimony began with creation and will climax in the new creation.

In 6:9–11, John the Seer sees under the altar ‘those who had been slain *for the word of God and for the witness they had borne*’. We begin to see the dreadful opposition of which Jesus had often spoken, and in particular in John 15:18 – 16:4, for he said this would happen when they witnessed, as he had witnessed to those who could not bear the truth. This was what happened in Jerusalem following the witnessing work of the Holy Spirit. In Revelation 11:1–13, we have the witness of two special witnesses—who are prophets—whose testimony is so dynamic as to disturb evil forces and cause the two of them to be killed. In 12:1–6, we have the red dragon seeking to destroy the woman’s male child, without success. In 12:11, the red dragon is conquered by the people of God ‘by *the blood of the Lamb and the word of*

⁴ It is clear that with the Spirit coming at Pentecost the community became the witnessing Church. In Acts 4:23–37, under a second outpouring of the Spirit, the witness was enriched and extended. In Samaria (ch. 8), Caesarea (ch. 10) and Ephesus (ch. 19), the witness grew with the coming of the Spirit. The emphasis in the Epistles to be continually filled with the Spirit indicates the constant source of revelation and proclamation.

⁵ I suggest reading my *The Revelation of St John the Divine* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1993) and especially the Essay ‘The Testimony of Jesus in the Book of Revelation’. Also helpful could be my monograph *Is Prophecy for Today?* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1982). Very helpful on the principle of prophecy and witness are *The New Testament Concept of Witness* by A. A. Trites (Cambridge Uni. Pr., Cambridge, 1977), and *New Testament Prophecy* by David Hill (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1979).

⁶ It can mean either the Book is the revelation of Jesus Christ, or it is the revelation of what was to happen which was given to Jesus Christ.

their testimony, for they loved not their lives unto death'. Yet later in the chapter, 'Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those *who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus*'.

In 20:4, the martyrs are described as having come to life and to be reigning with Christ in what has been called 'the millennium'. Finally, in chapter 22, we come to many comments regarding 'the words of this book', 'this testimony for the churches', 'the prophecy of this book', with the warning to add nothing to it or take nothing away from it. The angel tells John the Seer, 'I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren the prophets', thus confirming the prophetic nature of the witnessing community.

CONCLUSION: THE DYNAMICS OF WITNESSING

In the Revelation we touched only the edges of the prophetic living and action of the witnessing community. Great principles can easily be seen in regard to proclaiming the 'everlasting gospel' to the whole world, and the consequent rage and persecution by the powers of darkness. All of this is the action and substance of the 'testimony of Jesus' and the community's witness to it by participation. Unless we are prophetic in nature and action, we will be quite ignorant of the meaning of 'the testimony of Jesus' and the present work of prophetic witness. We must seek no other means of ministry than the prophetic one, recognising of course that it is at the same time both priestly and royal—'a kingdom of priests'.

We have one simple question to ask, 'Is the Church, today, the witnessing Church?' Is it, then, filled with the Holy Spirit, anointed and knowing the great truth of God, of Christ, of the gospel? Has it discovered the apostolic truth and is that the truth it is teaching? By dint of endeavour we might rationalise that it has 'the four marks of the church', 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic', but when we look closer, is this so? Does it proclaim the apostolic gospel or has it presumed to modify and even change it? There is a dire warning for such who do take from or add to the witness of Christ, and a rich reward for those who 'keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus'.

STUDY 3

THE APOSTOLIC COVENANT

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

INTRODUCTION: THE MATTER OF COVENANT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Whilst we do not find the term ‘apostolic covenant’ in the New Testament, we certainly know the Apostles understood and taught the New covenant. This knowledge was a background to their thinking, not only because of Christ’s references to it on the night of his betrayal, but also because, as Jews, they had lived in the ethos of covenant, being Israelites. They referred to the covenants God made with Abraham and with David, and the New covenant which He taught through the prophets. If the New covenant figured so largely with the Apostles, then it should figure largely with us, for without it we will not be presenting the apostolic truth, the whole counsel of God.

SOME UNDERSTANDING OF THE COVENANTS BEFORE THE NEW COVENANT

In historical theology we find some of the Reformers speaking of (i) the Covenant of Redemption (*Pactum Salutis*), and (ii) the Covenant with Adam. The Covenant of Redemption was said to have been made with the Son by the Father, before creation, relating to the salvation Man would need when he fell. The Covenant with Adam was said to be made with Adam at Creation, that if Man would obey God then he would receive salvation and so eternal life, but if he failed he would be lost and perish. The *Pactum Salutis* guaranteed salvation to Man through Christ. The failure in the Covenant with Adam meant the *Pactum Salutis* was indispensable to the human race, and it would be a covenant of grace. If we deny these two covenants existed, then the first covenant would have been that with Noah, and was one of not again judging the earth with a flood even if Man were to continue his sinning. The first covenant of saving grace would have been that with Abraham, who believed God was justified; that is, he was saved by faith alone and was promised his posterity would also come under the same grace. Having spoken of the Noahic and Abraham covenants, we would then proceed to speak of the Davidic covenant and the New covenant. The Davidic covenant would be linked with the Kingdom of God as the enlargement of

Israel's kingdom. The New covenant would be that of forgiveness, under the Mediator Jesus Christ, bringing the law of God to the hearts of men and women. It would climax in the *eschaton* and *telos*.

HOW SHALL WE VIEW THE COVENANTS?

Viewing the covenants depends largely on how we view the nature of the Covenant-Maker, God. Historical theology should depend upon a biblical understanding of the nature of God, the Triune God. This will shape its view of the nature of covenant. We mention here that human covenants are contractual because of human imperfection, and we are likely to believe that God must make a *contract* with us. All God's covenants arise from His nature and express it. He only has covenants of love, albeit holy love. Herman Hoeksema makes the following comments about the Triune God in regard to His covenant-making nature:¹

However, as soon as we present the matter of the covenant in this wise, if the life of the covenant in God is such a life of most perfect friendship, of the most intimate communion, of the deepest knowledge and the most affectionate love, it follows, in the first place, that the idea of the covenant cannot be found in an agreement or pact. In perfect harmony and communion of life, in the perfect, eternal knowing of one another, and in the most perfect love and unity, the idea of an agreement, of the conclusion of a pact, does not fit. In such a relation everything is spirit and life. The covenant idea is given with the life of the Triune God in Himself. It rises in eternal spontaneity from the divine Essence and realizes itself with perfect divine consciousness in the Three Persons. God knows and wills Himself, loves and seeks Himself eternally as the covenant God. The covenant is the bond of God with Himself. It is the eternal life of perfect light.

But if this is so in God Himself, this must also be applicable to the covenant idea as a relation between God and man. For all things are only out of God, through Him, and unto Him. Also the covenant relation can never be anything else than an ectypal reflection of the covenant life in God Himself. If the essence of the covenant in God is the communion of friendship, this must also be the essence of the covenant between God and man. If this communion of friendship in God rests upon the perfect essential unity by personal distinction, then this must also be the case with the covenant between God and man: it also must be based upon a creaturely likeness of man to God by personal distinction. If this communion of friendship in the Trinity implies a perfect knowledge of one another, then also the covenant life of man must consist in this, that God reveals Himself to him, causes man to know Him, reveals His secrets to him, speaks to him as a Friend with His friend, walks with him, eats and drinks with him, lives with him under one roof. If the covenant life in God consists in this, that the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity are united in the bond of perfect love, then also the covenant relation between God and man must originate in this, that God opens His heart for man. Then the life of the covenant is eternal life itself. For this is life eternal, that they know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent. Thou in Me, and I in them, that they may be perfect in One . . . Then the covenant is the very essence of religion, the highest good, the very best that can ever be imparted to man through grace, the highest bliss. The idea of the covenant is certainly not a pact or agreement, whether you conceive of such an agreement in the unilateral or bilateral sense. It is the relation of the most intimate communion of friendship in which God reflects His own covenant life in His relation to the creature, gives to that creature life, and causes him to taste and acknowledge the highest good and the overflowing fountain of all good.

And once more, if we may thus conceive of the very essence of the covenant, the covenant also is not a way to a certain end, is no means to the attainment of a certain purpose, is not the manner wherein we are saved. It is itself the highest purpose, the end, the eternal bliss, unto which all things tend and must tend. Then the purpose of all things is always the covenant of God. Then the covenant determines and dominates the whole of God's counsel, and the whole of

¹ Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Reformed Free Pub. Assoc., Grand Rapids, 1966, pp. 321–2.

history concentrates around the highest realization of the covenant of God. That is the sole purpose in creation and recreation. That is the purpose of the Word, of the cross and resurrection, of the uniting of all things in heaven and on earth in Immanuel, God with us. In the covenant of God is found the motive of the struggle of all ages in the world. And in that covenant is found the reason for the consummation of all things. And the idea of the covenant dominates all existence and all life and all relations of the creatures to God . . .

This powerful depiction of God as covenantal within the ontological Trinity—the relationships of the Three Persons being covenantal—gives us the key to covenant. We should draw our understanding of covenant from this source and not from the covenants or agreements humans make between themselves. We must not read ‘contract’ into the covenants God makes with Man. If we are puzzled by the lack of reference to the covenant of God—the covenant of creation—then we can see its explicit use in the first chapters of Genesis would be quite out of character. Likewise the explicit reference to covenantal law would be unnatural.

GOD’S COVENANTS WITH MAN AND CREATION

Whilst we recognise that the Father and the Son—and the Spirit, for that matter—were One in their covenantal intention *before* Creation, yet they do not make a contract between themselves. We can certainly speak of a *Pactum Salutis*, but we must read the word *Pactum* as ‘covenant of love’. Again, God, being covenantal in nature, brings through in creation *a relationship* with Adam which is not an explicitly stated covenant, yet we must say that He had a covenant with Adam, yet by no means a contract. As the *Pactum Salutis* made provision for the fall of Man, so the covenant with Adam made him to be God’s image. The image of God cannot be separated from God or it ceases to be truly the proper image. We take it that the placing of Adam in the Garden from outside the Garden (Gen. 2:15) and giving him a commission for the Garden, and also for all creation (Gen. 1:28–30), showed (i) that he was the friend of God and His covenant-partner, (ii) that he was—as God’s image—king over all creation, God’s regent, and (iii) he was to be to all creation what the Second/Last Adam became to all creation—prophet, priest and king. Adam was to take the things of Eden and fill up the earth with them. This was a glorious covenant, since God dwelled with Man in Eden, and Eden was the place of worship and service to God and to Man. All of this is the heart of covenant.

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH THE COVENANT OF CREATION—GOD’S COVENANT WITH ADAM?

The first 11 chapters of Genesis deal with the events which lead to the call of Abraham: (i) *the creation by God and Man’s place in it* (chs 1 – 2); (ii) *Man’s rebellion against God and, so, the covenant* (ch. 3); (iii) *the matter of Cain and Abel* (ch. 4) and ‘*the sons of God*’ and ‘*the daughters of men*’ (ch. 5); (iv) *the corruption and violence of Man which led to the Flood* (chs 6 – 9); (v) *the new beginnings with the covenant God made with Noah* (chs. 8 – 10); and (vi) *the self-exaltation of Man against God at Babel* (11:1–9), Abraham’s ancestors (11:10–32). What went wrong was that Adam listened to the voice of the serpent and decided to go with its word rather than the word of God. The bad effects of that are seen stretching from Cain to

the tower of Babel. Though Adam broke covenant with God, *God never broke covenant with Man*. Hence His calling of Abraham and the everlasting covenant with Man through him. We now see the stream of covenant from Adam to Christ.

The Covenant with Man, through Adam

This we have discussed above. Man was to be covenant-partner with God, His friend, His worshiper and servant, and he was to Edenise the world which as yet was not sanctified, that is, not consecrated in its will to the worship and service of God.

The Covenant with Noah

The covenant with Noah is almost a reiteration of creation, and so, in intention of renewal or confirmation of the covenant with Man, through Adam. In Genesis 9:8–17, we read:

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ‘Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.’ And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.’ God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.’

The term ‘I will establish’ is in Hebrew *heqim berith*, and William Dumbrell discusses this, under the heading ‘Is the covenant with Noah established or confirmed?’:²

Evidence of this character makes it more than likely that in contexts where *heqim berith* stands (Gen. 6:18; 9:9, 11, 17; 17:7, 19, 21; Exod. 6:4; Lev. 26:9; Deut. 8:18; 2 Kgs. 23:3) the institution of a covenant is not being referred to but rather its perpetuation. We have already virtually suggested in passing that this was the case in regard to the citations referred to other than those in Genesis. We may probably now surmise that what is being referred to in Gen. 6:18 is some existing arrangement presumably imposed by God without human concurrence, since it is referred to as ‘my covenant’. Despite the human sinful condition, he is determined to maintain it. The nature and the details of this arrangement are not clear from Gen. 6:18, though they might with some probability have been inferred from the course of the Genesis narrative to that point. The details will become quite clear, however, when Gen. 9:1ff is reached.

Dumbrell and other writers on covenant see God’s covenant with Noah as something like a reiteration of the creation material. The mandate of Genesis 1:28ff. is repeated, so that in one sense Noah is the new head of the human race. The sign of the covenant is the rainbow by which God binds Himself to exercise grace to Man and the creation even in the sight of Man’s evil (6:5; cf. 8:21; 9:8–17). If this is simply confirming a

² *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology*, by W. J. Dumbrell (Paternoster, Exeter, 1984), pp. 25–26.

covenant which has already been, then we must see all of creation in the light of an eternal covenant of God.

The Covenant with Abraham

Just as the covenant with Adam was universal, and its universal elements renewed in the covenant with Noah, so the covenant with Abraham referred to all the nations of the earth. The nations who blessed Abraham would be blessed, and Abraham would inherit the world (Rom. 4:13). We note that the Abrahamic covenant figures largely in the New Testament.

The Covenant with Israel

Israel was already in the covenant with Abraham. It had become the covenant not only with Abraham, but also with Isaac and Jacob, and Jacob's children in Egypt under pressure are heard by God (Exod. 2:23–25). The liberation from Egypt, the promise of occupying Canaan are the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, and the children of Israel walk in these until Sinai when God makes *a covenant of law* with them. This covenant of law is within the Abrahamic covenant, and is specifically with Israel. It is not, however, a contractual covenant, as such. Abraham—no less than Adam—had known God's law (Gen. 26:5). Properly understood, the law of God was innate in the act of creation. A. J. Motyer observes, 'Man is the living, personal image of God; the law is the written, preceptual image of God'.³ Man, then, was a living transcript of the law: he lived by law, but this must not be taken for 'contract'.

The Covenant with David

This is a special sort of covenant, in that it was made with Israel and Israel as a kingdom, yet Israel had ever been this under its judges and kings, but in God's promises it was to blossom out into a universal kingdom, and the Davidic King, the Messiah was to be its King, yet it was at the same time a covenant. Psalms 2, 89, 110, amongst other references (cf. II Sam. 7:8–17; I Chron. 17:3–15; Isa. 55:3; Jer. 33:14–16, 20–26), highlight this kingdom-covenant. In the New Testament, Christ refers to it, and it is linked with his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as also with his Lordship.

THE NEW COVENANT

We come now to the New Testament and what we called 'the apostolic covenant'. It was promised in Jeremiah 33 with the Davidic covenant, in Jeremiah 31:31–34, Ezekiel 36:22–38 and certain Isaianic passages. Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Matthew 26:27–28 are wedded together. The Cross brings the blood of the New covenant into view. Zechariah the priest, father of John the Baptist, speaks of what is to happen in Christ as the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant (Luke 1:68–79). At Pentecost, in Acts 2:14–39, the Jewish audience was addressed in terms of the Davidic prophecies and the New covenant, especially as Peter says, 'For the promise is to you and your

³ A. J. Motyer, 'The Biblical Concept of Law' in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. A. Elwell (Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984), p. 624.

children and to all that are far off'. In Acts 3:25 the Jewish audience is addressed as 'the sons of the prophets and of the covenant'. In 15:12–21 the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church of the New covenant is explained by the Elder, James. Paul has the New covenant well in view in II Corinthians chapter 3, where he alone in the New Testament speaks of 'the *old* covenant'. The Apostolic band are 'competent to be ministers of a new covenant'. The New covenant is of grace and exceeds the Old in glory. The Abrahamic covenant is fulfilled by Christ in Galatians chapter 3. In Hebrews the prophecy of Jeremiah (31:31–34) is greatly emphasised by the inclusion of it twice in the text (8:7–12; 10:15–17). Hebrews is a wholly covenantal book, but then wholly of the New covenant. Moses the mediator of the Sinaitic covenant is superseded by Jesus the Mediator of the New covenant, hence everything about the New is superior to that of the Mosaic. In the Revelation we have the outworking of the New covenant under the Lordship of the Slain Lamb. The dynamics of eschatology are covenantal. In the new temple with its altar and throne we have present world action. In 11:19, God's temple is opened to the vision of all, and the ark of His covenant is seen within it as law and grace in proclamation. Without the New there can be no gospel! All that is Apostolic truth is dependent upon the New covenant. Matthew 26:27–28 should show this.⁴ This particularly includes Christ as the Second and Last Adam, the covenant Head. All things eschatological are part of the action and substance of the New covenant.

CONCLUSION: THE DYNAMIC BACKGROUND AND SUBSTANCE OF THE COVENANT OF GOD IN THE APOSTOLIC AGE

The Covenant of God is with all humanity from the time of creation. Adam's rebellion cuts off humanity from the Covenant, but God does not revoke His covenant. We know men and women of faith lived within this Covenant. Covenant was not a contract but a loving relationship which redeemed all the world from its sin and ultimate judgment. Given substance, and sometimes form, as Noachic, Abrahamic, Sinaitic and Davidic, it was really the *one* Covenant and one with the New. It had always envisaged all the nations, all humanity as being members, beneficiaries and participants of its grace. Man was always to be a covenant-partner with God his Lover, fulfilling the love-obligations of Covenant relationship, the love-obedience to the eternal law of God, thus being the true image of God. It was knowing that the gospel was to proceed from Jerusalem to all nations that motivated the Apostles to lead the movement towards the geographical, ethnic and demographic fulfilment of the Abrahamic–New covenant (Luke 24:44–49; Isa. 2:1–4; cf. Acts 1:8). Covenant was the key to the internal Divine relationships and the Divine–human relationships that we discover so powerfully in the New Testament. Thus we can rightly speak of 'the Apostolic covenant'.

⁴ See my *Love's Most Glorious Covenant* (Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill, 1997), pp. 92–103, 115–156.

STUDY 4

THE APOSTOLIC FREEDOM

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

Introduction: The Matter of Freedom

It is easy to gather from the pages of Acts that although there were episodes of persecution and attitudes of rejection which the early Christians knew, nevertheless there was a lovely spirit of freedom, of delight in life, of societal care and concern, and enjoyment of one another. This is what we might call the existential freedom of the early community of Christ. Yet this was not based on some ‘happy-go-lucky’ spirit. It was part of the essential nature of the church we call today ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic’. What was the source and support of this apostolic freedom? That we shall try to discover, especially as it should mean as much to us today as to them in those days.

THE PROMISE OF FREEDOM

In Judaism there was an expectancy of freedom, based on the meaning of covenant which, as yet, had not been wholly fulfilled. The prophets, even in the face of God’s judgments, looked forward to a time of emancipated living; emancipated from judgments, from enemies, from guilt bondage and, in promises such as Ezekiel chapters 36 and 37, Jeremiah chapters 31 and 32—to name a few—even from the necessity of the sacrificial cultus to be forgiven, as also to have the law written in the heart, thus coming into the full knowledge of God (Jer. 31:33–34; cf. 9:23–24). Luke 1:67–79 gives us a picture of freedom-anticipation as Zechariah prophesies of the near happening of Messiah’s coming:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people,
and has raised up *a horn of salvation* for us
in the house of his servant David,
as 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
(Luke 1:68–75, emphasis mine).*

There was also the word of the angel regarding Jesus' birth, 'You shall call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins'. This one was to be 'a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of his people Israel'. When he came to maturity and was baptised and tested for his ministry, Jesus gave the liberating promise contained in Isaiah 61:1–2:

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 (Luke 4:18–21).

We are told that then:

... he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

Later, in John 8:31–32, we read of him saying, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free'. They answered him:

'We are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to any one. How is it that you say, "You will be made free"?' Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.'

For the rest, we see Jesus carrying out his liberating ministry, freeing men and women from Satan's bondage, exorcising demons, healing from demonic states, even from death at a certain point of need. This was surely the one who would give freedom to his people. We know that the final act of hatred and murder did not prevent him from doing that, but became the very act and occasion whereby he became the Liberator of mankind.

THE FREEDOM OF THE EARLY CHURCH: APOSTOLIC FREEDOM

It was not until Pentecost that true freedom came. As we have seen, the Holy Spirit gave them razor-sharp definition and understanding of the truth, and it was all contained in this, 'if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed'. Luke 1:68–79, 4:18–19 (Isa. 61:1–2), Matthew 1:21, and John 8:31–36, all came alive and into fruition. Peter made it clear that the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit had come to 'all flesh'. Whoever was to call upon the name of the Lord—Jesus Christ—would be saved. Those who repented and were baptised in the name of Christ would receive the forgiveness of sins and be given the gift of the Holy Spirit. All this was a staggering promise which brought a remarkable result—some 3,000 were baptised and received the gifts of forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit, and how could they not be free? Any way we may take this transformation it was evidently an amazing event. No wonder these thousands—soon to be joined by others—were free in love which was

shed abroad in hearts by the Holy Spirit with forgiveness! No wonder they were all of one heart and one soul and one mind, thought not that their possessions were their own, but sold much that they had and shared with the less-fortunate and the needy. This was what we would call ‘relational freedom’. This was what God through the prophets and Christ had promised and had now fulfilled. The immense power and witness of this freedom should not be underestimated. It was the very way of life of the Apostolic community. We might as well say here that if we have a repeat of the Pentecostal revelation and Spirit infilling then this relational freedom of love will be the outcome, today.

THE THEOLOGY OF FREEDOM

We have touched upon the action of freedom. This is apparent in Acts and the Epistles, for we see the members of the Church in their power, witness, and the truth, spreading to all four corners of the earth, and they are a community of love, testifying to Jesus and displaying his testimony to the world. What, then, lies behind this freedom, and what is its source and motivating power? We can say simply, ‘Jesus the Lord, the Father–God and the Holy Spirit’, and we would be correct, but to have a theological break down of this cause and power of freedom can be most helpful.

The Law and Liberation

This is the sticking point for us all—the law, God’s law. On the one hand it is bondage for the guilty soul, a high standard to be reached by the pious, a basis for self-justification to the legalistic. On the other hand it is the way of liberty for the humble, spiritual man—the man under grace.

- (a) *Let us see firstly that the law is good.* Paul says what true Israelites had always said, ‘The law is spiritual, promises life, is holy, just and good’ (Rom. 7:10–14; cf. Gal. 3:12). ‘Enlarge my heart and I will run the way of thy commandments’; ‘I shall walk at liberty for I seek thy precepts’ (Ps. 119:32, 45, AV). The person in Israel was under grace and saw the law not as a deadly enemy, but as his delight, ‘Thy testimonies are my delight, they are my counselors’ (Ps. 119:24); ‘the ordinances of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb’ (Ps. 19:9–10). Given that Psalms 1, 19 and 119— amongst other Scriptures—see the law as a delight, we have a different picture, it would seem, in the New Testament.
- (b) *Secondly let us see that the law has much to do with sin and sins.* The law is good but sin is a problem. Law works in us to rouse sin to an active pitch, ‘While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death’ (Rom. 7:5). Sin uses the law to force its victims to more sin:

But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me (Rom. 7:8–11).

So, then, the law is used by sin to increase sin in the person.

- (c) *Law is lethal and brings the sinner to death and judgment.* ‘The law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression’ (Rom. 4:15); ‘Law came in, to increase the trespass’ (Rom. 5:20); ‘Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions’ (Gal. 3:19); ‘For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse’ (Gal. 3:10). In Israel the law was kept, not for salvation, but because God had saved Israel (cf. Deut. 5:6ff.), so that it was kept by faith—love’s obedience—and had nothing to do with ‘works-righteousness’. In Galatians 2:19 Paul said, ‘I through the law died to the law’, that is, the law slew me (cf. Rom. 7:11). The judgment of the law is death, and ‘the soul that sins shall die’. We have seen Jesus’ dictum, ‘He that commits sin is the slave of sin’, and Paul’s, ‘The wages of sin is death’.
- (d) *Christ’s death on the Cross met the demands of the law and liberated sinners from judgment and death.* ‘I through the law died to the law . . . I have been crucified with Christ’ (Gal. 2:19–20). Christ’s death ‘nailed the handwriting of ordinances which was against us to the Cross’ (Col. 2:14–15), for in the language of Romans 3:24, ‘they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith’. Without going into the whole matter of Christ bearing our sins, Christ being made sin for us, and Christ suffering as the just for the unjust, we know that God laid on the Suffering Servant ‘the iniquity of us all’.

What Jesus had promised came true in his death: the Son made sinners free. He saved his people from their sins. In accordance with the blood of the New covenant, God has forgiven our sins, and our iniquities He remembers no more. That is, ‘There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set [us] free from the law of sin and death’. On the basis of all the above we can say that the sinner is set free from sin and the law, and hence from judgment, from death, and from Satan and his powers—the world system (cf. Gal. 1:4; 2:20; 3:14; 5:24; 6:10; Col. 2:14–15; Heb. 2:14–15; 10:10–18). Another way of saying this is that the sinner is transferred from the powers of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1:13). Yet another way is to say that the sinner has ‘received the reconciliation’ (Rom. 5:11) and is now warmly in the love of God.

This we must see, that on the day of Pentecost the Spirit came and revealed the effective work of Christ as Saviour and Lord and brought the forgiveness of sins to repentant hearers, and the gift of the Revelator, the Holy Spirit. The community knew itself to be free of all enemies and bondages of conscience. In response to this marvellous love of God it became the love community. Their freedom was the freedom of love and grace. We have seen in our Study ‘The Great Apostolic Grace’, the truth of Titus 3:4–7:

... but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

In abolishing death he ‘brought life and immortality to light’ (II Tim. 1:10).

The Law and Continuing Freedom

We remember that Paul said in Galatians 5:2–4:

Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

If they were to revert to ‘works-righteousness’ by keeping the law, then they would have negated grace and be back again under the old bondage. What were Paul’s suggestions for not getting back under the law with its legalism, and yet, at the same time knowing the obedience that love insists we give? Jesus said, ‘If you love me you will keep my commandments’. We quote this saying, not to insist on obeying law as a principle, but to denote the principle of love-obedience.¹

We know from such passages as Romans 13:8–10, and Galatians 5:13–14, that the moral law of the ‘ten words’, the new law of love²—Christ’s law—was seen by Paul as being summed up in ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’.³ This is virtually how James sees it as he twice called it ‘the law of liberty’ (1:25; 2:8–12). When we are liberated from the *condemnation* of the law, we are nevertheless to please God by keeping the law (cf. Rom. 8:4, 7). Thus we say that being freed from the condemnation of the law, we are free now to obey the law for itself, as the true law of God—the very transcript of His nature and the outshining of Himself, that which is called ‘the law of Christ’ in the New Testament, which he came to establish, and whose goal he was (Matt 5:17; Rom. 10:4). I have taken the liberty of including a number of quotes garnered by Noel Due in his little book *Paul: Apostle of Law and Liberty* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1985):

When once the firey Law of God,
Has chased me to the Gospel road;
Then back unto the holy law
Most kindly Gospel-grace will draw.
—*Gospel Sonnets 1720*

After Christ hes maid agreement betwixt us and the law,
we delight to walk in it for the love of Christ.
—Samuel Rutherford

The Law is of unspeakable use in deriving strength from our Head into His living members, whereby He empowers them to do what His law commands; and . . . in confirming our hope of whatsoever it commands and we have not yet attained.

—John Wesley in *Christian Theology*

¹ It will not hurt to point out here that Jesus, in Matthew 28:19–20, told his disciples to make disciples of all nations, ‘teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’, and this links with Acts 1:2, ‘he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the disciples’. In the Revelation those who ‘hold the testimony of Jesus’ are those who ‘keep the commandments of God’ (12:17).

² See my *Oh, No, Lord! Not Law, Lord?!!* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1979) and *Sweeter than Honey, More Precious than Gold* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1995). Also E. F. Kevan *The Grace of Law* (Carey Kingsgate, London, 1964); *The Law of God in Christian Experience* (Pickering and Inglis, Bassingstoke, 1955); Richard N. Longenecker *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (Harper and Row, New York, 1964).

³ The order of living out the law of love would appear to work out in this fashion; only when God’s love comes to me in Christ, do I love Him. In loving Him because He first loved me, I love others. Thus the true law originates in love and expresses itself in love actions. It was Christ’s law because he obeyed it, established it, was its goal, and enjoined it on us as though this were the true way of love-obedience and love-freedom.

. . . but from the Commandment, as a rule of life, we are not freed, but contrariwise inclined and disposed, by his free spirit, to the willing obedience thereof. Thus to the regenerate the Law becometh as it were Gospell, even a law of libertie.

—Samuel Crooke

He (a holy man) will have a decided bent of mind toward God, a hearty desire to do His will—a greater fear of displeasing Him than of displeasing the world, and a love to all of His ways. He will endeavour to shun every known sin, and to keep every commandment.

—J. C. Ryle

The power and authority of the law fastens together with a disposition to obedience upon the heart, so that the heart will be no more contrary to it, but sweetly concurring with it.

—John Sedgwick⁴

THE LIBERTY OF THE GOSPEL

Most of us are aware that some theologians view the law with deep suspicion, thinking of its use by sin and its own condemnatory actions. They fear a resurgence of ‘works-righteousness’ if it is obeyed, so they substitute a law which they call ‘the law that the Spirit teaches at the time or point of need’. This leads to deep problems. If we can say we are liberated from the legalism of using the law to justify or sanctify us, and that being freed from condemnation, we are free now to obey God, and that our practical freedom is active in love-obedience, then we only have another step to go; that is, in seeing we are not free until we are free not to do what we are free to do. This is exemplified in the principle ‘all things are lawful, but not all things are expedient’. In Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8, Paul teaches us that though we are free to do certain things, we are not free to do those things if they injure the weaker Christian and cause that one to stumble.

We need to see that the early Church lived under grace, and saw itself in apostolic power giving the apostolic witness as the prophetic community. They were those who had been ‘slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne’, ‘who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus’, ‘those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus’, for ‘blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book’ (Rev. 12:17; 14:12; 22:7; cf. 22:14 alternate version, ‘who keep the commandments of God’).

The question we have to face is the one which has exercised the minds of many, especially during and since the Reformation. It is, ‘Do Christians have to keep the law of God?’ The answer must be, ‘Yes, everyone should keep the law of God for there must be a law of God’. When seeking to define the term ‘law of God’, then the question may appear to be, ‘Is the law of God that which was given to Israel on Sinai?’ Christians are certainly not asked to keep the Mosaic law, for it contained elements which do not appertain to the Church. In Acts 15 the council at Jerusalem agreed that the Mosaic law did not apply to Christians, but requested that they should ‘abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood’. In Galatians 2:11ff., Paul made it clear that the Judaisers’ demand was wrong, since it virtually required a Christian to first become a Jew in order that he might be a proper Christian! Having said this, we see that the ‘ten words’ or

⁴ These quotes show the mind of Puritans and Evangelicals and carry no Scripture to confirm their view. Even so, they bring a good impression of the non-lethal side of law, that is, the functional side of it for true morality, and not moralism as such.

‘commandments’ need to be obeyed. In Israel’s Holiness Code there is much that pertains to the practical way of (i) loving God, and (ii) loving the neighbour. *In principle* this, too, should be considered in action. Of course, no obedience is self-justifying, for genuine obedience springs from having been justified.

We have to start at the New covenant principle, given in Jeremiah 31:31–34, ‘I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts’. The law is there, in the heart, by grace. The real question to be faced is, ‘What is this law and how, then, do we obey it?’ The question is asked because Paul, in Romans chapter 7, makes it clear that God’s law cannot be successfully obeyed ‘of myself’, that is, ‘of one’s own strength’. The answer lies in seeing the law *not* in its lethal, sin-stirring nature and function, but seeing it as the way *of* life of the believer, not to be mistaken as the way *to* life. This involves seeing Ezekiel 36:24–28 (cf. 37:1–14) as part of the New covenant promise, especially with regard to the Holy Spirit put within the heart so that the law is gladly obeyed.

To see it this way is (i) to have the mind of Christ, and (ii) to be led always by the Spirit. These two things are virtually the one. Richard Longenecker puts it succinctly:

Throughout Paul’s discussions of liberty, this factor of the mind of Christ as applied by the Spirit reappears as the distinguishing feature in the direction of Christian liberty. Thus the Christian lives his life in the new life of the spirit, and not in the old of the letter (Rom. 7:6); and the Apostle is a minister of a new covenant which is not of the letter, but of the spirit (II Cor. 3:6). Similarly, whereas it was the flesh that controlled and characterized the activity of the man outside of Christ, the spirit is the distinguishing feature in the believer’s guidance and life (Rom. 8:4–6; Gal. 5:16). The exact relation between Christ and the Spirit in this matter of immediate and direct guidance is not explicit in Paul’s letters. It would probably be most true to his thought to say that the mind of Christ became operative in the life of the Christian through the activity of the Spirit, as is his emphasis in I Corinthians 2:6–16. In II Corinthians 3:17a, however, he appears to equate the two in saying ‘the Lord is the Spirit.’ But his conclusion is the significant aspect at this point: ‘Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty’ (II Cor. 3:17b). For Paul, there is no liberty at all without the pneumatic element present; liberty is a matter of immediate personal fellowship between Christ and the believer in its direction as well as in its basis. And in this immediacy the Apostle speaks of the spiritual Christian as having knowledge which no human wisdom can approximate or even test; knowledge of ‘the mind of the Lord’—for ‘we have the mind of Christ’ (I Cor. 2:6–16).⁵

We see, then, that just as in Israel the law to the person of faith, grace and the Spirit was a beautiful law and quite liberating, so it is in the New covenant. ‘The law of Christ’ is surely the law of God as he understood it, as it obtains for the New covenant age, and is as it is worked out in love. We may consider that ‘the law of Christ’ is the new, true law, which is given by the new Lawgiver, Christ. On the one hand he does not outmode ‘the law of God’, thus superseding it, and on the other he does not introduce new ethics. It is still the law of God, but now as the law for the New covenant community. Calvin put it, ‘The Law is in itself full of light but we appreciate its clarity only when Christ appears to us in it’.⁶

We need to understand the Acts and Epistles more deeply to see the law of God outworking as the law of love. One example is the care and concern for ‘the weaker

⁵ *op. cit.*, p. 182.

⁶ Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 10, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (trans. by T. A. Smail, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1976), p. 47. Noel Due in his book *Paul: Apostle of Law and Liberty* (p. 9) has a translation, ‘For the law is in itself bright, but it is only when Christ appears to us in it that we enjoy its splendour’.

brother' or the one with 'the weak conscience', as we find them in Romans 14:1 – 15:5 and I Corinthians chapter 8, for there is certainly an outworking of the law of love, in love.

CONCLUSION TO 'APOSTOLIC LIBERTY'

In our paper we have drifted some distance from the joyous spontaneity the early Church knew with the revelation given at Pentecost of the whole truth of God in Christ. Even so, that dynamic freedom had not so much to 'settle' as to be grounded in 'the whole counsel of God'. From the point of view of the new community, it could almost be summed up in 'the wisdom of God in righteousness, sanctification and redemption', for these were what Christ was made to be for us, and these outworked themselves in the life of the community and are there for the same outworking today. We need to see them afresh, to be wrought upon by them, to come to the liberty that is freedom from law-condemnation (guilt), from the power of all evil enemies, and to be free in love-obedience even to loving regard for the ones who are weaker than us. There is no reason for us to live at a level lower and other than those of the Apostolic age.

STUDY 5

THE CLIMAX OF THE APOSTOLIC FAITH

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

INTRODUCTION: WHAT WE MEAN BY ‘THE CLIMAX’

We mean by ‘the climax of the Apostolic faith’, the climax which we call the end and consummation of all history. Paul points to it as ‘the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth’ (Eph. 1:9–10). It is the same as ‘the reconciliation of all things’—‘to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross’ (Col. 1:19), so that ‘the harmonising of all things’ (Col. 3:14) will be accomplished. Properly considered it is the same as ‘filling all things’ (Eph. 4:10), which is very much a parallel with the liberating of all things from the futility in which they are at present in bondage, as Paul sets that matter out in Romans 8:18–25. Here the heart of the fulfilment of hope is called ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God’.¹

There are many other terms and ideas contained in the idea of the climax which can also be called ‘the things of the eschaton’—meaning the last days or the last era—and ‘the things of the *telos*’, *telos* meaning ‘goal’. All of these things are the things for which we hope. They inspire hope, promising the very best outcome. Without the things of hope there is nothing left for humanity but the obvious fact of one moment succeeding another until all our moments are ended without glory, and so, too, are we! In this case we are driven to manufacture hopes of one kind and another, and there is no guarantee that what we hope for will ever eventuate.

The Threefold Power for True Living

The pastoral power of true hope—that which God has promised—is evident. A congregation which does not live in the hope which God inspires by His promises has no reality by which to live. In fact the apostolic church lived in a threefold power, that of faith, hope and love. These three are often mentioned together, and none has any

¹ We will pursue the thought that God and His promises are the one, and are the basis and object or goal of all hope. We will examine the many elements which evoke hope.

power of action apart from the others. They are not abstractions. Hope is caused by the promise of what lies in the future; faith is trust in the faithful covenant God, and love is the nature of God Himself—we love because He first loved us. If we fail to bring the Object and objects of hope before our people, the church will be bereft of its true dynamic. Faith and love will likewise lack substance. It is imperative, then, that we get it right about hope—God’s covenant and its ultimate *telos* or fulfilment.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END AND THE END OF THE BEGINNING

What we need to do is to see how everything began for the human race and what was portended for it. In Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we see God created Man in His own image, that is, Man as male and female together. He gave the human race its basic vocation which was to ‘be fruitful and multiply and to fill up the earth, and subdue it and have dominion over it’ (1:28f.). Psalm 8:4–8 says that God made Man little lower than the angels (or, little less than God), crowning him with glory and honour, giving him dominion over all things, so that nothing was left outside his authority and responsibility. In both references nothing is said explicitly about a climax. There may, of course, be a hint of such. Even so, it was *the beginning*, and as the story of the Bible proceeds we recognise there is that which is called ‘the day of the Lord’, and this is looked to as the *climax* God has ordained for history. Is it, then, the end of the beginning? Was the beginning with a view to that end? It would seem so. Is ‘the end of the beginning’, then, the end of ‘all things’? It would seem not. It would appear that what is the *climax* of that purposive beginning is, in a sense, *the beginning* of a new era or system, since it is called ‘the age to come’, and that would make all actions that lead to it the era (or eras) *before* the age to come.

There are two ways we can look at the beginning. The first view is that what was at the beginning was perfect and complete, but Man rebelled. From this first point of view we could say that what is needed is *a total renewal of that which was perfect and complete*, which means bringing it back to its former self, the re-creating of that state. In this case what we have said above would mean that everything which has ‘come apart’ will be united in Christ, everything will be reconciled in him; all that is empty will be filled up by him—since it was ‘emptied out’. All that was ‘subjected in hope to futility’ will be liberated by him, since what was there at the beginning will be wholly renewed.

The second point of view is that what was created in the beginning was always, and only, ‘with a view to . . .’ It was with a view to going on beyond the beginning to its maturity, its completion. *It was not only re-creating, but more than that.* We mean that God had planned more than the restoration and rehabilitation of creation: *He had planned something far beyond whatever had been in the beginning.* The invasion of sin—the Fall—did not and does not, in the ultimate, affect or ultimately hinder the intended outcome God always had for His creation. It would seem that the second view is the biblical one. The total rehabilitation of Man to what he once was is not excluded: it is just that God had more for Man than Man was in the beginning. What will be, will be beyond what was in the beginning. We avoid saying that Man’s fall and sin are essential to this ‘end of the beginning’, since that gives rebellion and personal evil some point, some commendation for their (supposed) part in the *telos*. Paul makes it clear in I Corinthians 2:7–10, that there was ‘a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed *before* the ages *for our glorification*’. The most

we can say about the invasion of rebellion and evil is that ‘In him [Christ] the tribes of Adam boast, more blessings than their father lost’ (Isaac Watts). Of course, ‘their father’—Adam—lost all: he lost the *eschaton* which would have been his. The purpose of God was always for the showing forth of His own glory, and the glorification of Man and the creation is the goal of the end, ‘the end of the beginning’. Sin and Satan can claim no part in this.

INTIMATIONS OF THE *TELOS* IN THE APOSTOLIC TEACHING

In gathering up the actual eschatological intimations in apostolic teaching, we need to look at what the Apostles taught and wrote. This means garnering a vast number of statements in the New Testament, but in doing so we should keep in mind (i) all elements relate to Christ, and (ii) all references to the end (*telos*) are not references to a ‘dead-end’, that is, a sudden stoppage of all action as though meeting a terminus. We mean that we must not only think of a certain point in time at which matters such as judgment, death, resurrection, the fulfilment of the Kingdom, heaven and hell are counted as ‘the end things’. Such ‘things’ have been going on all the time, but come into full view at what we call ‘the end’. The term ‘end’, a meaning of *telos*, is really the situation of fulfilment, yet beyond which there is not cessation of action. Whilst *telos* can mean ‘finish’, yet it is best thought of as ‘completion’ and even ‘maturation’. God finishes all evil, and completes His plan for ‘all things’. *Telos*, then, marks the beginning of fullness of eternity.

THE ESCHATON AND THE MATTER OF GLORY

It is quite a remarkable thing that all the eschatological ‘things’ are, in some way or another, matters of glory and glorification. We will see this in regard to such matters as the resurrection, eternal life, sonship (adoption), inheritance, the Church as the Bride, the Holy City—and so on. But before we see the apostolic emphasis on these matters we need to realise that from the beginning the thrust of history has always been eschatological, that is, it is always ‘with a view to’, the ‘now and not yet’, ‘the present prolepsis of the future’. What we emphasise from this point onwards is that all things eschatological are caught into, and covered by, the term ‘glory’.

The Matter of Glory Both Protological and Eschatological

I Corinthians 2:7–10 speaks of God’s decree of glorification for Man, and this means Man will be glorified in the *telos*. When we look at the matter of glory, we cannot understand the eschatological without understanding the protological. In the beginning Man’s glory was linked with his creation. In I Corinthians 11:7, Paul says ‘man’ (*aner*: male) is the image and glory of God. In Genesis 1:26, Man (man and woman together; *anthropos*), is the image of God. In Psalm 8:5 we have, ‘Yet thou [God] hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honour’. His glory and honour are in having dominion over creation, as also mentioned in Genesis 1:28. Man in the image of God has dominion over the earth, and this is reflecting the nature of God as King. Ultimately, Man—in and as the last Adam—will have dominion over things celestial as well as things terrestrial. God’s glory is not

only dominical, but it is moral. The best description given of that glory as moral was given by the Lord Himself in Exodus 34:6–7:

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.’

In this case God was glorious in Israel, His glory being moral and covering such attributes as holiness, righteousness, goodness, truth, and love. At the same time He was a firm Ruler over Israel and the world, as well as being the One Who acted according to His own law.

Given this protological action of glory, and the course-of-history experience of God’s glory, much in the Old Testament must be seen to be cast in eschatological mode. This should not seem altogether strange since the Old Testament speaks so much and so often of the glory of the Lord. It has its eschatological references to glory, namely in Numbers 14:23, ‘but truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD’; ‘For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea’ (Hab. 2:14; cf. Ps. 22:27–28); ‘the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea’ (Isa. 11:9), and this along with the prayer of Psalm 72:19 which is, ‘Blessed be his glorious name for ever; *may his glory fill the whole earth!*’ In Zechariah 2:5 God says regarding Jerusalem, ‘I will be to her a wall of fire round about, says the LORD, and I will be the glory within her’. Ezekiel 39:21 says, ‘And I will set my glory among the nations; and all the nations shall see my judgment which I have executed, and my hand which I have laid on them’. As Paul tells us in Romans 9:4, one of the great gifts to Israel was ‘the glory’. The Book of Ezekiel appears as the paramount prophecy of the glory of God in Israel and in the temple. The glory is in the temple for Israel’s sake in covenant, only to be withdrawn, and then to return to that covenantal– eschatological sanctuary in 43:1–6, where ‘the glory of the LORD filled the temple’. In Revelation 21:22 the temple of the *telos* is ‘the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb’.

The prophetic thrust in history was always towards the acknowledging of God’s glory, and this was to be especially so in doxological worship. The anticipation of the worship passages in the Book of the Revelation is seen in such a passage as already quoted—Nehemiah 9:5—‘Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be thy glorious name which is exalted above all blessing and praise’! It is also strong in the Psalms, especially in such as 29:1f.:

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy array.

Here the terrestrial Psalmist calls in the celestial creatures with all their skill of worship and adoration.

When it comes to the New Testament, the matter of God’s glory floods over from the Old Testament. The angels burst out with the glory of the Lord at the birth of Jesus, the Word becomes flesh and in the covenant-glory of God dwelling among us, the disciples behold his glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of truth

and grace. The glory of Immanuel is seen in what he does and says in his earthly ministry, though its glory is for the most part a veiled one. It is seen in special, unveiled form at the Transfiguration (cf. II Pet. 1:16–18). Here the Father has glorified him, but it is particularly *as the Son* that he desires the Father to glorify him—especially so at the Cross—in order that he might glorify the Father. The Father glorified him in all his incarnation, his transfiguration, at his death on the cross (John 17:1–5; Heb. 2:9–10), and then at the Resurrection (Rom. 6:4), for there ‘he was raised from death by the glory of the Father’. He had prophesied his coming ‘in the glory of the Father’ at his second advent. At his ascension he was ‘taken up into glory’. Stephen saw the glory of the glorified Son of God at the Father’s right hand (Acts 7:38). For such glorification the Son had prayed in his prayer of John 17.

Paul saw this glory of the risen Christ. In Acts 22:11 he said, ‘I saw not for the light of that glory’. Stephen at his death, as we have said, saw ‘the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God’ (Acts 7:55), and we assume Jesus also was shining with glory. Certainly in Revelation 1:12–16, John the Seer saw him in his full glory—‘His face was like the sun shining in full strength’. We have a right to assume that although this was a vision, yet it properly portrayed the heavenly glory of Christ, where, according to Philippians 3:20–2, his heavenly body is a ‘body of glory’. Of course ‘glory’ here is that of the second and last Adam—Christ—whose body is a spiritual body (I Cor. 15:45). This glory is accorded to the Slain Lamb in Revelation 5:12 and 13, and in Revelation 15:3–4 in ‘the Song of Moses, the servant of God and the Song of the Lamb’. This glory is also accorded to the Father in 4:11, and 5:13 (cf. 7:12). The glory in these contexts of both the Father and the Lamb consists of dominion and authority over all creation, as well as the moral and redeeming power spoken of in Exodus 34:6–7 and Revelation 7:10–12. The glory of the Father and the Son was understood by the apostolic community. They saw it to do with their own, ultimate glorification.

The apostolic community knew that it had been resurrected from Man’s loss of glory through the Adamic fall, for ‘those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified’ (Rom. 8:30). This is proleptic glorification—the glory which is yet to be fulfilled at the *telos*, so that the statement is eschatological. Yet, in the present time, redeemed Man is being ‘changed from one degree of glory to another’, for this present ‘slight momentary affliction is preparing for [him] an eternal weight of glory’ beyond all comparison (II Cor. 3:18; 4:16–18).

Having traced this action of glory from the giving of it to Adam, the loss of it by Adam, the Glory (God) working in history in Israel and through to the Ascension and Reigning of Jesus Christ as the Second and Last Adam over all the creation—‘thou art the King of glory, Oh Christ!’—we are now free to see the working of the glory in the *eschaton*, as the Apostles proclaimed that working. What we wrote above is so; that all eschatological elements are, in one way or another, linked with God’s action of glorifying Man and Creation.

THE ‘END THINGS’ THAT ARE OF THE HOPE THAT IS WITHIN US

Before we discuss those things which we have said are related to the ultimate glory, we need to see that *they are things of hope*. Hope is based on the promises of God, that is, of the God who is faithful to His promises. In Hebrews 6:13–20, these hopes are based on God’s covenant promise with Abraham. Of course God’s covenant is

eternal, based on the nature of the Trinity, for God is first covenantal within Himself, and then to the creation which has been brought into being for His purposes. The *telos* is really that of the covenant, yet, through the Davidic covenant it is also linked with the Kingdom of God. Those eschatological things which we discuss below are all of hope. As Paul says in Romans 8:23, we were saved in the hope of ‘adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies’. As yet we do not see this, but then ‘hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees’. Hope, then, is in the promises made by God (Acts 26:6), the gospel which was ‘the hope of Israel’ (Acts 28:20), and of course all is eschatological for it is ‘the hope laid up for you in heaven’ (Col. 1:5). Hope that is true hope ‘hopes all things’ (I Cor. 13:7). It is linked with faith, because ‘faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things *not seen*’ (Heb. 11:1). Hope is not afraid or ashamed to hope, because ‘the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us’. That is why ‘faith, hope and love abide’ (I Cor. 13:13). They never end, and since love supports hope (Rom. 5:5), and faith works through love (Gal. 5:6), then the greatest of these virtues is love, for God Himself is love (I John 4:8, 16).

The following elements, then, compose our hope—‘the hope of glory’; ‘the hope [of] the resurrection’; ‘our hope of sharing the glory of God’; ‘the hope of righteousness [justification]’; ‘the hope of salvation’; ‘Christ Jesus our hope’; ‘our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ’; ‘the hope of his calling’; along with ‘his glorious inheritance in the saints’; ‘the hope of the gospel’; and ‘the hope of eternal life’. It is because God is ‘the God of hope’ and our hope is ‘laid up in heaven’ that hope ‘hopes all things’, and even ‘in hope [believes] against hope’. As Paul says, ‘If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied’. It is hope that is for here and eternity—how could it be otherwise and be hope. For Christ himself is our hope, and within us (among us) he is ‘the hope of glory’. That is why we are enjoined to ‘seize the hope that is before us’ and to ‘hold fast the confession of our hope’.²

We have every proof we need, then, in seeing that the apostolic truth was eschatological in its thrust, that as the early community lived in the love of God, in His faithfulness and ‘the faith of Jesus Christ’, so they lived in great hope. That is why Peter could urge them, ‘Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ’, for things we will now discuss widen our view of the eschatological basis of hope and its marvellous contents. An example of how hope is the dynamic for Christian living can be found in I John 3:1–3:

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

The great principle is this, ‘Whatever a man hopes for will affect him now, so that he will live as far as possible in conformity with what he is assured he will be’. Let none

² Because we wished this particular paragraph not to be interrupted by references so that straight reading of it might prove more effective, we have stated the references in this footnote. They can be checked against the text. They are Colossians 1:27; Acts 23:6; 24:15; cf. 28:20; Romans 5:2; Galatians 5:5; I Thessalonians 5:8; Titus 1:2; 3:7; I Timothy 1:1; Titus 2:13; Romans 8:30; Ephesians 1:18; 4:4; I Thessalonians 2:12; II Peter 1:3–5; Colossians 1:23; Titus 1:2; 3:7; cf. I Peter 5:10; Romans 15:13; Colossians 1:5; I Corinthians 13:7; Romans 4:18; I Corinthians 15:9; 10:23; Colossians 1:27; Hebrews 6:18; 10:23.

say hope is mere wishful thinking, a dreaming about what is to come. ‘What is to come’ bears powerfully upon him in the present. We mean that if he sees he will be pure, he seeks to be that now. If he sees he will be loving, he sets about being loving now—and so on.

THE ‘END THINGS’ WHICH ARE THE CLIMAX OF THE APOSTOLIC TRUTH

‘The Hope of Glory’—The Glorification of Man and Creation

We saw in I Corinthians 2:7–10, that the apostolic teaching was ‘a secret and hidden wisdom of God’, and that it was ‘decreed before the ages for our glorification’. As we shall see in Romans 8:18–25, this includes the creation. In I Thessalonians 2:12, Paul speaks of ‘God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory’. Peter tells us that ‘he called us to his own glory and excellence’ (II Pet. 1:3–4), which would mean the redeemed would ‘become partakers of the divine nature’. Paul speaks of calling and glorification in the one breath, ‘those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified’ (Rom. 8:30). Paul also makes it clear that the glorification of the saints means they will have a glorified body ‘like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself’ (Phil. 3:21). In I Corinthians 15:44, this is a spiritual body. This present body of flesh is ‘sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory’. To be raised is ‘to put on immortality’, and that, if anything, must mean it is glorified. This is seen especially in the light of I Timothy 6:15–16, where immortality belongs only to God. Immortality is gifted to us at glorification. This must be the ‘eternal life’ of which Jesus spoke so often in John’s Gospel.

‘The Hope of Glory’—Glorification and Sonship

All the time we are thinking of God as Father—‘the Father of glory’ (Eph. 1:17), who ‘is bringing many sons to glory’ (Heb. 2:10; cf. Rom. 8:29–30)—and of His eternal covenant, His plan for His sons to do His will of the creational covenant, given in Eden (Gen. 1:28), so that they subdue the earth and have dominion over it. This is their glory. It is also the meaning of Revelation 21:7, ‘He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son’. In one sense Christ was only, ever, this true Son, yet all God’s sons are in him and as such are ‘more than conquerors’, true subduers of the earth.

In Isaiah 43:1–7, the Lord addresses Jacob, and speaks of how He has cared for the people. He closes with these words:

Fear not, for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you;
I will say to the north, Give up,
and to the south, Do not withhold;
bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the end of the earth,
every one who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.

God's covenant children are to be to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:12). This thought is repeated often in the Old Testament and in the New. It is taken up in Ephesians chapter one, where God in love predestines His elect to be His people, firstly 'to the praise of his glorious grace' (v. 6), and then to 'to live to the praise of his glory' (v. 12). To bring them to this point, He brings them to be His children by 'the riches of his grace' (v. 7).

His aim is to bring them to their glorification, that which Paul in Romans 8 calls 'the liberty of the glory of the children of God'. This is a wonderful description of what His sons will be. It means that the whole, groaning creation will be freed from the futility to which it has been subjected—though, mercifully, *'in hope'*—so that it comes to share in the sons' 'liberty of the glory', which is liberation from the bondage to corruption, 'corruption' being the opposite of 'incorruption', or 'immortality'. This God will achieve by conforming each person 'to the image of his Son, so that [his Son] might be the first-born among many brethren'. If we ponder this statement we see that just as Christ is the Son glorified, so the sons—his 'many brethren'—will likewise be creatures of glory. This will be 'the liberty of the glory of the children of God'—a heady concept! When the elect cry, 'Abba! Father!', then that is glorious liberty under 'the Father of glory'. So John's comment, 'it does not yet appear what we shall be but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is', tells us the glory which the sons shall be given. Was this what Jesus was praying about in John 17:22–26? Only when they saw his glory could they be glorified by it.

'The Hope of Glory'—Glorification, Sonship and Inheritance

Peter is excited about 'an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you' (I Pet. 1:4). He talks, in this context, about 'a living hope' that is based on Christ's resurrection. Sonship always implies 'the inheritance'. It was 'the God of glory' who appeared to Abraham (Acts 7:2), so that Abraham was to be the father of the whole world (Rom. 4:16). Romans 8:14–15 talks about sonship and the next few verses say, 'and if children then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him'. The glorified sons are heirs. Likewise Galatians 4:4–7 connects sonship with the inheritance, that sonship being *in* the Son, a sharing in the Son's inheritance on the principle of Revelation 21:7. The inheritance has always meant a lot to those in Israel. The *son*, of Revelation 21:7, 'shall have this heritage', that is, he will inherit all things, those things which are 'the new heaven and the new earth'! Two thoughts need to be kept in mind; (i) that all the promises of inheritance are covenantal, and come to us clearly from God's covenant with Abraham. They concern not only Israel, not only David and his covenant, but all within the New covenant, and (ii) that we can take it that they were there before time as part of the nature of God, for just as the book of life and the intention of the Cross were present, so the fruits of the Cross included all the covenantal promises of God that His people would inherit eternity; yes, and would inherit God (Rom. 5:2; 8:17), which is the same as saying we would inherit God Himself, the glory of God—with all its meaning of dominion and moral reality—and so inherit the very Kingdom of God, a statement found often in the New Testament. It may be that Romans 8:21, 'the *glory of the liberty* of the children of God', and Ephesians 1:18, 'the riches of his *glorious inheritance* [inheritance of glory] in the saints', are synonymous in meaning. The first of these is God's gift to

His people and the second can mean His people are God's inheritance—a term often used for Israel being His inheritance. Both are connected with glory.

The Resurrection and Glory

All of these *'telos things'* overlap, so we will, perforce, keep repeating ourselves. Paul calls the resurrection 'the adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies'. We noted that Paul referred to the resurrection as Israel's hope, 'with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead', 'having a hope in God . . . that there will be a resurrection both of the just and the unjust' (Acts 23:6; 24:15). In Acts 2:25–28 (cf. 13:35, *passim*), Peter quoted Psalm 16 of Christ and his hope of the resurrection. It is Paul who speaks at length of the manner and mode of the resurrection in I Corinthians 15:42–56. He speaks of the body—'It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory'. He points out that the body to be is a spiritual one, not meaning it is composed of invisible spirit, but that it is a body befitting its eternal, heavenly nature, the immortality that it has put on. So in Philippians 3:20–21, he says, 'But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself'. So, then, the *telos* of the body will be all-glorious.

The Glorious Hope of Eternal Life

All that we have said immediately above bears out the fact that eternal life is glorious. The term 'eternal life' is used over thirty times in the New Testament. Paul speaks of 'the hope of eternal life' in Titus 1:2 and 3:7. In Romans 2:7, he speaks of 'those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life'. We could deduce logically from this saying that 'glory and honor and immortality' equal 'eternal life'. It could also be equalled with 'his eternal glory' of I Peter 5:10. From other points of view we can conclude that those who have eternal life have come into possession of an immortal body, have an eternal weight of glory, an eternal inheritance, and have a building—a house that is not as a perishing tent (body) is here, but is 'eternal in the heavens'. So eternal life is the gift of things eternal and all these things are those of glory.

The Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb

The marriage of the Bride and the Lamb is the culminating event of all history. Given protologically in Genesis 2:24 as 'the profound mystery', which Paul takes up in Ephesians 5:32 (*passim*), and John the Seer sees in vision in Revelation 19:6–10 and 21:9–21. From these passages we see the beauty of the Bride. We see that she possesses all 'the glory of God' (21:11), is clothed in glorious garments (19:8, "it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.). The Bridegroom brings out the truth of I Corinthians 11:7, where the man (*aner*) is 'the image and glory of God' and his wife is 'the glory of the man'. Her glory reflects that of the Bridegroom. Together—as in Genesis 1:26—they constitute the image and likeness of God, the Father. The Bridegroom has already been described in Revelation 1:12–20. He is the one whose glory overcomes the devised but false glory of the evil powers and destroys them.

No wonder they are blessed who are invited to this great denouement of history. As the description of the Bride in Revelation 21 continues we see that the Bride is really the Holy City, ‘comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners’ (Song of Sol. 6:4). The Unholy City, Babylon, is the consort of the Beast and, like the Beast, goes to an unholy and inglorious end, whereas the Holy City is a thing of beauty, of unspeakable glory, and is eternal.

The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, the True Paradise

We have covered much of this subject in the paragraph immediately above. It is the City which is the Church, and into her are brought ‘the glory of the kings of the earth’ and ‘the glory and honour of the nations’. The City has no need of a temple for the Temple are God and the Lamb. It has no need of a light for ‘the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb’. Paul’s words come to mind here, ‘glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations’ (Eph. 3:21). Obviously the City is also the place of Paradise, since the beautiful sparkling water of life flows as a river from the throne of God. In this Paradise, of which Eden was the prototype, live the glorified people of God. The wonders of this glorious Paradise are the glory of God, of the Lamb, of the Bride, of the kings of the nations and the nations, the river ‘bright as crystal’, the marvellous beauty of the Holy City itself. The outcome for the resurrected, glorified saints and all the shining, celestial creatures, angels and archangels in their myriads is the wonderful worship and praise of glorious creatures and glorified humanity ascending to the throne of God and the Lamb; the Sevenfold-Spirit—the Spirit of worship—being in the midst—all of this is the Eternal Glory and the eternal worship, the covenant of God come to its *telos*.

CONCLUSION: THE CLIMAX OF THE APOSTOLIC TRUTH AND FAITH

It is no wonder that Paul said, speaking of the decree for our glorification, that indescribable glory, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him’. He said this decree was a mystery, and all God’s mysteries are unfolded to the elect, but kept from those who do not have an ear to hear. The terms ‘indescribable’ and ‘unspeakable’ are apt. The Holy Spirit must unfold them. Somewhere, in our hearts, the Spirit has imprinted knowledge of what is to come, and so by this he has created hope which he constantly replenishes.

We can rightfully come to the conclusion that in the New Testament, which is the apostolic truth, all the elements of hope were—are—strongly taught. Without them the teaching would have been flaccid and weak. It was certainly not this, but full of power. To know that the extent of glory is not exhausted in this life, but has its major part in ‘the age to come’, is what lifts our sights from merely thinking of our mortality to seeing the glory that is yet to be, our glorious mortality. No wonder Peter wrote, ‘Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, *set your hope fully upon the grace* that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ’. ‘The grace that is coming’ is, in one sense, even greater than the grace which He has so generously lavished upon us in this life. It is the grace of glory, the grace which ordains that we shall be ‘partakers of the divine nature’. It means we shall live at the very heart of glory, at the

heart of the Triune God, for by being the Bride of Christ we shall be inducted into the mystery and the life of 'the divine nature', the Triune Godhead. All of this means that, whereas the first Eden under the first Adam did not even begin to Edenise the whole of this world, yet the true, last and second Adam did so. Through his incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension and reigning at the Father's right hand, he has set the future age and brought Paradise into being, and sealed it for all his creatures, those both celestial and terrestrial.

No wonder the apostles and all the others of the early church were so occupied in living hope as to proclaim the glorious news of the love and grace of God. They lived proleptically in the 'end of the beginning' as they lived actually in 'this present evil age [*aeon*]'. They lived daily in the cognisance of the good news, the *kerugma*, the everlasting gospel. In truth they lived in covenantal relationship with the God of the covenant, the God who grants the eternal inheritance, 'the God of all hope', 'the God of all grace', the God of the everlasting covenant of peace.