

Unpopular Truths

Sadly we are not only living in a post-Biblical world¹ but in a post-Biblical church. Much of the modern UK church contains members who never read their Bible and have no clue about even basic doctrines. Worse yet, many church leaders either distort the Biblical message or just use texts as a tagline for various humanistic or mystical thoughts. No longer is it just liberal, modernistic churches that abandon the authority of scripture, but many evangelical churches avoid the Bible in practice; some Charismatic leaders have openly abandoned the Word in favour of subjectivity.

However, there is a hard core, a significant minority, of godly believers meeting in truly evangelical churches, often in very small numbers, who seek to obey God. They honour the Bible and are zealous to maintain a good testimony. It is even more sad, therefore, that in many of these assemblies, there are a number of very clear truths and historic doctrines that are shunned quite vigorously. It still shocks me that truths which are clearly testified to in God's word, and which our forbears maintained, are now rejected. Often it is clear that the mores of the world are what has caused this rejection, some truths are just too unpalatable to men, so these folk surrender to prevailing views. In other cases, it appears that the prime cause is a hardened addiction to the traditions of men; plain truth is jettisoned because it threatens certain institutions and theological systems.

It is my contention that this situation must be challenged and overturned. I have done this elsewhere on various subjects and in a variety of technical papers; however, here I want to be as succinct as possible and examine some of the unpopular truths that are founded upon the clear testimony of scripture. This is not going to be a concise systematic theology, nor a discipleship manual, but a focus on vital truths that are being left aside today. God's word alone must be our authority, no matter how uncomfortable it truths make us feel.

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¹ Even the secular world once recognised the importance of the Bible, the British legal system was based upon it and Queen Victoria could claim that it was the foundation of the Empire.

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Church Issues

NT churches did not have dedicated buildings

There's just no getting away from this, there is no NT example of a church building, no apologetic for such a thing and to build one goes against both the spirit and the specific word of scripture. Physical temples are Old Covenant; under the New Covenant God dwells in his people (1 Thess 1:1) not in temples made by hands (Acts 7:48, 17:24).

All mentions of church meetings take place in houses² and the whole ethos of church life is based upon the concept of family (1 Tim 3:15), not ritual or formality; the church is a living organism not an organisation. Further, NT church meetings are always small, there is not a single instance of a normal church meeting occurring in a large hired hall or being large in numbers.³ The normal place for church meetings was an upper room in a reasonably sized domestic dwelling.⁴

The dynamic of the gathered church is *koinonia* (fellowship) where mutual edification can occur (see later); this necessitates fairly small meetings. The character of the church assembled is that of a family; meetings are where the family meets together and family life is the best symbol of the interdependency God expects to find in churches. Homes are the best places for this to be carried out.

NT Churches are not led by a single pastor

Elders (shepherds/pastors/bishops⁵) are repeatedly warned not to have a domineering attitude over the flock (1 Pt 5:2-3); and the Biblical command to have a plural, equal eldership is to help prevent such a disaster. Churches are to appoint elders, not an elder.⁶ Neither is there such an animal as a senior pastor, or a 'minister', let alone 'reverend'. We are told by Jesus to avoid giving special titles to church leaders.

The concept of a single church leader is a worldly management technique and not a divine command. Single leaders may be an effective measure in secular government but the world is not the model for the kingdom. Churches are led by a team ministry.

This is a simple point that needs little explanation, there is not one indication in the NT that local churches are led by a monarchical leader or have any formal oversight above them from a wider area.

Leaders serve

But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.' (Matt 20:25-28)

The whole point of the Gospel is that God sent his Son to serve and save rebels. In doing so the Son expects his brethren to serve each other likewise. He even took a towel and washed the disciple's feet to emphasise this point graphically.

² For example: Acts 8:3; Rm 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phm 1:2.

³ The hiring of the Hall of Tyrannus by Paul (Acts 19:9) was specifically for evangelism and debate, not for an edification meeting of the church.

⁴ Lk 22:12; Acts 1:13; 20:8.

⁵ The terms elder and bishop are synonymous: Titus 1:5 with 1:7; Acts 20:17 with 20:28 (*episkopos* 'overseer' = 'bishop'). The function of elders is to shepherd ('pastor') and to teach (Eph 4:11).

⁶ Acts 20:17 (Ephesus) 21:18 (Jerusalem); Titus 1:5 (Crete).

The first are last and the first serve. Elders are those who are 'first' in the church,⁷ so they must serve others too. There is no despotic authority in the church, there is no man above all. Elders serve the body to ensure good order and this sometimes entails rebuke and admonishing. Teaching carries authority and elders who teach carry teaching authority - members should listen, learn and obey - but others teach also. The gift carries the weight. When the gift is seen emerging, elders must encourage the man - this is how fresh leadership arises.

The model for leadership is fatherhood not monarchy or management

We exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own children. (1 Thess 2:11)

As my beloved children I warn *you*. (1 Cor 4:14)

For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. (1 Cor 4:15-16)

As a son with *his* father he served with me in the gospel. (Phil 2:22)

Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort *him* as a father. (1 Tim 5:1)

The point is that as the church is a family; the model for leadership is that of a father (or sometimes the even gentler 'nursing mother' - 1 Thess 2:7). Leadership is a relationship of gentleness, care and sacrificial concern. The church is not an organisation but God's household (Eph 2:19); consequently the dynamics of discipline and government are nothing like secular, worldly methods.

While leaders do govern, this government is like fatherly direction more than management. Even the Biblical words that suggest submission to elders need careful attention. For instance Heb 13:17, **Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.** Here the word 'obey' is *peitho* which means 'to persuade', 'to be persuaded', 'to induce by one's words to believe' or 'to win favour'. 'Submit' is not the normal *hupatasso* (organisational submission, e.g. to governments) but *hupеiko* which implies yielding after a battle, such as a discussion. These words suggest leadership is by teaching, discussion, dialogue, convincing and persuasion rather than authoritative commands. Or 1 Timothy 5:17, **Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine;** here rule (see note below) means 'to set before' i.e. to superintend as a protector or a guardian, as a father stands first in the house. It means protective leadership that gives care and aid.

Leaders must be approachable, available, amenable, sociable, loving, restrained, and all these qualities require that the numbers leaders care for are small and local.⁸ For instance, the concept of a pastor living a long distance from his flock is nonsense; Jewish shepherds slept in the sheepfold with the flock making their own bodies the gate.

These scriptures also show the importance of apprenticeship in discipling, the younger worker learns from the experience of the gifted apostle, rather than just gaining head-knowledge.

⁷ Even the word 'to rule' (*proistemi*, to be first or to stand before thus to lead) in 1 Thess 5:17 can mean: to attend, be concerned about, give aid or care e.g: Rm 12:8; Titus 3:8,14. Phoebe is nominated by this term which is usually translated 'helper'.

⁸ Yes leaders must sometimes rebuke and admonish (but so do other believers), and yes they must enforce discipline when required, (even expelling unrepentant sinners) but these are extreme measures. Under normal circumstances their role is one of gentle nurturing - like a father.

[Though other idioms are used for the church (temple, army, people, nation, flock, vine etc.) these are to emphasise certain spiritual facets: where God's worship is focused on earth, who God's people are rather than others, the focus of heavenly warfare etc. Underneath all these symbolic elements the church is actually placed in Christ and Christ is God's Son; to every believer God is a Father and thus the church is actually God's family. Within this framework leaders act as fathers as representatives of our heavenly Father who cares for us as his children. Woe betide any elder that usurps this role with dominating ideas.]

The main function of church leaders is to identify and release fresh ministry

The prime function of leaders is not to control but to identify, nurture and release the gifts in others: [Leadership is] **for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.** (Eph 4:12) This is so simple and obvious in the NT that it needs little else to be said.

NT local church leadership is never imported

All NT churches grew their own leaders who were then formally appointed by an apostle (or his delegate) on a return journey, sometimes only a few months after the Gospel was first announced. This required faith on the part of the apostle and not human logistics. After planting a church, the apostle established a doctrinal foundation and then left, or sometimes he sent a delegate (like Timothy or Titus) to help nurture it further. As certain men began to show an aptitude in understanding the word, they were nurtured and released into formal ministry.

Church ministry was never formally trained

The apostolic church established no seminaries and no formal leadership qualifications. Jesus chose disciples that were largely unlearned simple folk; some were educated but none were religiously trained. Paul was later chosen as an apostle and was formally trained, but Paul specifically states that he counted this training as rubbish (Phil 3:7-8).

The overwhelming emphasis commanded by Jesus is to trust in the Holy Spirit to guide into all truth (Jn 16:13). Over and over we are exhorted to walk in the Spirit and be filled with the Spirit in order to function as believers. Yet modern churches tend to ignore this urgent qualification and substitute another one - seminary training. One reason for this is to ensure that new leaders toe the party line.

Biblical training is by apprenticeship, where a young disciple works and travels with the experienced, gifted man, as Timothy to Paul. This was the method established by Jesus, where his disciples learned everything from first-hand experience. Thus the gifted man passes on his character as well as his knowledge; his prayer habits and faith, as well as wisdom. Academic training can never match this Biblical method.

NT church leadership is only male

Apostolic commands on the qualifications of leaders are always applied solely to men.⁹ This was familiar to Jewish believers where synagogues only had male leaders, and the synagogue was the early pattern for the home-church. We only need one word of warning that women are not to be trusted with church leadership authority, but we have several.¹⁰

⁹ Such as 1 Tim 2:12, 3:2.

¹⁰ Gen 3:16; 1 Cor 11:5, 14:34, 35; 1 Tim 2:11, 12; Rev 2:20.

NT Churches function on the basis of mutual edification

Surprisingly, the apostles never state that worship is the reason for gathering together, but they do insist that the corporate church is a place of mutual edification. Personal worship is taken as read but the purpose of gathering is to edify one another.

Meetings are to be places where all share so that every gift of Christ is manifest and all benefit. The entire point of gathering is that mutual edification takes place. Meetings that are dominated and controlled by one man are not Biblical church meetings at all.

- Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, leading to edification. (Rm 15:2)
- Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (Eph 4:29)
- I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets that the church may receive edification. (1 Cor 14:5)
- Let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel. (1 Cor 14:12)
- Love edifies. (1 Cor 8:1)
- Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. (Rm 14:19)
- Comfort each other and edify one another. (1 Thess 5:11)

Edify means 'to build up', like the building up a house (from which the word derives), and thus involves the concepts of construction, laying a foundation, strengthening, encouragement, promoting growth, development. We teach and encourage one another bit by bit, just as bricks are laid one upon another very slowly until a house is formed.

The reason for the multiple command to edify one another is that God has gifted every member of the body of Christ in a certain way¹¹ and by sharing these gifts of grace we build each other up. Some may have many gifts, some may have more powerful gifts, but all have something of Christ which only they can express. The body needs to receive and benefit from these gifts in order to grow

Indeed, the only way people (and the church) grow is when all the body works together interdependently: ... speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Eph 4:15-16). Without the expression of these gifts, there is no growth.

The clearest picture of a NT meeting is 1 Corinthians 14 and in this chapter alone the word 'edify' (and its cognates) is mentioned 7 times. Here Paul exhorts believers to share their gifts for the good of all, that everyone may be exhorted, encouraged, edified and comforted (1 Cor 14:3). Christian meetings are not about grandstanding performances, showy expressions or fleshly exhibitions of talent; neither are they preaching centres - no matter how good the preacher is. Christian meetings are about ordinary folk sharing what they have of Christ with a mind to do each other good. Edification is *koinonia* in action.

In the NT church spiritual gifts flourished

It cannot be denied that the NT church used spiritual gifts, but many good folk would deny that any supernatural gifts are available today. This notion is called 'Cessationism', that is the doctrine that the supernatural spiritual gifts of the NT ceased to function when the

¹¹ Eph 3:7, 4:7; 2 Tim 1:6; 1 Pt 4:10, *As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

Bible was written, say by the end of the first century AD. The reasons given for this are protracted and strained, relying upon a twisting of the sense of 1 Cor 13:10 and a rational analysis of church history. Why good folk believe this is astounding to me for several reasons, but two key ones are:

1. The content of the Bible was neither widely available nor even formally agreed for centuries, even though it was written by about 95 AD [or probably earlier]. Churches and individuals probably only owned small portions and copies of apostle's letters. When the content of the Bible was finally agreed in 397 AD, it was centuries before ordinary church members were able to read it in most countries. The first vernacular translations into German appeared with Luther's Bible in 1534 while the first English translations that were widely available did not appear until at least 1535 with the publication of Tyndale's complete Bible (the NT appeared in 1525).¹² Thus the whole Bible was not available to most English Christians for over 1500 years (even then few poor people could afford one if they could find one). Why would God withdraw gifts that the apostle's felt were essential to edification, only to leave them without access to his word for 1500 years?
2. The Bible itself demands that we do not deny spiritual gifts (1 Thess 5:20; 1 Cor 14:39). Indeed, Paul said they were essential and for all (1 Cor 14:1, 5,) and that meetings would include them (1 Cor 14:26, 29). In fact, there is no clear line drawn in the NT between ordinary and supernatural spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:29-30 contains helps and administration with healing and miracles; Rm 12:6-8 contains encouraging and giving with prophecy, Eph 4:11 contains teachers as well as apostles). If God says, '**do not despise prophecies**' (1 Thess 5:20), I need a very good reason to suddenly start ignoring them.

For these and many other reasons we cannot deny the use of genuine spiritual gifts in Biblical churches. However this does not mean that we should endorse the Charismatic Movement which is riddled with error, heresy and malpractice.¹³

The NT emphasis in church life is 'one-anothering' (*koinonia*), not top down authority.

The phrase 'one another' is used over 60 times by the apostles to emphasise mutual, interdependent ministry. Growth in the Christian life is by God's grace, but God has purposed that this grace is usually mediated through *koinonia*, so that we are dependent upon each other (Eph 4:29). As we encourage one another we all partake more of God's grace. This is why apostolic commands are frequently found in the form of the 'one another' phrase, for example:

- **Be kindly affectionate to one another.** (Rm 12:10)
- **Admonish one another.** (Rm 15:14)
- **Through love serve one another.** (Gal 5:13)
- **Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another.** (Col 3:13)
- **Comfort one another.** (1 Thess 4:18)

The modern concept of top-down authority, of pastors being six feet above contradiction is entirely absent from the NT.

Ministering to each other involves mutual admonishment and submission

At a certain point every believer should be able to teach and admonish others (Heb 5:12); it is not just elders who admonish, all can admonish:

¹² Wycliffe's Bible appeared in 1388 but very few people had access to it and printing had not yet been invented.

¹³ There is not space here to defend this view. Please refer to my papers, *The Charismatic Catastrophe*, *Unholy Alliances*, my booklets *The Origins of Pentecostalism*, *Deception - The Deadly Virus* and others. The Charismatic Movement has single-handedly introduced occult and pagan doctrines and practices into the church on an unprecedented scale. See notes on the Health & Wealth Gospel that follow.

- ... submitting to one another in the fear of God. (Eph 5:21) [The fact that Paul subsequently highlights the family and slaves does not limit the 'one another' to just these groups.]
- I urge you, brethren - you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and *that* they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints - that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labours with *us*. (1 Cor 16:15-16) [There is no indication that Stephanus was an elder, though he may well have been, but note also that the submission was to his household. As hosts of the church, the members were to submit to his wife and family.]
- Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another. (1 Pt 5:5)
- Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. (Rm 15:14)
- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another. (Col 3:16)
- Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly. (1 Thess 5:14; note; *brethren*, not the elders who are told to do this in v12)
- the older women likewise ... that they admonish the young women (Titus 2:3-4)

Again it is the gift that carries authority. If a brother has wisdom he can apply that in admonishment to another brother without the involvement of the elders. If more godly believers admonished folk, there would be fewer problems in the church. In one sense there was no higher authority in the early church than the apostles, and Peter was the acknowledged early leader (James became a 'chairman' at Jerusalem later). Despite this, the upstart and former persecutor, Paul, admonished Peter publicly - and he was right to do so. (Gal 2:11ff).

We are to act in love towards each other always, but that does not mean that there are actual visible acts of love being manifest. Love may pervade a relationship while there are no visible signs (such as hugs or kisses). Submission must also be a heart attitude we maintain towards each other; but that doesn't necessarily mean there are any obvious visible signs of it - such as obedience to a command. Even a pastor addressing the flock, or admonishing the flock, may still have an attitude of submission in terms of preferring others above himself.

The reason is that we are all members of Christ's body and all equal in status:

- There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)
- There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all. Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another. (Col 3:11-13)

Together we stand as one new man. The local church is to represent this one new man; so as such there can be no elevated people; all are loving and submissive to all. There is no seniority above others in the body of Christ, all are one in status. There are different functions in the body and elders stand in front like fathers in order to ensure decency and order; but important decisions are to be arrived at by consensus (see Acts 15:22-23, 25).

The practical focus of church life was breaking of bread not the sermon

Preaching is not the focus of NT church life, breaking of bread is.¹⁴ In fact, the NT emphasis regarding preaching is evangelism, preaching the Gospel. Within church life,

¹⁴ 1 Cor 11:18, 20; Acts 2:42.

words translated *preach* are usually words that imply 'dialogue', not a sermon. The model for discipleship is that of Jesus: teaching by example, conversation and teaching the word in a question and answer forum.

NT Church worship did not use musical instruments

Search as long as you like, you will find no reference to musical instruments in connection with the church in the New Testament, and precious little mention of any kind.¹⁵ Again the church followed the synagogue in this - there was no instrumental music in the synagogue. Historically, instruments only began to be used in church services after about 200 years¹⁶ when other pagan influences began to be absorbed. As they appeared they were condemned by leaders such as Chrysostom as a fleshly development. Instrumental music was formally introduced into Roman church services by Pope Vitelian in 671 AD.

Scripture emphasises the importance of vocal contributions in worship. The church is called together to offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Pt 2:5) and these are specifically stated to be the fruit of the lips giving thanks (Heb 13:15). Worship is something done in and by saints as a result of a consecrated life yielded in service to God as a sacrifice (Rm 12:1). Praise is the outward testimony of our lives to demonstrate the goodness of God (Eph 1:6,12; Phil 1:11). Both can include sung, vocal contributions.

The new nature of believers, the expression of a new heart, is manifested in a new song unto God. This is acceptable worship since it is inspired by the Spirit and returns to God. The expression of the flesh (clever human ideas, will-worship, uncontrolled emotionalism) are not acceptable to God. The cleverness of musical skill, the emotional intensity of certain types of music, and the sheer force of loud noise works against Christian worship, as does anything which excites the soul. The flesh is not to be brought into the service of the church.

Doctrinal Issues - The Doctrine of God

God's sovereignty

Let's spell this out - God is king and in control of absolutely everything, **everything!** This emphasis should not be necessary when addressing believers, but sadly these days it is. If God is controlling the hairs on our head and the death of sparrows (Matt 10:29-30), how much more is he controlling everything else. This scripture should settle the matter on its own, but here are a few more:

- Yours, O LORD, *is* the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all *that is* in heaven and in earth *is yours*; yours *is* the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head over all. (1 Chron 29:11)
- All the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing; he does according to his will in the army of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?' (Dan 4:35)
- *He who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords. (1 Tm 6:15)
- You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created. (Rev 4:11)

¹⁵ The mention of harps in heaven (Rev 14:2, 15:2) is symbolic of harmonious Christian worship.

¹⁶ Many have cogently argued that musical instruments were not in widespread use in the church at large for 1200 years.

- ... according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will. (Eph 1:11)

If God is all-powerful, he is totally sovereign over everything, QED. Some implications of this include:

- GOD DETERMINES THE COURSE OF NATIONS - **The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.** (Dan 4:25) Thus revolution can never be excused.
- GOD DETERMINES WHO WILL AND WHO WILL NOT BE SAVED - **For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.'** (Rm 9:15) Thus conversion does not rest in man's choice, but God's gift of faith.
- GOD DETERMINES EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS IN OUR LIVES - **In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.** (1 Thess 5:18) Thus we must have faith and patience.
- GOD DETERMINES THE END FROM THE BEGINNING - **Remember the former things of old, for I *am* God, and *there is no other; I am* God, and *there is none like me*, declaring the end from the beginning.** (Isa 46:9-10) Thus we can have hope.
- GOD CONTROLS WHAT MEN SAY, THINK AND DO - **Who *is* he *who* speaks and it comes to pass, *when* the Lord has not commanded *it*?** (Lam 3:37). The LORD knows the thoughts of man (Ps 94:11). You understand my thought afar off ... **For *there is* not a word on my tongue, *but* behold, O LORD, you know it altogether ... In your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when *as yet there were* none of them** (Ps 139:2, 4, 16). Who says of Cyrus [the Emperor], '***He is* my shepherd, and he shall perform all my pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."**' (Isa 44:8). Thus we can be confident in God's plan.
- GOD CONTROLS THE FORCES OF NATURE - **The LORD has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds *are* the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers.** (Nah 1:3-4). He who forms mountains, and creates the wind. (Amos 4:13). He causes the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures. (Ps 135:7). Fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His word. (Ps 148:8). He gives rain on the earth, and sends waters on the fields. (Job 5:10). For He commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves of the sea ... He calms the storm, so that its waves are still. (Ps 107:25, 29). The LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea. (Jon 1:4) [Note that nature is not under the direct control of Satan.] Thus we can trust in times of calamity and give thanks in times of prosperity.
- THIS INCLUDES GOOD AND EVIL THINGS - ***Is it* not from the mouth of the Most High that woe [Hebrew: 'evil'] and well-being proceed?** (Lam 3:38) Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done *it*? (Amos 3:6). I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity [Hebrew: 'evil']; I, the LORD, do all these *things*.' (Isa 45:7). Thus we can be wise, discerning and understand the times.

All of this means that we must never minimise God's sovereignty by what we do or say. This truth must dominate the way we think and the way we conduct our lives. We are far too careless in the way we speak, even about the weather or the difficulties of the day. A worshipper will trust God's sovereignty in life's circumstances and timing, honouring the Lord even during difficult times.

Thus we must be careful how we present the Gospel for instance. If God is sovereign, draws men to Christ and predestines those who will be saved, we cannot say that God loves everyone or that Jesus died for everyone. The proclamation of the Gospel is not an open offer to all, but the means of grace for those called by the Spirit.

If God is sovereign then he is certainly ruling his church, so men should take their hands off this work as if it all depended upon them. The clever worldly ideas to pull in outsiders should all stop. The church is for believers to do each other good and to give thanks to God.

Evangelism is not based upon making the church entertaining and welcoming, but on believers going out to where unbelievers are (work-mates, neighbours, friends, and relatives) and sharing the Good News. We don't need lots of unbiblical new church programmes, methods, and fun ideas.

Finally, we must give God his due place in our lives and be a worshipping people. Worship is something that must set the course of our lives (Rm 12:1-2), it is not something relegated to an emotional musical interlude for a few minutes on Sunday. Believers must live by faith, faith that God is in complete control and will do all his will. Active belief in God's complete sovereignty will radically change the character of Christians and maximise the testimony of their walk.

God's love - is tied to election

God does not love everyone! Just a second's clear thought shows this to be true if one has a proper understanding of God's perfections. God only does things fully and perfectly, and what he does is from eternity to eternity. God never decrees anything imperfectly or temporarily. What is decreed is eternal, full and perfect: **Whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it, (Eccles 3:14).**

If God declares that someone is loved they were loved from eternity and they are loved fully into eternity future for evermore. Further God only loves anything in this creation on the basis of his Son. The Father loves the Son, all else in this world is consigned to destruction. Those who are loved by God are loved because they are found in Christ. The essence of salvation, actually, is being found in Christ - just as Noah's family was saved inside the ark from a world that was judged. [This is why there is a linguistic connection between the pitch that covered the ark and the propitiation of Christ's atonement.]

Those that are sentenced to hell were never loved by God; how could they be? If God loved them on earth, then his love was taken away from them in hell, or God loves people in hell. The latter thought is preposterous as hell is the place of God's judgment and wrath. Therefore, God either never loved these or he stopped loving them. But God cannot cease loving someone he has set his love upon, or his love would be imperfect and fallible; his decree would be faulty.

Perhaps God loves wicked people with a lesser sort of love? Well this is never even hinted at in the Bible, in any way. God either loves or he doesn't. How can God display a strong love to some and a weaker love to others? God only does things fully and perfectly, or he isn't God.

Thankfully, we do not need metaphysical arguments since the matter is settled plainly. God hates certain people and this is mentioned very many times indeed in the Bible. No one can say God loves everyone since the Bible shows that he hates some.¹⁷ Neither can we use sophistry to make the word 'hate' mean 'to love less'; this is just a falsity. The word means what it says and some of the original words are the same word as the hate that leads to murder.

Neither is there any place at all where scripture states that God loves everyone; not one. The NIV uses 'love' in Ps 145:13, but the word does not appear in the majority of Masoretic texts. It is a mistranslation. The word 'compassion' is used for all in Ps 145:9, but this is not love, it is a reference to God's providence which provides good (rain, sun, seasons) to

¹⁷ For instance: Lev 20:23, 26:30; Ps 5:5, 11:5, 53:5; Prov 16:16-19; Zech 11:8; Mal 1:3; Rm 9:13.

everyone. Even this Psalm reveals a distinction between the elect and the reprobate¹⁸ (see v18-20). Jn 3:16 teaches that God so loved the world that he sent his Son to save the elect. If 'world' here meant everyone, then it means the same in v17 and this would then teach universalism - everyone saved and no hell. 'World' here cannot mean everyone or there is no Gospel. The word 'world' is also often used in a limited sense, such as in Jn 12:19. Neither do the texts using the word 'all' mean everyone, such as 1 Tim 2:4. 'All' is frequently limited in scope throughout scripture (like 'world') and often only means a relatively small number (such as Jn 3:26, 8:2). Again, if 'all' means everyone here then we have universalism again.

The simple truth is that of election, often itself unpalatable. After man's fall he forfeited all hope and was judicially worthy of nothing but wrath. Knowing the inevitability of the fall, and using it for his own purposes, God chose a portion of mankind to be saved to demonstrate his grace and mercy. Upon these he set his love from eternity and placed them in Christ¹⁹. Those who were not chosen can only receive God's hate, even though God is patient with their sins and providentially provides for their good day by day.

Throughout scripture one sees a distinction between the wicked and the good, the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light; the book of Psalms reveals this very clearly. This is the dichotomy between the elect and the reprobate - those whose sins destine them to condemnation. For this reason wrath hangs over most men (Jn 3:36). Those who have God's wrath on them are the ones that God hates. Only the elect in Christ are loved.

God's holiness

It is a popular modern fallacy that God's attributes are dominated by love, since John says, 'God is love' (1 Jn 4:8, 16); but this was never held by historic theologians and it ignores the weight of Biblical teaching. By holiness we mean that, God is infinitely righteous, utterly perfect and separate from all evil.²⁰ He is unique and above creation, being absolutely pure and incorruptible. He cannot sin or tolerate sin.²¹

The simplest definition of God's character is probably 'holy love' but the 'controlling' element is holiness; God hates evil.²² God's love is constrained by his holiness, not the other way around. In the same way God's omnipotence is 'limited' by his holiness; although God is all-powerful, he cannot lie; God's power is circumscribed by holiness. God's holiness is the essential attribute that colours all God's other characteristics.

The critical feature about God is his glorious holiness. Only holiness features as a thrice-named characteristic,

Holy, holy, holy /s the LORD of hosts; the whole earth /s full of His glory! (Isa 6:3)

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come! (Rev 4:8)

More than forty times God is called, 'The Holy One' of Israel or Jacob, and everything related to God is called 'holy', such as his name (Ps 111:9) or where he dwells (Ps 20:6). God is never called, 'The Loving One'. God's purpose in redemption is to create a family of

¹⁸ 'Reprobate' is a Biblical term meaning 'rejected' that is used theologically to identify the non-elect. It is translated as 'reprobate' by the KJV but as 'rejected', 'disqualified' or 'disapproved' by other versions. See 2 Tim 3:8; Titus 1:16.

¹⁹ Eph 1:4-5: He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

²⁰ 1 Pt 1:16; Lev 11:44.

²¹ Ex 15:11; Lev 11:44; Habb 1:13; Jm 1:13.

²² Zech 8:17; Ps 5:5; Prov 6:6-19, 8:13.

saints - holy ones (1 Thess 4:3). Holiness is the very heart of God's personality, he is 'glorious in holiness' (Ex 15:11).

Puritan Stephen Charnock said, '*Power is God's hand or arm, omniscience His eye, mercy His bowels, eternity His duration, but holiness is His beauty... A chief emphasis is placed upon this perfection of God: God is oftener styled Holy than almighty, and set forth by this part of His dignity more than by any other... [Holiness] is the glory of all the rest; as it is the glory of the Godhead, so it is the glory of every perfection in the Godhead.*' Another Puritan, John Howe, said, '*This may be said to be a transcendental attribute, that, as it were, runs through the rest, and casts lustre upon them. It is an attribute of attributes.*'

When God swears an oath, it is by his holiness (Ps 89:35). Anything God does is holy (Ps 145:17 KJV). Because of his holiness, God hates sin and will bring wrath on sinners (Nahum 1:2); yet because of his mercy God decrees an atonement to make his elect people holy and loved from eternity (Eph 1:4-5). His holiness thus results in hatred and wrath to the wicked (Ps 5:5), but love and grace to the elect who are accepted in Christ (Eph 1:6).

Doctrinal Issues - The Doctrine of Salvation

Christ did not die for everyone

We need to think about this logically as revealed in scripture; salvation has always been restricted to those chosen by God, not everyone.

SALVATION IS RESTRICTED IN THE OT

1. Salvation only comes by knowing God (Matt 11:27; 2 Thess 1:8).
2. In ancient times God only chose to save eight people from the flood, one family that he knew (1 Pt 3:20, 2 Pt 2:5). The vast majority of the human race perished - men, women, children and animals.
3. In the OT God only knew (loved) the people of Israel, some of their ancestors and those foreign proselytes who joined with Israel.²³
 - For you *are* a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. (Deut 7:6)
 - The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and he chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples. (Deut 10:15)
 - Salvation is of the Jews. (Jn 4:22)
4. God did not know other nations, thus there was no salvation for them.
 - You only have I known of all the families of the earth. (Amos 3:2)

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM PREACHED BY JESUS WAS RESTRICTED

In the NT Jesus only ever ministered to Israel (Matt 10:5-7, 15:26). When Greeks sought him, he saw this as a sign of his impending death when the Gospel would be universalised (Jn 12:20-23).

UNDER THE NEW COVENANT THE GOSPEL IS UNIVERSALISED BEYOND ISRAEL, BUT IT IS STILL RESTRICTED.

1. It is restricted to those whom God draws (Jn 6:44,65).
2. It is restricted to Jesus' sheep (Jn 10:4, 11, 15).

²³ Such as Ruth, Rahab, Aruanah the Jebusite, Uriah the Hittite.

3. It is restricted to those whom the Spirit calls (Jn 3:5-8; 2 Tim 1:9; Heb 3:1).
4. It is restricted to the elect loved by God in eternity (Eph 1:4-5, 2:4; Rev 1:5).
5. It is restricted to those for whom Christ's blood was shed (Matt 20:28; Heb 9:28).
6. It is restricted to God's special people (Titus 2:14).
7. It is restricted to those given grace (Rm 5:15; Eph 2:7).
8. It is restricted to those who eyes are opened by God (Matt 16:17).
9. It is restricted to those whom God gives faith (Eph 2:8).

These scriptures make it abundantly clear that God's redemption is as wide as his choosing; salvation is for the elect and not for all. When man fell God was under no obligation to save anyone at all; justice would have been served by the extinction of mankind. In the mercy of God he chose to elect a portion of mankind to salvation, for these he granted grace and faith, these who would be called by the Spirit and drawn in due time. God's electing was necessary since man cannot be saved without God's intervention, his depravity has ruined any spiritual aptitude for good. Those elected to salvation continue in grace (Jn 10:28-29) since they are prayed for by Jesus (Jn 17:20); he does not pray for all - only for the elect (Jn 17:9).

A consequence of this is that the Gospel cannot be presented as automatically available to all, but only to those who have faith, who seek God, who cry for mercy. All should be urged to repent and be saved and whoever will come will be saved, but not all will come.

The Gospel is not a free offer guaranteed to everyone, depending upon their will

In the light of the above, we can never present the Gospel in universalistic terms. We can never say to an individual or an audience: 'God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life'; 'Jesus died for you personally'; 'God provided a salvation for you at the cross and it's up to you to accept or reject it'; 'Invite Christ into your life and you will be saved' or 'Open your heart and receive Christ'.

If Jesus did not die for everyone, then we cannot state that everyone in a room is guaranteed salvation if they only accept Christ and open their heart. Esau was hated by God before he was even born (Rm 9:11, 13), he was not elect. Both Esau and Jacob were sinful men but only Jacob met with God and was changed. Later Esau regretted his actions and sought God's blessing with tears - but failed to find repentance because God did not give it to him; he was rejected (Heb 12:17). He had sorrow but no spiritual change of heart.

Conversion is not an act of man's will (Rm 9:16) so a man cannot choose to be saved. He can cry to God for mercy, he can seek salvation but he cannot come to Christ unless he is drawn by God (Jn 6:44, 65). The beginning of conversion is a work of God in the heart prior to any act of man (Jn 3:3-8; Eph 2:1-10), therefore, man cannot change his own heart as a leopard cannot change his spots. Consequently, man is unable to do anything to initiate salvation by his efforts, whether good works, praying, repenting or believing. Only when God gives faith can a man believe;²⁴ only when God grants repentance can a man turn and be converted;²⁵ only when God draws a man by sending the Holy Spirit to work in the heart can a man even see the truth.²⁶ If this is true, we cannot lead a person to Christ unless these works have already transpired in their heart. To get people to recite a prayer

²⁴ Acts 14:27, 18:27; Jn 6:29; Phil 1:29; Eph 2:8-9.

²⁵ Acts 5:31, 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25-26; Heb 12:17.

²⁶ Jn 3:3-8, 6:44, 65; Matt 13:14-16; Mk 8:17-18; Rm 11:8.

or raise their hand in response to a message, and then tell them they are saved is sheer folly; especially if we know nothing about these people.²⁷

The Gospel is a message of hope and a command to repent (Acts 17:30). We urge everyone to repent and declare that there is only one hope - Jesus Christ. We preach that everyone who comes to him will find everlasting life; but behind that is the knowledge that only those drawn by God will come to Christ (Jn 6:44); only those given faith by God will believe (Eph 2:8). It is one thing to say that all who come will find mercy, but quite another to insist that God loves *you*, or that Christ died for *you*. How many people have been told that only for them to die in their sins. Where is that love now?

We must persuade people of the truths of the Gospel, arguing and debating what the Gospel is and explaining what God says in his word. We should always direct people to Christ, not themselves, telling them to flee to him, seek his mercy, call upon his name. We must also pray for those we talk to and set a good example in the way we live. In this we cannot offer guarantees; we can sow the seed and water it but only God can give growth. One person can respond to the Gospel call, but another can seem to embrace it but fall away completely. The same message can open one man's heart (as the Spirit applies it to the conscience) while another man is hardened in rebellion.

It is the truth that sets people free (Jn 8:32), we do no one any favours by preaching something that is not true. Further we risk misrepresenting God by telling someone he loves them and will save them if he has no intention of doing that at all.

Common grace

The idea of grace is one of the sweetest doctrines in the Bible, we should celebrate the glory of God's free, unmerited grace which saves the elect despite their lack of any worth. This grace is so expensive that it cost the Father the humiliation and death of his own Son. So, to suggest that grace is 'common' is an insult to God. Grace can never be common, it is costly and particular - grace is only given to those God has chosen. There is no universal grace to all as there is no love of God to all. God's grace is as broad as his love; it arises from the cross and sustains those whom God has chosen to be his heirs.

Since grace arises only from the cross, how can grace ever be ministered in any form to the reprobate? If grace is earmarked for the elect how can the wicked benefit from it? God's stance towards this world of sin is one of wrath and judgment; only the cross alters this so that by the substitutionary death of God's Son, God can administer grace to those he has predestined to receive it, those for whom Christ died. The idea of common grace turns this upside down.

The doctrine of common grace was invented fairly recently in order to support the false idea that God loves everyone and to provide a foundation for the idea of good in society. Looked at from a human standpoint, some people appear to do good, how can they if they are sinners?

John Calvin explained that these 'good' acts are but 'glorious sins'. The notion of righteous sinners misunderstands two cardinal doctrines - the total depravity of man / the heinousness of sin, and the glorious quality of God's true righteousness. If man is dead in

²⁷ This is why so many fall away from evangelistic crusades; the many that respond by standing, raising a hand or reciting someone else's prayer were never converted in the first place. Even the Billy Graham Organisation has admitted that up to 95% of 'converts' fall away in time.

sins then he is spiritually dead and unable to raise himself to spiritual life. It is impossible for a spiritually dead man to produce works of spiritual righteousness. There is not one word in the Bible about a special kind of grace that enables man to do good in society but which does not convert him. God's grace brings regeneration and eternal life. Only after a man is spiritually raised / regenerated can he do good works that are approved by God.

Common grace is a misunderstanding of God's providence. God is so patient and compassionate, even towards a fallen creation, that he providentially supplies what is necessary for life. This is not grace arising from the cross, but an example of God's patience.

He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matt 5:45)

Nevertheless he did not leave himself without witness, in that he did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. (Acts 14:17)

Penal substitution

From time to time in history this crucial doctrine is assailed by well-meaning, but totally wrong, preachers. At the present time a debate is raging over a book by Steve Chalke that attacks this doctrine, suggesting that it teaches a vengeful God when God is loving to all. However, in recent times many scholars, as well as some evangelical teachers, have questioned the doctrine including: James Dunn, Alan Mann, Stephen Travis, Nigel Wright, Clark Pinnock, Robert Brow, Mark Baker and Joel Green.

Chalke's position is manifest in this quote,

*The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse - a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed ... The truth is, the cross is a symbol of love. It is a demonstration of just how far God as Father and Jesus as Son are prepared to go to prove that love.*²⁸

We have seen above that scripture does not testify that God loves all and neither was the cross intended for all so Chalke's underlying presuppositions are incorrect. In fact, previous champions in the fight against Biblical atonement were liberals like Albert Schweitzer or Deists like Hermann Reimarus.

Folk who adopt heterodox views of the atonement usually err in many areas of Biblical theology. This is true of Chalke who distorts many truths, especially the doctrine of God and man's depravity. Chalke posits a God who is not primarily holy but only love; a Jesus who did not claim to be divine; the cross is more about God identifying with man's pain; and man who is essentially good. These errors are the opposite of the Biblical Gospel.²⁹

Another heresy which denies the need for penal substitution is the Moral Government Theory (or Moral Influence Theory) of the cross. This has manifest itself in various forms throughout history and has been taught by Abelard (1079-1142), Hugo Grotius (d. 1645) and Charles Finney (1792-1875). It claims that Christ did not bear our penalty for sin or satisfy God's justice, but suffered with us as a moral example, thus the sinner is somehow pardoned. God, as man's Governor, is eager to pardon everyone, and accepts Christ's death as payment for all [though Finney denies even this saying, Christ can only die for himself].

²⁸ Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, pp182,183.

²⁹ Chalke also sees little difference between a Catholic mass and the Lord's Supper, and also called the literal creation of Genesis 1, 'rubbish'.

The Gospel is holding up the cross as a supreme example of God's love, a moral influence, which somehow saves people.

A new version of this theory is propounded by George Otis who has said, '*Christ has not redeemed us by giving his life as a ransom for our sins ... Christ paid no man's debt.*'³⁰ In this he follows Finney; Otis also taught that Christ's example of love on the cross enables people to change. However, to this he has now added the false notion that man's sin and suffering is the result of domination by specific demonic forces that rule in various ranks: local, city-wide, regional and national. These demons must be defeated and removed before the Gospel can be effective. Salvation is thus not by a penal, substitutionary redemption, but by overcoming demons and embracing an example. Thus the Biblical doctrines of man's total depravity and Christ's substitutionary atonement are rejected.

We do not need a long theological debate to resolve this matter. The salvation of a sinful person by the substitutionary death of another is absolutely clear from Genesis to Revelation. Sin results in death; a death must occur for every sinner.³¹ For a man to be saved, a substitute saviour must die in his place; the blood of the saviour pays the penalty for the sin of the sinner.³² Only a man who is also God could die for more than one person. The blood of Christ has infinite value, hence it is called 'precious'.³³

These truths are made evident in:

- The symbols and types of the sacrificial offerings throughout the entire Old Covenant, where the sinner is reconciled with God through the death of a substitute animal.³⁴ Note the dedication of the temple by Solomon where a sacrifice of 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep was made in one event.³⁵
- The words of the prophets showing the fulfilment of typology in the Messiah.³⁶
- The words of Jesus himself.³⁷
- And the clear teaching of apostles.³⁸

Atonement is the satisfying Divine Justice by Jesus Christ giving himself a ransom for us, undergoing the penalty due to our sins, and thereby releasing us from that punishment which God might justly inflict upon us. [Buck's Theological Dictionary]

The Covenant of God and the decree

It is usual for Reformed theologians to speak about God's covenant under the framework of a 'Covenant of Grace',³⁹ and sometimes to include in this the term the 'Covenant of Redemption'.⁴⁰ But it is important to understand that there is no Biblical data regarding a 'covenant of grace' outside history and above all other covenants; or a single all encompassing covenant, which contains subsets of other covenants, administered in different ways. However, God's decree or counsel could be considered this way and it is important to be Biblical on this matter to avoid a focus on man.

³⁰ George Otis, Lecture No. 4, '*Moral Govt. Theol.*', YWAM meeting in Tacoma, Washington (1981).

³¹ Lev 22:9; Ezek 18:4, 20.

³² Rm 3:24-26, 5:9; Eph 2:13; Heb 9:14, 22; 1 Jn 1:7.

³³ 1 Pt 1:19.

³⁴ Gen 4:4; Ex 29:14; Lev 1:4.

³⁵ 2 Chron 7:5.

³⁶ Isa 53:4-12; Zech 13:7.

³⁷ Matt 20:28; Mk 10:45

³⁸ Rm 1:18, 3:22-25, 5:8-9; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 1:4, 3:13; Eph 5:2; Heb 9:11-28; 1 Pt 3:18; 1 Jn 2:2; 3:16; 4:10.

³⁹ A single united covenant comprising all others.

⁴⁰ A covenant in eternity between the Father and the Son to save the elect.

Firstly, the phrase 'Covenant of Redemption' is not Biblical and the notion of a formal covenant between the Father and Christ in eternity is not spoken of. Any such covenant must of necessity include the Spirit as part of the Trinity, but this is not usually taught in the Reformed doctrine. It would be more Biblical to speak of a 'counsel of redemption' for the decrees of God in eternity are called 'a decree' (Ps 2:7), 'an eternal purpose' (Eph 3:11), a 'counsel' (Acts 2:23, 4:28) or 'foreordination' (1 Pt 1:20) but never a covenant. Neither is God's purpose to save man decreed in eternity described as a contract between the Father and the Son, it is a declaration of the Triune God to decree a bond of friendship with the elect in Christ and provide for the salvation of his chosen people. This eternal purpose finds fulfilment in the New Covenant, the Gospel. In the Bible, covenants are always descriptions of a means established by God in time to effect a relationship with certain people (or parties) on Earth.

Note that there is no evidence that scriptural *covenants* are contracts between God and man requiring obedience from both parties. Man cannot contribute anything to entering the New Covenant. He is ever an **unprofitable servant** (Lk 17:10). Covenants are a bond between God and man established in sovereign grace: **I will take you as my people, and I will be your God,** (Ex 6:7).

Then, there is no Biblical evidence of any sort for a covenant of works (especially in the form of a contract) between God and Adam. This is taught by many theologians of various schools. It claims that God promised man salvation on condition of obedience, but man failed and came under condemnation, necessitating a covenant of grace. Adam's obedience was the means of staying in a graceful covenant relationship. But scripture everywhere teaches that man could never obtain salvation without Christ, no matter how innocent he was. Eternal life is tied up with Christ as the Son, man could never have obtained everlasting life without being united with Christ. Further God's decree from eternity was that the elect should be united in the Son (Eph 1:4-5), for God to promise eternal life outside of Christ would have been a lie.

There is a unity of God's purpose and a unity between the OT and the NT in how this is worked out, but this unity is never called the 'covenant of grace'. In fact, the NT reveals a significant disjunction between the New Covenant and the Old (Mosaic) Covenant which does not suggest organic unity (Jn 1:17; Gal 5:4; Heb 8:13). God's eternal plan is seen to be progressively worked out in an increasingly narrowing selection to: Noah and all living creatures (Gen 9:9ff); Abram and his descendants (Gen 15:18, 17:2ff); Israel as a newly constituted nation (Ex 24:8); with David's line for kingship (Ps 89:3-4; Jer 33:21); of Israel, only a remnant will inherit (Rm 9:27; Mic 5:7-8; Zec 8:11-12). The seed of Abraham is in fact Christ, and all those in Him - the elect of grace both Jew and Gentile (Gal 3:7, 9, 16, 29). This line of divine purpose is therefore - the Gospel of Christ:

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.' (Gal 3:8)

The covenant with Abraham was a presentation of Gospel promises. The various OT covenants were aspects of God's purposes for man (and nature) to establish a bond of friendship, which progressively lead towards, and are fulfilled in, the New Covenant and are then abrogated in their earlier form. The main precursor of the New Covenant is not the Mosaic Law but the Covenant promises to Abraham.

The unifying feature of Biblical history is not a covenant of grace (though it could be called such I suppose) but the decree of God to save the elect - the Gospel. Divine covenants, on

the other hand, are always between God and men and are always 'cut' (enacted) in time to establish friendship after a significant event (such as the flood, Abraham's obedience, or the establishment of Israel as a nation). There is no reference to a covenant cut between the Father and the Son in eternity.

Repercussions of the Covenant of Grace in Reformed circles

1. There is unity between Mosaic law and grace under both covenants.
2. There is one sign of the covenant: circumcision and baptism have essentially the same purpose within their covenant.
3. Baptism is administered to infants since they are in the covenant just as Israelite infants were circumcised.

There is no clear scriptural evidence for any of these items. We have already shown the scriptural contrast between Mosaic Law and grace; indeed believers are specifically stated to be not under Mosaic Law at all. Law and grace are contrasted as systems or dispensations.⁴¹ There is unity between God's principle of eternal, moral law and grace: what is required of eternal moral law is required under grace, Christ-likeness. But what is required under Mosaic Law (such as Sabbath keeping, offerings, fastings) are not required by grace under the New Covenant.⁴²

Then, baptism is never described as a seal of the covenant like circumcision was for Jew (Rm 4:11). In Col 2:10-12 Paul is not speaking about circumcision as water baptism but the actual putting off of the old nature (the *flesh*) - a spiritual event applied by the Holy Spirit himself; in fact the action of the Spirit is the only seal of our faith (Eph 1:13; 4:30). Circumcision symbolised the cutting off of the flesh; in Christ we were co-crucified and this became real for us. The baptism here is a submersion into Christ whereby we died and were raised to new life. Presbyterians need to argue that 'baptism' means immersion/submersion here to prove their point, and yet elsewhere insist that baptism does not mean immersion.⁴³

Paedobaptism is a huge subject and cannot be fully entered into here. However, if all the above is correct, then it follows that babies should not be baptised. A few reasons include:

- Scriptural teaching is that only confessing disciples are to be baptised (Matt 28:19).
- Even Presbyterians admit that babies are in sin and in the flesh, and yet are also sanctified and in covenant because of their parentage. This is a dangerous affirmation to make.
- Presbyterians admit also that baptised infants can turn out to be unregenerate. So baptising such was unbiblical, a mistake and a poor testimony.
- Although there are cases of households being baptised in Acts, we cannot insist that infants were definitely included in baptism - there is no clear statement to that effect. Neither could we prove that any young children were not actually converted before they were baptised and evidenced this by speaking in tongues (c.f. Acts 10:44-48; Matt 18:3, 19:14, 21:15-16).
- The Reformed case often claims historical support in the early Fathers, but modern, professional, academic studies (even by Reformed professors) have categorically shown

⁴¹ There is, however, grace evidenced in detail in the Old Covenant and law (of Christ) manifested in the New Covenant.

⁴² The reformed fudge that the Mosaic Law is sub-divided into moral, ceremonial and civil aspects and that two of these have been cancelled but the moral law remains finds no basis in the OT, or even in Jewish thought. The Law is a single unified item.

⁴³ This does not mean that water baptism must always be by immersion. A good case can be made that baptism can be by immersion, pouring or sprinkling.

that for over 300 years in the early church baptism was usually by immersion (exceptionally by pouring) and that babies were not baptised.⁴⁴

The baptism in the Spirit is applied to all believers at conversion

We must first note that the normal Charismatic explanation of this event⁴⁵ is nowhere expounded by the apostles in the NT at any point; neither is there any exhortation for believers to seek an experience called 'baptism in (with or by) the Spirit. The references where this phrase occurs are in the Gospels and twice in Acts explaining what Jesus will lead his disciples into after the cross when he inaugurates a new way to God.

The only mention in the apostolic letters is 1 Cor 12:13 where it clearly describes the spiritual induction of the elect into Christ in the heavenlies which occurred at the ascension and is applied to believers at regeneration:

By one Spirit we were all baptised into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

What could be clearer? All the elect, all believers, were baptised and made to partake of the Spirit. The words *Were* and *baptised* indicate that:

1. The baptism was a past event. [*Were baptised* = first aorist passive indicative of baptizw and so a reference to a definite past event. *And were all made to drink of one Spirit* (kai pantej e`n pneuma epotisqhmen) = first aorist passive indicative of potizw, to give to drink. *Robertson's Word Pictures*.] Indeed, Eph 4:5 states that there is only one baptism (and Paul is not talking about water baptism which is repeated).
2. It is not a future event for a young disciple to seek.
3. It is not a repeated event that touches believers one by one throughout history, but a single event that affected all believers at one point. The Spirit was poured out at Pentecost upon the whole body of Christ when Christ gave gifts to men (Eph 4:8; Jn 7:39).
4. Those who were baptised in the Spirit put on Christ (Gal 3:27). If you are a Christian, you have been baptised in the Spirit.
5. In water baptism all believers are symbolising this event and apply it to themselves.

There is virtually no teaching on the Charismatic variation of this doctrine in the entire history of the Christian church until the errors that arose in the late 19th century.⁴⁶ According to these Charismatic notions, this means that most, if not all, of the godly men and women in the church were second rate Christians until the 20th century. How can it be true that an immature Pentecostal believer has more spiritual power than Martin Luther, Augustine, CH Spurgeon or John Calvin.

The concept of an adept laying hands on a novice to impart a definite, subjective, spiritual experience is common throughout history in occult religions, especially in shamanism and

⁴⁴ See Profs. Hendrick Stander & Johannes Louw, *Baptism in the Early Church*, Carey Pub. (2004).

⁴⁵ This teaches that there is a distinct second work of grace in the believer where the Spirit, upon the work of the individual (in believing, praying, waiting, repenting etc.), comes upon a person with power, imparts joy, gives gifts (usually tongues) and imparts dynamic power for evangelistic service. Ordinary Christians, without this experience, cannot live life to the full. The very name of the Charismatic Movement arises from the Greek word for 'gifts' in 1 Corinthians 12:4 (*charismata*), grace-gifts which supposedly come only after having this experience.

⁴⁶ There are references to a 'baptism with the Spirit' by Methodists like Fletcher but this is referring to the false notion of entire sanctification and not a Pentecostal experience leading to spiritual gifts. The idea of a special subjective experience leading to power and gifts began to arise within the Holiness Movement in the US, and also partly in the Keswick meetings in the UK (where it had a slightly different meaning pertaining to entire consecration). From there it developed somewhat in the Welsh Revival of 1904 and flowered in the Pentecostal Movement after 1906. The Charismatic Movement adopted the mature Pentecostal doctrine.

oriental faiths. The 'Christian' methodology of doing this was developed in the heretical Latter Rain Movement in 1940s US Pentecostal churches and adopted wholesale by the Charismatic Movement. The Latter Rain proponents also taught a variety of doctrines that are closely linked to occult practices and which are also flowering in the modern Charismatic apostolic/prophetic movements.⁴⁷

Rewards

Some Reformed preachers insist that there is no such thing as rewards for work done in this life. There is only one reward and that is the life of Christ, given by grace. The reason for this is to ensure that there is no trace or hint of human works attributed to salvation. However, while the Bible strongly denies any works in justification, it categorically and clearly teaches that God gives varying degrees of reward to saints for work done in his service as a believer. While God has no obligation at all to give any reward, since all true ministry is empowered and generated by him, yet he still promises specific rewards - so great is God's grace.

The meaning of the Biblical words for rewards mainly revolve around the idea of wages.⁴⁸ In general the believer's reward is eternal life, the sinner's wage is death; but above this there are variations in other rewards over and above eternal life. These flow from Christ since all our treasures are in him. Conversion is the start, not the end of new life. Rewards are wages for divine service. We must add virtue, moral energy to our faith (2 Pt 1:5). The performance of this duty varies from Christian to Christian and this performance is judged and rewarded accordingly (Lk 19:11-27; Matt 25:14-30; Rm 14:10-12). Christians are all equal in status - they are each sons of God in Christ, but believers differ in faithfulness. The NT has encouragement to serve and warnings against falling. Note that if the reward is eternal life alone, texts that state it is the due wages or recompense of human actions teach that salvation is by works - the very thing Reformed teachers are trying to avoid.

OT saints looked to their reward (Heb 11:26). They knew that God (and life in him) was their great reward (Gen 15:1) but they expected other specific rewards, such as citizenship of a heavenly city (Heb 11:10, 14,16). Rewards have no human merit, they are works planned in eternity by God (Eph 2:10) and even the will and strength for them is given by God (Phil 2:12-13). To inspire faithfulness, God sovereignly chooses to promise rewards for Christian service; Jesus repeatedly affirmed this:

- But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. [Matt 6:3-4]
- Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. [Matt 6:19-20]
- And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward. [Matt 10:42]
- For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. [Mt 16:27] See also: 1 Cor 4:5; Gal 6:9-10; Eph 6:8; Phil 3:13-15; Col 3:23-24; Heb 6:10, 10:35, 11:6, 26; Rev 2:23-26, 11:18, 14:13, 19:8.

⁴⁷ Check on the aberrations and heresies of William Branham and Franklin Hall, the key Latter Rain teachers. See later section on, *a critique of the 'health and wealth Gospel'*; my papers: *Current Theological Problems Explained Simply*, *The Charismatic Catastrophe*; and my book *The Origins of Pentecostalism*.

⁴⁸ The words used are: REWARD [**misqo,j**] *misthos* 'wages'; WORK [**e;rgon**] *ergon* 'enterprise', 'deed'; LABOURS [**ko,poj**] *kopos*; 'toil'; RIGHTEOUS ACTS [**dikai,wma**] *dikaioma*; 'a righteous deed'; TREASURES [**qhsauro,j**] *thesauros*; storehouse, treasury, collected treasures. In one case there is 'recompense'.

Rewards are clearly conditional and believers can lose them or even be cheated out of them (Matt 10:42; 2 Jn 1:8; Col 2:18). This is not eternal life that is in question, but specific rewards. To teach otherwise leads to a destruction of the doctrine of perseverance; again something reformed teachers are trying to avoid. The words used in these passages cannot be made to say something other than what they actually say. The rewards are meritorious, are wages. The labours are real toil, the work is our deeds on earth and the righteousness is our righteous acts. These lead to a storing of precious things in a storehouse (heaven).

There can be no doubt that the believer is to receive rewards; the question is what these rewards are. A survey of the relevant texts intimates that the reward has to do with the various positions of authority in the new world.

Doctrinal Issues - The Doctrine of the End

The need of a loose hold on this world

The concept of believers being pilgrims and sojourners⁴⁹ in this world has fallen on hard times. Time was when Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* was required Christian reading and, indeed, was the second most popular book after the Bible. The truth is that we have no place in this world because it is dead to us (Gal 6:14). The Christian must always have one eye on the end of all things and the return of his Lord to keep a correct perspective on living in the world now.

To ensure a healthy spiritual life, the believer must resist conformity to this world at all costs (Rm 12:2). We must not think like other people, act like other people or speak like other people. Believers must take thoughts captive and not be ruled by them (2 Cor 10:5). They must behave in a godly fashion, following their master (Matt 10:38; 1 Tim 4:8; 2 Pt 1:6) and let no unsavoury talk come from their mouths (Eph 4:29) controlling the rudder of the tongue (Jm 3:5-8). Failure in even one of these areas leads to dead works (Jm 1:26).

We must even ensure that we don't even take our rest like worldly people. Too many Christians have let their thinking be moulded by the world and feel aggrieved if they do not receive their due rest and relaxation. In times gone by the concept of annual vacations did not even exist, let alone the idea of going to a foreign country. Visits to the seaside only became fashionable in Victorian times, and even then to aid recuperation. There has become little difference between people in the world and people in the church: their goals are similar on the surface and their lifestyles are the same when they both live for their annual holidays, even if it is a 'Christian' holiday.

Yet believers are supposed to be singled out for their refusal to think and act like other people. In Biblical times this often meant facing death. Daniel chose a lion's den rather than worship like everyone else, as did the young Israelite believers that faced the fiery furnace. Often in history Christians have faced persecution, imprisonment and execution rather than follow the party line. Men, women and children died rather than go to mass under Bloody Mary. The controlling feature of their lives was that they looked for a better country, a better world (Heb 11:16, 13:14; Phil 3:14).

⁴⁹ Travellers passing through.

The bible says that we are 'strangers' or 'aliens' in this world, we neither belong to it and neither are we the same as other people. Our attitude should be that we are camping in this world,⁵⁰ ready to strike camp and move on, not tied too closely to worldly people (Phil 2:15). Instead too many believers are fully at home with all the comforts, possessions and attitudes of this world.

Worse still is the growing phenomenon of churches totally adopting the earthly methods of the world around them in order to attract people into their meetings. Difficult doctrines (like sin, conversion, judgment, holiness, discipleship) are never mentioned for fear of upsetting outsiders. The Gospel is perverted to sound like a great association to join where the benefits are good. Worship is perverted to be a rock-music party or an emotional sing-a-thon. Mysticism is promoted that bears much resemblance to New Age cultism. Paul condemned this attitude long ago (Col 2:20-23) and so should we. All this means the following:

- WE MUST HOLD EARTHLY POSSESSIONS LIGHTLY, they are of this world, not the kingdom.
- BELIEVERS MUST TAKE CARE NOT TO REACT LIKE ORDINARY PEOPLE.
- THE IDEA THAT SECULAR METHODOLOGY WILL ASSIST IN BUILDING THE CHURCH IS PREPOSTEROUS AND CURSED. God alone builds the church, this demolishes all the concepts based around the 'seeker-sensitive' strategies, management leadership techniques, secular psychological counselling therapies and so on.
- THE PORTRAYAL OF WORSHIP AS AN ENTERTAINING PERFORMANCE IS ANATHEMA. It is earthly to build up emotionalism in structured meetings by artificial methods.
- BELIEVERS MUST BE VERY CAREFUL IN THEIR USE OF MONEY. Christians should save and buy what they can afford. **Owe no one anything.** (Rm 13:8). It is a characteristic of the world to buy what you want on credit and worry afterwards about payment.
- BELIEVERS WHO FOCUS THEIR ASPIRATIONS UPON EARTHLY ISRAEL, either now or in a future millennium, are making a mistake. God's purposes are not founded upon anything earthly. When Jesus returns God will destroy this world to renew it in an eternal form.

Hell, judgment and the intermediate state

Firstly, we can dismiss one modern false notion that is growing in popularity - i.e. that there is no eternal hell, only annihilation or conditional immortality (everlasting life is for the redeemed, the wicked are not resurrected for judgment). Despite the adoption of this old heresy by some highly-thought-of evangelical leaders, the historical position of Christianity stands clear - there is eternal, everlasting punishment for those who have not bowed the knee to king Jesus.

- **He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.** (Matt 3:12)
- **... and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** (Matt 13:42)
- **Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** (Matt 22:13)
- **... to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched - where 'Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'** (Mk 9:43-44; cf. Isa 66:24)
- **The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.** (Rev 20:10)

Passages like this can be multiplied. The point of the metaphors is continuance of condemnation and suffering. There are texts where the eternity of the state of blessedness of believers and the eternity of the misery of the wicked are set side by side. There is no reason to suppose that the same words for eternity or everlasting in these verses express two different ideas of continuance.

⁵⁰ Jn 1:14: Jesus 'tabernacled' here; 'dwelt' literally means 'to pitch your tent, to tabernacle'.

The modern failure is to ignore the dire consequences and nature of sin and the enormity of sin's hatred by God. Those who claim that temporary crimes do not deserve eternal punishment fail to observe the infinite majesty of an offended God and the statement of scripture that each sin is worthy of death. This means that many sins are worthy of many deaths, or an eternity of deaths for one person. An infinity of punishment is required to deal with a lifetime of sinful thoughts, word, deeds and sins of omission.

Then there is the necessity of the dead being raised in a new body for judgment and condemnation (Dan 12:2; Jn 5:28-9; 2 Thess 1:6). Why would a new immortal body be required, unless it was fitted for an eternal punishment? God could just as easily judge the disembodied souls of men if they were to be annihilated immediately afterwards.

Hell

The place of torment is hell, a word derived from the Saxon *helan*, meaning 'to cover'; hence 'the covered' or 'the invisible place'. The NT Greek word for this place is **ge,enna geenna** or *Gehenna* which derives from the Hebrew *Ghi-Hinnom*, originally the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where the refuse and dead animals of the city were cast out and burned in a fire that was never extinguished. It thus became a symbol of the future destruction of the wicked. Hell, then means the place where condemnation is meted out on the unregenerate, symbolised by the Valley of Hinnom but whose location is only known by God.

The Grave

Unfortunately, the translators of the Bible have repeatedly translated other words as hell also, even though they really mean the 'grave' or the state of death. In the OT the Hebrew word is *sheol*, where it is used for 'grave' about 31 times (e.g. Gen 37:35, 42:38). In an equal number of places it is translated as 'hell' by the KJV. The equivalent NT Greek word is *Hades*. The grave is the place of departed spirits, the congregation of the dead (Prov 21:16) but this is where we have to observe carefully what scripture says.

Until the cross, both the wicked and the righteous went to sheol/hades upon death, but there was a great chasm fixed between the two. The righteous dwelt in a section called Abraham's bosom (Lk 16:22⁵¹) and were in paradise (Lk 23:43) to which they were taken by angels. Indeed Christ himself went there after the cross (Acts 2:31). However, the wicked are in torment there awaiting punishment; for them the grave is a prison, locked and barred (Rev 1:18, Matt 16:18). This is clear and unequivocal in the Bible; but a change occurs after the cross/resurrection.

After the cross, the righteous dead were taken to be with the Lord and are now in heaven itself.⁵² Jesus has the keys of Hades and opens the doors for his saints to be released (Rev 1:18). The dead in Christ are now met, not by angels but, by the Lord himself and taken to be with him always (Jn 14:3; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23) so there are no believers left in Hades in the Gospel age. At the Second Coming, saints who have died come with Jesus from heaven to meet the living saints in the air (1 Thess 4:16-17), for all to be given their resurrected bodies (1 Jn 3:2; 1 Cor 15:49) to dwell in the new earth where heaven and earth are now one (2 Pt 3:13).

⁵¹ This story is nowhere stated to be a parable; indeed, the Lord treats it as a reality.

⁵² This may be what is being referred to in Eph 4:8 but this is disputed by some.

The wicked lost souls remain in torment in Hades awaiting consignment to hell after the Final Judgment, for which they require immortal bodies. Hades is thus the 'intermediate state', not the place of punishment. This is why Hades will vanish when the Lord returns since it is of no further use (Rev 20:14); there is no more death in the new world.

Hades cannot be hell if it is thrown into the lake of fire (i.e. hell, Rev 21:8), the place reserved for Satan and all who follow him (Rev 20:10). This also means that Satan and his demons cannot be in hell at this time. As we have seen earlier, Satan is bound, but active in the earth and was called 'the prince of the power of the air' by Paul (Eph 2:2). This is because Satan is restricted in Tartarus:

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment. (2 Pt 2:4).

Here 'hell' is not Gehenna (*geenna*) but a form of *tartaroo* (from '*Tartarus*', the place of the wicked dead in Greek mythology which was below Hades). This is the only time this word is used in the New Testament and it refers to the extremity of the air around the world where Satan and his hordes have been confined (Jude 6); i.e. the aerial regions, the bounds of material creation.

The binding of Satan

Here we enter extremely controversial issues, but matters that require our concentration if we are to avoid being deceived. My focus here is not so much on the Charismatic practices of exorcism (see later), but on the repercussions of one's interpretation of Rev 20:1-4. The real import of this passage is about the restraining of Satan not the 1,000 years (the 'Millennium', which in the original Greek is actually 'thousands of years' not 1,000 years).

To clarify the differences about the Millennium, there are three main interpretations, which have resulted in a fragmented church:

1. PREMILLENNIALISM - Jesus returns before a 1,000-year golden age of the kingdom.⁵³ [This, in various forms, is probably the dominant view today.]
2. POSTMILLENNIALISM - Jesus returns after a 1,000-year golden age, which is beginning now. [Held by many triumphalist churches, both of the Charismatic and Reconstructionist varieties.]
3. AMILLENNIALISM - there is no golden age in the future. The 1,000 years is a symbol of the Gospel age we are in now. [Traditionally the Reformed view.]

My position is Amillennial, the historic position of the church, of the reformers and the only one that makes sense (clearly that will be disputed but we cannot discuss this here, I have many other papers that do that). But the issue before us is not the Millennium but the binding of Satan. Note the following passages:

If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ... But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. (Matt 12:26-29)

⁵³ Historic Premillennialism differs from Dispensationalism in many ways too complex to cover here. Dispensationalism itself is broken down into a Pre-Tribulation Second Coming, A Post-Tribulation Second Coming or variants of a Mid-Tribulation Second Coming (less common these days). The Tribulation is usually seen as a seven-year period of violent persecution under the Antichrist. Pre-Tribulation Dispensationalists posit a secret rapture of the saints to save them from this. Another feature of Dispensationalism is its focus upon Israel and a literal hermeneutic (system of interpreting OT prophecy).

Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition ... And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders. (2 Thess 2:3, 6-8)

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment. (2 Pt 2:4)

And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day. (Jude 6)

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (Rev 12:7-9)

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. (Rev 20:1-3)

From these passages note the following:

- Satan is always being cast down.
- He is in the bottomless pit (not a geographical place), but still working.
- Satan and his demons can be in chains and yet move through the world causing damage. In other words, there are limits on their activities in the Gospel age.

It is clear that in the Gospel Age Satan is being restrained. The restraining began when Satan was thrown out of heaven for his sin of pride and rebellion (Rev 9:1, 12:7-9) and was only able to oppress the saints as much as God permitted (Job 1:12, 2:6).⁵⁴ In this period Satan was able to 'deceive the nations' with the notions of paganism - the worship of natural objects.⁵⁵ God's word and worship was restricted to the small nation of Israel only.

After the cross the Gospel of God's word was universally released and not limited to one nation. God's purposes were more finely focused in the church, his household, which became a clearer, more urgent target for the enemy. Consequently Satan, who had been expelled from heaven, was formally deposed as ruler of the earth (a function he had usurped by controlling men's minds with temptation and deception, Lk 10:18;⁵⁶ Jn 12:31, 16:11; Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8). Thus God restrained Satan from doing two things:

1. Destroying the people of God (as the Lord had protected Israel).

⁵⁴ Satan's presence in heaven was not as a dweller but as one called to give an account.

⁵⁵ The 'catch-all' term 'Paganism' covers an extremely varied group of nature religions, comprising worship of sun, moon, stars, trees, mountains, spirits, animals, dead ancestors, or even men. Within paganism is the realm of the occult - the 'hidden', esoteric knowledge behind many pagan religions which comprises: *magic* (manipulation of events and things by spiritual forces, Satanism), *spiritualism* (communication with demons, especially those pretending to be the dead) and *divination* (fortune telling by various methods).

⁵⁶ This text refers to Jesus speaking prophetically. The victory of the seventy over demons signalled to Jesus the complete overthrow of Satan's power at the cross.

2. Creating a world empire through which he could dominate mankind (which he had done to certain degrees in the ancient less populated world).

If one looks at all these scriptures (plus many others) one cannot hold any other view than that Satan is restrained in the Gospel Age, and will be released from that restraint for a while at the very end, which is when the Lawless One is revealed showing how man can be as evil as he can be, then comes the end.

Those who posit a future millennium golden age have hordes of questions to answer, such as:

1. If Satan is to be restrained in the millennium, how is it explained that Satan is restrained now during the age of the Gospel?
2. Why is there no mention of the millennium anywhere else in scripture?
3. Why is such a crucial doctrine never articulated by the apostles?
4. Why does Rev 20:2 say literally 'thousands of years' (the word *ci,lia* is plural)?
5. How can Jesus return to reign over a world that includes sinners? When Jesus returns it is in glory, a glory that will destroy all forms of sin by his mere presence. No sinner could stand in a realm where the risen Jesus is king.

We could posit many more questions, but that would turn this paper into a thesis on eschatology, which is not our purpose.

Biblical Studies

Some Bible versions are poor translations that detrimentally affect doctrinal understanding

There are now huge numbers of Bible versions available in English, how is a poor young Christian supposed to make a choice for himself; especially as some are good, some are indifferent and some are downright bad?

Firstly, we must understand the truth about the methodology behind the various translations. To make this simple, there are three main types of method:

1. LITERAL TRANSLATION - where the original languages (Greek in the NT and Hebrew plus some Syrian Aramaic in the OT) are translated word for word, sentence for sentence. Examples would be the KJV, NKJV, NASB, RSV.
2. PARAPHRASE - this is where the sense of the original is freely translated into English; so a passage is translated by the main thoughts expressed, not by the words. Examples would be the Living Bible, TEV (Good News Bible), Phillips NT, The Message.
3. DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE - in simple terms, this is an approach somewhere between the other two. It is a thought for thought translation but aims to be closer to the sense of each verse. Examples include, the NIV, CEV, NEB, Weymouth's NT.

There is a clear choice in translation between aiming for clearer English, or a word for word translation of the original texts; between what translators feel is the thought of the writer and what the writer actually wrote. The modern emphasis is upon clarity; the traditional emphasis was upon literal translation.

Secondly, there is the problem of which manuscripts (MSS) to use. Again, to simplify the problem, there are two main families of MSS for the NT text. The traditional text used by the KJV and the NKJV is from the Byzantine family. This is essentially the same text used

by the later Reformers, called the Received Text (*Textus Receptus*). The basis for this family is quite late and for the NT there are over 5,000 MSS dating from the 5th to 17th centuries. The Majority Text is very similar except in Revelation (this is the text used by Greek speaking churches).

Most modern translations are from the Alexandrian families and use an eclectic⁵⁷ approach. For instance, the NIV also makes many arbitrary changes to the OT on the basis of other versions, such as the Septuagint, or other documents such as the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Jewish Targums. For the NT the basis is a number of older MSS dated from the 3rd to the 15th centuries. What is worrying is that the key MSS (the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus) differ from the traditional text, and from one another, thousands of times.⁵⁸ The text that is the foundation for most modern versions is the United Bible Society's 3rd edition of the Greek NT, which rests upon these two ancient, but flawed, MSS.

Practical problems in comparing the Alexandrian family against the Byzantine include:

- *Missing verses or part verses*: in 1 Tim 6:5 Paul tells us to withdraw from certain people. The NIV omits this command altogether.
- *Added verses or part verses*: In Ps 145:13 the NIV adds the words *'The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving towards all he has made'* that do not appear in the majority of trustworthy (Masoretic⁵⁹) MSS. This half-verse does not appear in the KJV, NKJV, ASV, NAB, BBE, Darby and Young's Literal Translation. Something similar appears in the RSV and NRSV, but even these don't use the word 'loving', rather they use 'gracious'. The addition of the word 'loving' changes the entire Biblical position on God's holiness, and election to salvation. The NIV does not indicate this unsupported reading in the marginal notes of the editions I have read.
- *Changing the sense*: in 1 Cor 7:1 the KJV says that a man should not touch (i.e. fornicate with) a woman. The NIV actually says that 'it is good for a man not to marry'. Prohibition of marriage is an error that the apostles warned about in the end times.
- *Weakening doctrinal proof texts*: in 1 Tim 3:16 the KJV says, 'great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh' and is a crucial text to support the deity of Christ. The NIV merely has, 'he appeared in a body' (i.e. the man Christ had a body!!!).

We could continue this add infinitum!

On the positive side we should state that there are more MSS for the Bible than for any other piece of ancient literature and these are closer to the time of writing than for any other books. Despite a number of minor differences, no major doctrine is dangerously affected by the disagreements within these MSS.

On the negative side we ought to be aware that a number of the men who led the charge to change the basis of our translation were unbelievers, such as JJ Griesbach, who was so opposed to evangelical theology that orthodox readings were automatically rejected in favour of others. The Alexandrian family type is also based upon unproven theories, such as a supposed corruption of the NT text in the 2nd century, or a general clearing up revision in the 4th century. Another fallacy is to suppose that the oldest MSS are the most authentic and accurate. In fact, copying rules deemed that old worn out copies were destroyed when

⁵⁷ Making somewhat arbitrary choices of the best text from a number of sources. To a degree all translators must do this, but the redactors of the Alexandrian type appear to be far more arbitrary than is wise, cherry picking from many sources as they see best.

⁵⁸ In the Gospels alone they differ from each other over 3,000 times.

⁵⁹ Masoretic refers to the school of the Masoretes, the textual scribes and copyists of the OT who lived from the 5th-9th centuries AD. They standardised and carefully revised the OT text.

an accurate new one was made, hence few ancient MSS survived. It also posits that ancient MSS used in the Alexandrian type could well be bad copies that failed to be destroyed. This would account for the many discrepancies; the Sinaiticus alone has nine levels of corrections made by revisers throughout the centuries - is it trustworthy?

Finally, we should note that the Byzantine family is based upon:

- An overwhelming support in the majority of Greek manuscripts.
- An overwhelming support from the Lectionaries⁶⁰ and the early Versions; this includes the Syriac (or Aramaic) and Latin Versions which go back to the mid-second century; the Peshitta, (a good early Syriac translation) contains Byzantine readings, and the Ulfilas Gothic version of the fourth century.
- Approximately 95% of the Uncial⁶¹ manuscripts have a Byzantine type of text.
- Over 95% of the Minuscules⁶² have a Byzantine type of text.

The decisions you make regarding these matters (and a decision has to be made) will determine what Bible you read. I have no doubt that reading an untrustworthy version leads to errors; indeed many of the aberrations of theology and practice in the modern church can be traced to a dependence upon false translations.

Two things, therefore, determine what Bible version we use:

1. DO WE WANT A LITERAL OR PARAPHRASED TRANSLATION? Paraphrases are easier to read but only a literal translation gives us the actual words inspired by God. Only literal translations can be trusted in detailed word studies.
2. WHICH SOURCE DO WE TRUST? There are significant differences between the Byzantine and Alexandrian families.

PERSONAL DISCLOSURE: my view is that only a literal translation based upon Byzantine texts (I prefer the Majority Text) can be trusted for accurate Bible Study. This means that the KJV or the NKJV is to be preferred. However, if a Bible based upon the Alexandrian MSS is desired, the best modern translation from this source is the NASB followed by the RSV [yes, I am aware of a couple of critical errors of translation but these can be inked out]. The NIV is not to be trusted for reasons given above. Modern paraphrases are frequently shocking; however, the TEV (Good News Bible) can be of use for young children. For a fresh viewpoint, Phillips and Weymouth can be helpful. Blatant free paraphrases like the Living Bible and The Message should be shunned entirely as they are very untrustworthy.

Practical Issues - The Believer's Experience of Salvation

The requirement to Judge

Most believers today feel that they must be tolerant above all things. In fact, this is a worldly sign of the times, which tolerates everything, including sinfulness and wickedness. Unbridled tolerance is a recipe for lawlessness, injustice and iniquity. Actually, believers are told to be discriminating people and judge all things, only approving the good.⁶³ The prime constituent of Christian maturity is the ability to discern good from evil:

⁶⁰ Early church service books containing selected readings from the Gospels, Acts and Epistles

⁶¹ Capital letters or majuscules.

⁶² Smaller letters in a cursive, free flowing hand.

⁶³ 1 Thess 5:21, Test all things; hold fast what is good. Rm 12:2, And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Eph 5:10, finding out what

... those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Heb 5:14)

Texts that condemn judging are addressing unrighteous judgment, not discrimination. For instance, Matthew 7:1 refers to judging hypocritically. Many verses command that we judge, that is examine and discern everything.

- Judge with righteous judgment. (Jn 7:24)
- He who is spiritual judges all things. (1 Cor 2:15)
- If the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? (1 Cor 6:2)
- I [Paul] give judgment. (1 Cor 7:25)

If we are to beware of certain things, we must exercise discernment to recognise them before we avoid them. For instance we must beware of: false prophets (Matt 7:15), Judaizers (Phil 3:2), deception (Col 2:8), schismatics (Rm 16:17), empty words (Eph 5:6), strange doctrines (Heb 13:9). All these things require that we exercise thoughtful discernment as to what is being said and judge whether it is good or evil.

Christians are to be effective judges of men, worldly conditions, and spiritual deceit.

The requirement to watch

Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time [of the Second Coming] is. (Mk 13:33)

Take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand. (Mk 13:23)

Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming ... And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch! (Mk 13:35-37)

Now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. (Rm 13:11)

Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober. (1 Thess 5:6)

We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. (Eph 4:14)

Many Christians today live in a fog of ignorance about the world they live in. Indeed, one often hears that it is not our job to bother about politics or what is happening in the world. Despite that, many believers run to vote for any leader that suggests he may be a Christian, despite his track record. In this way Christians have helped put certain people into power who have done appalling things in the name of democracy, some who are on the edge of being the subject of war-crime charges in the International Court.

Jesus commanded that we should watch, i.e. should be aware of what is going on in the world we live in. It was because believers in the early church obeyed this that they escaped the horrors of the fall of Jerusalem when they saw the Roman army mobilise. They watched, understood the warning of Christ, then fled to the Judaeian hills. The remainder of the Jewish population suffered some of the worst atrocities and torment of any besieged city in all history.

We are warned by Paul that deception will run riot at the end and that the man of sin will be revealed who will build a world empire.⁶⁴ If Christians are to avoid following this man they must wake up and watch out. Remember that the word 'antichrist' primarily means

is acceptable to the Lord. Phil 1:10, approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.

⁶⁴ 2 Thess 2; 2 Tim 3:13; Rev 13.

someone 'in the place of Christ'.⁶⁵ The man of sin will pretend to be a Christian and gradually usurp the role of Christ himself. If gullible believers follow any politician who claims to be a Christian without checking his credentials and fruit, they could well end up voting for this man of sin. This would be like cows voting for their own butcher. Remember, the man of sin will initially deceive people into thinking he is wise, good and effective in solving the world's problems. When given power he will war against the saints.

Believers are accountable to God for whom they support. It is critical that Christians take great care whom they vote for. Leaders who are clearly wicked (i.e. they openly lie, deceive and manipulate) who have passed unrighteous legislation, who work against personal liberties and religious tolerance, or who have waged wicked wars should never be supported by Christian people.

The requirement to suffer: believers can expect suffering and persecution in this age - a critique of the 'health and wealth Gospel'

The NT clearly teaches that believers will undergo suffering of one type or another. That anyone could fall for the false promises of Word Faith preachers is pretty staggering. What do they promise:

SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL BLESSINGS ARE RECEIVED BY FAITH

This is often said to occur by a spoken word of faith. In this a distinction is drawn between two Greek words: *logos* and *rhema*. Both mean 'word' / 'speech' and both are used interchangeably in scripture.⁶⁶ However, these preachers tell us that *logos* means a rational word like teaching, while *rhema* is a powerful, declared word of incipient faith. *Logos* refers to the objective, revealed written word while *rhema* refers to a subjective spoken word of faith. A *rhema* word releases power while a *logos* word just encourages. To base such nonsense upon wrongly applied grammar is utter foolishness. There is no meaningful distinction between these words in the NT; they are synonyms.

Then they teach a form of VISUALISATION. This is an occult technique used in Magic and is common in certain Oriental religions. It is where a desired object is pictured in the mind and focused on until the object is delivered. There is no teaching on this in the NT and no example of a believer using such methods.

In fact the apostles taught, indeed commanded, that we should work hard and earn our own money (1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:12). There is no hint in the NT of gaining wealth by faith, a power word or visualisation. Unlike modern Word Faith preachers who live millionaire lifestyles based upon gifts, Paul's attitude was this:

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labour and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. (2 Thess 3:7-10)

CERTAIN PREACHERS HAVE SPIRITUAL POWER AND MUST BE SUBMITTED TO FOR A HEALTHY SPIRITUAL LIFE

The televangelists in this movement not only make unbiblical demands of money and not only live outrageous lifestyles of opulence, but they speak violently against those who

⁶⁵ 1 Jn 2:18, 2 Jn 1:7.

⁶⁶ 1 Pt 1:23 *logos*, v 25 *rhema* both refer to the 'word of the Lord'. 1 Cor 12:8, Paul uses *logos* for the 'word' of knowledge when *rhema* would be expected by Charismatics. There are many more examples.

criticise the movement. Such ungodly leaders find no difficulty in fleecing poor gullible folk of their hard-earned money on the promise that it will result in a blessing or a healing. This is classic fraud and is totally unbiblical. Biblical leadership is service, not domination. Submission only occurs within the local church where brethren submit to each other and to the elders. A Christian has no obligation to submit to the demands of any other man, whether he is an apostle, prophet or anything else.

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY AND APOSTLESHIP IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE BIBLE

This goes back to the supposed difference between *rhema* and *logos*. The Bible is considered a dead word, albeit authoritative, while a spoken prophecy by an accredited leader is considered as far more authoritative.

In these circles there is often an emphasis upon SPIRIT GUIDES, supposed to be angels who impart words of knowledge - knowledge about people that could not be known by normal means. Again this is an occult experience, common in shamanistic religions. Scripture states the opposite: **God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son** (Heb 1:1-2).

The Christian's final authority is God's word, the Bible, since it is the revelation of his will in all things. The New Testament is the final revelation of God's Son, as transmitted by Christ's Spirit through the apostles. The Bible represents the whole Trinity and is the touchstone for everything in a believer's life. No ministry of man can ever usurp its place.

Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions. (Lam 2:14)

GOD WANTS ALL HIS PEOPLE TO BE HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS ALL THE TIME

The dangers of this heresy are obvious. The Bible speaks fully and frequently about suffering, indeed the apostles warned that suffering was to be expected by all disciples,

All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (2 Tim 3:12).

Indeed far from leaders being even more prosperous than disciples, leaders should expect more suffering (1 Thess 3:4). The apostle Paul knew not only frequent violent persecution but also distress, affliction, continued sickness, poverty, hunger, thirst and even anxiety and depression.⁶⁷

GOD WANTS ALL HIS PEOPLE TO BE HEALTHY ALL THE TIME

In view of the fact that God has ordained suffering for his people on many occasions, this cannot be true. There is not one instance in the NT of a believer being healed supernaturally; not one. However, there are many cases of believers being sick, sometimes being sick to the point of abandoning the Gospel work, even though there was an apostle present.⁶⁸

THE PROBLEM WITH CHRISTIANS IS OFTEN A DEMON THAT NEEDS EXORCISING.

Again there is not one scripture that states this and neither is there any NT text that demonstrates it in a believer after Pentecost. The apostles never saw the diagnosis of a believer's problems to be a demon and never expelled a demon from a Christian, only from unbelievers. Problems in believers that are due to sin always require repentance and seeking forgiveness from God; people who are delivered from demons frequently get into problems again because the sin that caused them was never renounced properly (see later).

⁶⁷ See 2 Cor 1:8, 4:8, 7:5, 11:24-29.

⁶⁸ Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-27); Timothy (1 Tim 5:23, notice Timothy was often ill); Trophimus (2 Tim 4:20); Paul (2 Cor 12:5, 7, 10).

TO SPEAK AGAINST THIS MOVEMENT INCURS GOD'S WRATH AND WILL RESULT IN EVIL CIRCUMSTANCES

Some well-known Word Faith leaders have even said on air that they wished their critics dead or even that they wanted to shoot critics with a machine gun. Well the apostles frequently spoke vehemently against false teachers, naming names and exposing their evil teaching and deeds. For instance, Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim 1:20) Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim 2:17). We are told to examine the teachings of preachers (Matt 7:15-20; Acts 17:11; 1 Jn 4:1) and reject those who teach heresy or who live bad lives (1 Thess 5:21; Heb 5:14). All teachers should be glad for their hearers to check what they hear against God's word since the teacher is seeking to make people understand scripture better. Any one who finds it necessary to threaten those who examine and criticise their ministry is insecure and evil.

The requirement to wage true spiritual warfare

There is so much nonsense taught on this subject that a proper warning would require a whole book; I will try to be concise.

EVERY BELIEVER IS LIBERATED IN CHRIST

When one trusts in Christ one is joined to him in spiritual union that comprises dying with him and being raised with him (Rm 6, see later). The believers' legal place is being seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph 2:6) far beyond any reach of the enemy; indeed, the believer has been totally delivered out of Satan's kingdom and placed into the Kingdom of Christ (Col 1:13). The job of the believer is to hold a position of faith and obedience that puts on the new nature and walks in the Spirit (Eph 4:22-24; Gal 5:16). In doing so he will bear the fruit of the Spirit (the character of Christ) and be free from the enemy, being qualified by the Father to be partakers of Christ's inheritance (Col 1:12).

The new nature abides in our spirit and cannot be touched by demonic forces (Eph 4:22; 1 Jn 5:18), however our soul (mind, will, emotions) can be tempted and lured into sin (Jm 1:14-15). When the soul yields to temptation it becomes flesh, dominated by sensual and bodily lusts (Gal 5:16-25). If a believer resists Satan this cannot happen. If a believer falls into sin then he must repent (renounce the sin and actively turn his direction to walk in obedience), confess his sin, seek cleansing by the blood of Christ and move on (1 Jn 1:9).

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. (Col 1:13-14)

BELIEVERS NEED NO EXORCISM TO GET FREE FROM SIN

The Biblical method of cleansing is totally sufficient and requires no assistance from men promoting themselves as liberators in a 'deliverance ministry'. There is no such ministry mentioned in the NT and the apostles never used this method in helping a believer be sanctified. Christians in the NT are never infected with a demon and never delivered from one. The matter simply never arises.

BELIEVERS NEED NO EXORCISM TO GET FREE FROM CHARACTER PROBLEMS

Personality flaws, feelings of rejection, insecurity, shock following trauma or other matters may or may not have been made worse by demonic temptation but the cause is not spiritual. We must never blame our own failings, fears or weaknesses upon anything other than ourselves. We will never deal with inner difficulties by having some demon expelled; indeed some ritual claiming to do this may well make things much worse - as personal testimonies prove. Again there is no instance of this happening in the NT church - never!

Strength of character comes from walking in obedience and especially from trusting God in suffering:

... we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. (Rm 5:3-4)

What clearer instruction is needed? Suffering produces perseverance and this strengthens character. To be a stronger person one seeks God's grace in trials (Col 1:11) and his power leads one to triumph in weakness. To seek to avoid the problem by seeking an exorcist actually goes against God's will and spurns God's grace.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS TERRITORIAL SPIRITS CONTROLLING MEN'S AFFAIRS

This means that the whole concept of Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare is nonsense! First, Satan is not ruling the earth. The earth belongs to the Lord (Ps 24:1, 89:11; Acts 17:24; 1 Cor 10:26) and Satan only has power within it by controlling the mind's of men through deception. As the end approaches this deception increases and Satan dominates the world more and more through temptation and delusion, but he is not in charge and does not rule. The influence he has in the world is controlled by God so that even the boundaries of the nations are set by the Lord (Acts 17:26). All Satan's actions ultimately fulfil God's purposes.

If Satan is not in control and if the boundaries of nations are set by God, then demons do not control any territory, city or precinct. This is why we never see the apostles use any of the methods of modern Charismatics in this matter. Never is an evangelistic endeavour preceded by a united prayer time to overthrow demonic forces controlling a sector of land. Neither is there any attempt to discover the nature of the demonic forces in a particular area. Indeed, the whole concept of demons is ignored in practice. In reality, demonic forces work through men so Paul was opposed by men deluded into thinking they were serving God by persecuting the church. The fight against these forces is by prayer, faith and the truth. Paul prayed for grace to preach effectively and persuaded men of the truth of the Gospel; when men yielded to this truth, the power of demons was overthrown as men became Christians. Under Paul's ministry, even high ranking Roman authorities became Christians.⁶⁹

Occasionally, when forced by direct confrontation - and only as led by God, the apostles directly confronted demonised unbelievers such as the Philippian slave girl (Acts 16:14). It is also noteworthy that the word 'demon' never appears outside the Gospels while the word 'demons' only appears six times, three of them in Revelation. There is no focus upon demons in apostolic writings.

THE PRACTICE OF BINDING SATAN IS UNBIBLICAL

There is no apostolic instruction to bind Satan before a successful meeting can be experienced and never do we see the apostles acting this way. Neither are we told to bind demons in order to expel them from people. The binding of the strong man mentioned by Jesus (Matt 12:29) is the overthrow of Satan. Jesus as the Son of God was already Satan's Lord and proved to be his master, as a man, at the temptation. Christ totally destroyed Satan's works at the cross where sin and death were vanquished.

The binding and loosing of Matt 16:19 refers to the power of the Gospel; the terms (in Rabbinical usage) meaning to forbid or to permit. Keys open doors and the keys of the kingdom of heaven is the truth of the Gospel. People only get into the kingdom by believing

⁶⁹ Phil 4:22. Josphus even implies that the Nero's wife, the Empress Poppaea, was a Christian. Jerome said that Paul turned the house of Christ's persecutor (Nero) into a church.

in Christ. Those who accept the apostles' word and believe in Christ are registered in heaven and have access to the kingdom. This has nothing to do with binding demons. A secondary feature (Matt 18:18) refers to the discipline in the church in terms of expelling wicked people. The words 'bind(s)' and 'demon', or 'bind(s)' and a 'spirit' do not appear in the same verse of the NT anywhere.

The modern Charismatic/Pentecostal deceptions about territorial spirits, exorcism and binding Satan have actually led to a weakening of genuine evangelical spiritual warfare. The church must actively preach the true Gospel at every opportunity, and ignore getting into petty imaginary battles with fallen angels that divert and distract from the job in hand.

The requirement to mortify the flesh⁷⁰

I once spoke at a meeting on this subject only to be rounded upon by everyone, including a leader, who claimed that the Bible never speaks of us as being dead. Amazingly, it seems these long-standing Christians had never read the following:

- Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. (Rm 6:8)
- If One died for all, then all died. (2 Cor 5:14)
- I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. (Gal 2:20)
- You died with Christ. (Col 2:20)
- For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col 3:3)⁷¹

How can we be born again to a new eternal life if we did not die to the old one full of sin? This is the fundamental bedrock of experiential Christianity, The foundation of salvation is justification, being declared righteous before God instead of guilty, but justification arises when we died with Christ on the cross and were raised with him in new life and thus able to share Christ's righteousness. God does not place his Son's righteousness in a sinful nature; he does not pour new wine into an old wineskin. The righteousness of Christ is the heart of the new nature which we received when we died with Christ and were raised with him (Eph 4:24).

It is critical in overcoming sin that we understand that we died to our old life, to understand that our old man (our natural, sinful, Adamic life) is dead as far as God is concerned. The believer lives in the good of this truth and acts accordingly in self-denial.

However, the full sentence of this death is delayed until we receive a new body as well as the new heart and spirit that we already have.⁷² Just as the Christian is viewed by God as being legally seated with Christ in heaven (Eph 2:6) but yet remains physically on earth, so God also sees the old nature as legally dead,⁷³ but the believer still has the old nature with him which must be daily put to death (Col 3:5) - i.e. the truth of its legal death believed and applied. This is done as the believer puts off the old nature (Eph 4:22) in practice and puts on the new nature, the life of Christ (Eph 4:24). This equates to being renewed in spirit (Eph 4:23) so that the mind follows Christ's commands and not the ways of sin. It is in this sense that the believer has died with Christ.

⁷⁰ I.e. put to death the flesh, Rm 8:13, Col 3:5.

⁷¹ See also 2 Tim 2:11; Rm 6:4-6, 7:4, 8:10 and many more.

⁷² The new heart and spirit equates to the new nature. The renewed spirit is home to the indwelling Holy Spirit and the life of Christ, while the new heart is the foundation of a new disposition to serve God.

⁷³ In Rm 6:6 Paul states the body of sin is destroyed, but this literally means 'unemployed, rendered useless, inactive'. The legal death of the old man enables us to live a new life and overcome sin. The full sentence of death is carried out when we gain a new body at the Second Coming.

The key effect of this doctrine is to emphasise that the believer cannot reform the old life with God's power; the old nature is crucified by God not reformed. There is no power in trying to improve the old life, this is the place of failure. The source of sin, the old nature, is given a death blow by the cross to enable Christians to live from a new life source, the new nature which is the life of Christ in a believer's spirit. The answer to overcoming sin is to destroy the source of sin, the old nature.

When a believer fails to apply this truth, and succumbs to temptation, he becomes flesh. The Spirit of God fights against this in our lives and seeks to teach us to put on Christ (Rm 13:14; Gal 3:27) which equates to putting on heavenly armour (Eph 6:12), putting on the new man (Col 3:10) and walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:22-25). Holy living is about 'putting on', not trying harder to be nice; this is because Jesus was given by God to us to be our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1 Cor 1:30). This requires us to consider ourselves as dead to sin (Rm 6:11-12).

The upshot of all this is the vital principle of self-denial; we must constantly deny ourselves and take up our cross (consider ourselves as dead) in order to live like Christ.⁷⁴ Self-denial in the believer is not a struggle to try to be good in the strength of the flesh, but a struggle against the temptation to live in the flesh. It is a struggle to believe the truth, a struggle of faith - to believe that we are dead to sin and alive to God. Too many Christians live according to the flesh, they are dominated by the principles and appetites of the old life. They succumb to desire, are tempted by Satan, fail to resist, fail to apply self-denial and effectively live like worldly people even though they aspire to be better. But before self-denial can begin, we must believe that we are dead - dead to all of our old life and alive to God.

The requirement to lead a spiritual life

Overcoming sin is only half of the problem in leading a godly life, we must learn not to trust in the strength of our old nature to do 'good' things as well as bad things. It is here that we must assert a truth which many good men disbelieve. The Bible clearly distinguishes between what is spiritual in man and what is soulish (Heb 4:12); if scripture says there is a division between soul and spirit, then I must believe the clear word of God.⁷⁵ Indeed, it teaches a threefold distinction in man: body, soul and spirit:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess 5:23)

⁷⁴ Matt 10:38-39, 16:24-25; Mk 8:34-35, 10:21; Lk 9:23-24, 14:27; Jn 12:24-25. A key saying or command that is repeated in all four Gospels needs especial consideration. In this case we have seven repeats - this shows its great importance.

⁷⁵ This is Trichotomy, yet most Reformed teachers hold to a bipartite nature of man (just body and soul) not tripartite (body, soul, spirit). However, some eminent Reformed theologians did hold to trichotomy (such as WGT Shedd), and in practice they all speak of a spiritual nature in the soul (often called 'the rational soul') and a psychological nature (heart and mind). While man can be variously sub-divided (e.g. heart, mind, soul, strength, thoughts, body, members etc) scripture and experience show an inner life comprising essentially thoughts, feelings and will (soul) above which must be an organ for spiritual perception and communion with God (spirit). [Compare a human body where one can differentiate many organs, but all acknowledge the key systems of skeletal/muscular structure, vascular system, nervous system and respiratory system to describe physiology.] The heart is the root or fountain of our lives and is situated at the junction of the soul and spirit and as such is the gateway of our choices (see Heb 4:12). The spirit perceives God's will and the soul executes it through the body. To use a business analogy, the spirit is meant to be the Chairman of the board, the soul is the business executive and the body is the factory workers. Failure occurs when the soul acts as chairman dominated by the workers. Each organ is Biblically described as a tri-unity to represent its creator: spirit = conscience, communion, intuition; soul = emotions, intellect and will; the body = flesh, blood, bones.

Both the Bible and experienced analysts explain that the soul comprises of the emotions, the volition (will power) and the mind (intellect). We cannot list all the proof-texts here, but there are many. So, there is a part of our lives attuned to the spiritual, that communes with God spiritually, and a part of us that is the executive of the body - it controls what we do through emotions, volition and intellect. When the physical senses encounter something, it is the soul that decides what to do. Your soul chooses whether you will be godly or sinful.

The reason this is important is to teach us that while we may not be objectively sinning, we can still live out of our soul to do the Lord's will, and this will result in a dead work. For instance, an individual can imagine that they are serving God because they experience all sorts of emotional and subjective feelings - but this is mere soulishness, operating at the level of the emotions.⁷⁶ The believer must learn the difference between what is of the soul and what is of the spirit.

The natural man [*psuchikos*] does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually [*pneumatikos*] discerned. But he who is spiritual [*pneumatikos*] judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. (1 Cor 2:14-15)

The things of God are spiritually discerned and it is the spiritual man who judges all things. Here Paul differentiates between a spiritual man and a psychical man (i.e. soulish man, *psuchikos*; *psuche* = soul). In general *psuchikos* refers to unregenerate people [as in 'many souls'], but it also refers to Christians who act at the level of mere men.

If believers act like natural men, they are being soulish. For instance, if a natural (unregenerate) man gets insulted, he reacts, perhaps sinfully by swearing. If a Christian gets insulted there should be no reaction at all; he is dead to the accusation. This is a spiritual response. The soulish Christian will react, perhaps in a justifiable way without any sin. This person has not manifested the old nature and sinned, but he has reacted, and is thus expresses the emotionalism of the soul. The spiritual response results in a testimony to God, the soulish outcome is just the action of a self-controlled man.

Paul wrote to people he called 'saints', 'sanctified in Christ' (i.e. Christians, 1 Cor 1:2) yet said they were carnal (i.e. fleshly, 1 Cor 3:1). Such are babes in Christ who have not learned to discern between soul and spirit and behave like 'mere men' (1 Cor 3:3). When men cause divisions in the church, for oh such lofty reasons, they are being soulish and fleshly. They have acted either intellectually, emotionally or by sheer will power but without seeking the sanction of God. Remember Christians become flesh when they are tempted and follow the old nature. When Christians follow the soul (are *psuchikos*) they are in danger of becoming fleshly, they are not following the Spirit's directions in their spirit. They quickly go from soulish (over-emotional, over-zealous or over-intellectual) to being fleshly (sinful) - acting like ordinary men.

In the Corinthian example, men thought they were being godly by indulging in subjective, soulish thoughts and decisions. They loved flowery, philosophical, emotional or intellectual preaching and elevated it above the simple truth. This was unwise and it was not being spiritual, but it was not dramatically sinful. From here, however, they degenerated into

⁷⁶ This is why mysticism is so dangerous because it operates at this soulish level seeking a relinquishment of control, increased passivity, promoting subjective emotional responses without intellectual involvement.

fleshly actions by adopting a party spirit and causing schism by following the types of preachers they preferred. From being soulish, they soon fell to being sinful.

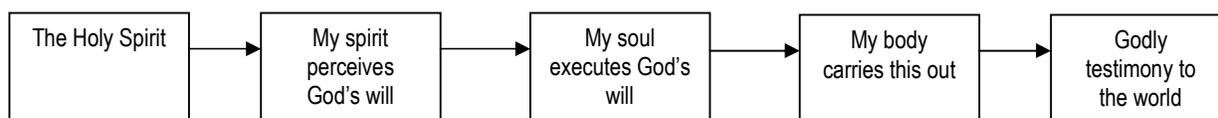
Hebrews 4 speaks about this in different terms:

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account. (Heb 4:9-13)

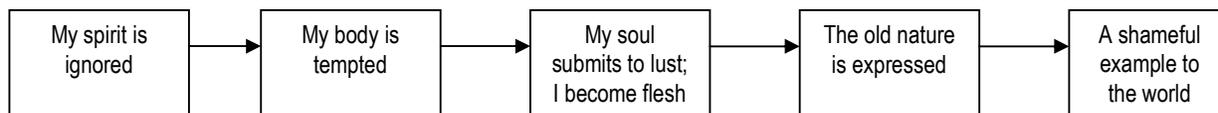
Understand what this is saying. The rest of God, available for all believers, is to cease from works, cease from legalism, cease from human strength in church affairs. We can all fall into this dead-works based life and still think we are serving God, but this is disobedience. The way God shows us this is to sever the soul from the spirit and discern what our true motivation is which is based in our heart at the junction of soul and spirit; our innermost self. We will give an account for what we do, and our work must be spiritual, must be based upon God's rest not our efforts.

The soul is not to be abandoned like the old nature, indeed it is a vital organ for human life as it directs the life. What is crucial is that the soul is subordinate to the spirit, and the spirit must be always communing with God (filled with the Spirit). In other words, it is not my bright ideas (the soul) that are necessary, but obeying God's directions heard in my spirit, the still small voice. My will power (soul) will not force a work through to success, but obeying God's voice will. My subjective feelings (soul) are not the arbiter of what God is saying, but God's spiritual opening up of his objective word to my heart is. When we are truly following God, hearing him in our spirit as we study his word, then we use our soul to execute God's will. We think through our plans and determine to carry God's will out. The submitted soul is the means of ensuring God's work is done effectively. If, on the other hand, the soul submits to bodily lusts and sensual craving, the soul becomes flesh and a vehicle for the old nature - the result is sin.

GOD'S DIRECTION



SINFUL ACTIONS



The requirement to look to the Holy Spirit not the law for direction

The problem with the unregenerate is a person - the old man, the Adamic nature - that sins because it is sin. Salvation for a believer is a person - it is being in Christ, the Saviour. Living the Christian life effectively is also dependent upon a person - the Holy Spirit, whose job it is to lead us into truth, power and fruitfulness in Christ.

Reformed teachers usually claim that the Mosaic Law is the rule of life for the Christian, but the apostles never said this. In fact they said the opposite:

- The Mosaic Law was temporary (Gal 2:19, 3:23-24; Rm 3:20, 5:13,20).
- The believer is under the Law of Christ not the Law of Moses (Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 9:21).
- The Old Covenant law ceased to have any jurisdiction on believers in the Spirit (Rm 6:14, 7:6; Gal 5:18).
- The law has no hold on those who have died, as we have in Christ (Rm 7:1-4).

The rule of life for a believer is always God's will and in the OT this was established by the law during the time of Israel, but through direct, divine intervention beforehand with the patriarchs. In the time of the divided kingdom the law (which was largely being ignored) was assisted by prophetic intervention and the prophets' word was to be obeyed as God's law. In the NT that which the OT law pointed to (Christ) was revealed to us and so the law was fulfilled in a person. Believers are now united with that person since they are in Christ, and the rule of life is to follow him, not the Law of Moses. Jesus' commands supersede and go beyond the Mosaic Law, which only dealt with externals and could not empower obedience. The Law of Christ deals with motivations and, as applied by the Spirit, gives power to obey (Gal 5:18). The law could not help people take thoughts captive, but Christ can; thus Christians must not hate as well as not kill; must not lust as well as not commit adultery.

In this world Christ sends his Spirit to continue, apply, and develop his work since he himself is in heaven at God's right hand. The Spirit enlightens and guides every believer in the way the law would have done for the OT saint, and much more. (See next item also.)

The requirement to be filled with the Spirit

The apostles exhort disciples to be filled with the Spirit and to continually seek being filled (Eph 5:18, the present indicative tense here has the effect of a continuous tense). This is modelled by the apostles who were filled after their Pentecostal filling in Acts 4:8, 31, 6:5, 7:55. The objective of the Spirit coming upon believers is power to witness for Christ (Acts 1:8) - to live a good testimony, and men who did God's work were said to be 'filled' or 'full' of the Spirit, never that they were 'baptised in the Spirit'.

Biblical teaching is that we must continually rely upon the Spirit of Christ, not the law, to keep us on course. He does this by bringing the life of Christ to us (Rm 8:10-11), and thus we **live according to the Spirit** (Rm 8:5). Indeed, only those who walk in the Spirit are sons of God (Rm 8:14). In fact one of main functions of the Spirit is to bring assurance to believers that they are God's sons and enlighten them about the inheritance of a son (Rm 8:16-17).

We must be in the Spirit (Rm 8:9), be led by the Spirit (Rm 8:14), live in the Spirit (Gal 5:25), walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16), purpose in the Spirit (Acts 19:21), worship in the Spirit (Phil 3:3), love in the Spirit (Col 1:8), be renewed in the Spirit (Eph 4:23), sing with the Spirit (1 Cor 14:15) and pray in the Spirit (Eph 6:18). By allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us into the things of Christ (Jn 14:26, 16:13-14) we will bear the fruit of the Spirit as we trust him and will put to death the deeds of the old man (Rm 8:13).

So, it is clear that we need the Spirit for everything in the Christian life; in fact, we can't even pray effectively without the Spirit's help (Rm 8:26). We should pray to be filled with the Spirit every day and rely upon him for all we need, moment by moment. As we do so, the grace of Christ is revealed in us.

Conclusion

This little work can't hope to give a full analysis of all the truths highlighted in this paper. While I have tried hard to be concise, some subjects of necessity required more space than others, but even these fall far short of what I would have liked to present if there were space. I have specific papers on most of these subjects if readers require more information.

My purpose has been to point to significant truths that are either being ignored or attacked in various church quarters, but which are vital (in my view) to understanding the Gospel and living the Christian life. My only desire is to exhort believers to dig deep into God's word to discover the riches that lie there for themselves. May the Lord bless you in this.

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Understanding Ministries**

Unpopular Truths Listed

Church Matters

- NT churches did not have dedicated buildings.
- NT Churches are not led by a single pastor.
- Leaders must serve and not be authoritarian.
- The model for leadership is fatherhood not monarchy or management.
- The main function of church leaders is to identify and release fresh ministry.
- NT local church leadership is never imported.
- Church ministry was never formally trained.
- NT church leadership is only male.
- NT Churches function on the basis of mutual edification.
- In the NT church genuine spiritual gifts flourished and ought to operate in a Biblical church
- The NT emphasis in church life is 'one-anothering' (*koinonia*), not top down authority.
- Ministering to each other involves mutual admonishment and submission.
- The practical focus of church life was breaking of bread not the sermon.
- NT Church worship did not use musical instruments.

Doctrinal Issues - The Doctrine of God

- God is totally sovereign.
- God is sovereign over everything, including 'evil' things and calamities.
- God is sovereign over who gets saved; election and reprobation are Biblical.
- God does not love everyone, but only loves those who are in Christ from eternity.
- God's love is from eternity past to eternity future and does not change or diminish.
- God's providential care for all is reflective of his patience and goodness but is not a demonstration of his love for all.
- God's holiness is the most important attribute of God, not love. Holiness overrides love in God's actions.

Doctrinal Issues - The Doctrine of Salvation

- Christ did not die for everyone, but only for those chosen by God and given to him.
- For these, Christ fully and effectually paid the price of their sin. The atonement is limited by quantity (the number saved is not everyone) not by quality (Jesus fully saves, salvation is not dependent upon man's choice or future behaviour).
- The Gospel is not a free offer guaranteed to everyone, depending upon their freewill.
- The Gospel is God's means to bring the word of life to the elect and secure their calling and conversion, but is a means of hardening the reprobate in sin.
- There is no such thing as common grace which prepares people for salvation. God's providence is not grace. The only grace of God is that which comes from the cross and is directed at the elect.
- The cross was a penal substitution; i.e. Christ suffered as the just for the unjust. He took the penalty of our sin and paid the full price for it becoming a curse for us.
- The Bible does not articulate a doctrine of the Covenant of Grace or a Covenant of Redemption but teaches the decree of God in eternity to provide a gracious Gospel in Christ.
- Divine covenants are never formal contracts depending upon man's obedience but a gracious and sovereign means of establishing friendship between God and man.

- There is no such thing as the covenant of works - the Bible is silent on this issue.
- There is no subjective experience called the baptism in (with or by) the Spirit which believers are commanded to seek after conversion.
- The baptism in the Spirit occurred formally at Pentecost and is applied in time to all believers at conversion to bring them into the body of Christ. Water baptism is a symbol of this.
- Rewards are graciously given by God to believers who live faithfully.

Doctrinal Issues - The Doctrine of the End

- Christians are not of this world and need to keep their eyes on the end of all things to keep a loose hold on earthly matters.
- Hell is a definite place of judgment and condemnation.
- Hell is everlasting in scope. There is no Annihilationism.
- The wicked go to Hades upon death to await judgment. Believers go straight to be with the Lord. Before the cross, believers were in Hades in a special place called Abraham's Bosom or Paradise, separated from the wicked. At the cross of Christ these were released and taken to heaven.
- Satan is not in hell now but in Tartarus, the aerial regions around the earth.
- Satan is currently bound and restricted by God in the earth to protect the cause of the Gospel and the growth of the church. This binding is released for a little while at the end to enable Satan to accomplish a world government ruled by sin.

Biblical Studies

- Some Bible versions are poor translations that detrimentally affect doctrinal understanding. Believers should take great care in choosing a Bible version to study. Bible versions are hindered by the type of translation method and the source manuscripts chosen.

Practical Issues - The Believer's Experience of Salvation

- The believer is required to judge what is good and evil, especially in relation to doctrine and preaching.
- The believer is required to watch and be aware what is happening in the world to see how it complies with Biblical teachings and warnings.
- The believer is required to suffer. This means that the health and wealth Gospel of the Word of Faith Movement and the presuppositions of the Signs & Wonders Movements are false.
- The believer is required to wage true spiritual warfare, but not the sort of Charismatic nonsense that is being taught today. The claims of Strategic Level Spirit Warfare teachings are unbiblical.
- The believer is required to mortify the flesh; this means properly understanding the death of the old nature and the need to put on the new, followed by self-denial.
- The believer is required to lead a spiritual life; this means the believer must understand what is spiritual and what is soulish, as well as what is good and what is sinful.
- The believer is required to look to the Holy Spirit not the law for direction in life.
- The believer is required to be filled with the Spirit at all times.