

IMITATE |

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SIMNOR, GREG. Imitate Me

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"Freely we receive; freely we give"

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Cover design by Jay Huygen Interior design by Rose Miller, Kraftwork I would firstly like to give glory to and acknowledge my Teacher, who is faithful and trustworthy to bring to light and life the knowledge of our Father, as we seek Him with all our heart.

Thank you that when we ask, You give us the knowledge of Your mystery, that is Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I would also like to thank Danielle, Rochelle and my fellow elders, who have helped in the shaping and the articulation of the words of this book.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past six years I have found myself constantly drawn to the incredible life of the apostle Paul. As I meditate on his words I am being encouraged, challenged, inspired, enlightened and awakened, to who the man was, how he lived and what he was able to model and demonstrate.

The purpose for writing this book is to ask a series of questions around why Paul is the only one who said, "Imitate me, as I imitate Christ." Why is Paul allowed to write this in God's book and what is it about Paul's life that we are to imitate? We will also explore, in each chapter, what I call his absolute statements of faith that define his relationship with Christ, and how we are all to come into this incredible reality as well.

Paul was a follower of Jesus who modelled Christ likeness and his transformation from Saul to become Paul is a demonstration of God's power. Paul's life is a representation to us all of what is possible when we are surrendered and submitted to our Father and His purposes.

This is one of the core reasons he is the one who said, "Imitate me, as I imitate Christ," but I want to ask us all a question that not only defined Paul's life, but will define our own lives as well.

"Do our lives begin when we enter into this physical world or are our lives already predestined in Christ, alive in the eternal, waiting for us to discover and unpack who we really are?" Saul started his life in the natural as Saul, a Pharisee, but He had been earmarked, predestined in God before He was ever physically born, to become Paul, a son of God. He had been set apart and chosen before the foundation of the world to be a saint, even though he started his physical life as a sinner who needed saving, and we, if we are in Christ, are no different.

Galatians 1:15 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace,

I pray that these words would have a profound impact on you, as this is not only true for Paul's life, but for our lives as well. We too come into this physical world as sinners, separated from God, but this is our secondary position as opposed to our primary position. We too have been predestined in God before we were ever conceived in the physical, to know Him and to come into the fullness of the life Paul discovered and lived from.

Ephesians 1:4-5 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.

Psalm 139:13-16 For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, and skilfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.

Knowing this through the power of revelation changes everything. It changes the way we see God, what we believe about God and who we are in God and it empowers us to live out the lives we have been called for. We are on a journey to actually discover who we already are in Him.

I believe Saul/Paul is a powerful prophetic picture for us as the church. Saul/Paul are a picture of two sons and two churches, sons and churches that live from the flesh and sons and churches that live from the Spirit. Paul was chosen to be a son who would live in

accordance to the Spirit before he was born, but he entered life as Saul. Saul is a picture of a son and a church who don't live from a true knowledge of the Father or the Father's ways, even though they perceive they do. These sons, this church, live their lives from the flesh, even though they have been called to live their lives by the power of the Spirit. How can a follower truly learn from Jesus and all His kingdom truth about who God is, His purpose and plan and who we are in Him, coming into eternal life now, unless they have entered into Sabbath rest, ceased from their works, and been yoked to Christ wholeheartedly?

Hebrews 4:9-10 So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

Failure to enter His rest, and truly learn from God, will have us living from incorrect mind sets which paralyse us from ever becoming the sons and churches we are called to be.

Our very lives are the true demonstration of what we believe. We will manifest the reality of the God we know.

Saul manifested the reality of the God he knew, but this was not the God of the scriptures.

Saul was a Jew, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, called in accordance to the physical, but not yet of the Spirit, even though he had been predestined to be a son of the Spirit. Saul persecuted sons of the Spirit, until the time was right for God to call him into his new identity.

Galatians 4:6-7 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Acts 9:15-16 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

Notice it's God who sends the Spirit of His Son into our hearts and it's this Spirit of Jesus that cries Abba Father.

There is a battle for God's sons to live as sons of the Spirit and not

as slaves of the flesh. Paul has a very clear reference point for this because, for so long, he had lived as a slave and not as a son, and his very words in Philippians 3:7-8 describe this.

Philippians 3:7-8 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.

This is what makes Paul such a perfect model, because through his life we can see the son we are called to be and become, and the son we would not want to be. A son who is led and has his identity and hope in the Spirit of truth, as opposed to a son who is led and has his identity and hope in a fleshly version of truth.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But realise this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

These attitudes are not to be the attitudes of sons of the Spirit. These attitudes come out of sons who live from the flesh. Are our lives the sign of the times we live in? Do we recognise these attitudes in us rather than the beatitudes?

What would the church of Jesus Christ look like if we all committed to living as Paul lived? What would our world look like, if the church committed to living as Paul lived?

How much of our current life reflects Paul's?

I personally believe Paul is the greatest example and model we have to follow and imitate, because he started this physical life on earth, like we all did, separated from the Father. His journey of going from Saul to Paul is simple, while being profoundly deep and one that we can all look to and take our cue from.

Saul didn't become Paul through human learning. Saul received his education under Gamaliel, while Paul received his education

under Jesus Christ, the Messiah. It was Jesus who said flesh and blood (in other words man), can not reveal anything to you, but this is the role of My Father who is in heaven. Saul was a student of the Torah, while Paul was a student of Christ. These are two very different realities, even though Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets.

Which educational system have we and are we receiving our learning from, man or Messiah?

The truth to this question will be discovered in the demonstration of our lives. We will manifest the reality of the God we know. Failure to manifest Christ likeness is the evidence of being in and operating from the wrong educational system. Man's educational system is mind first, Spirit second, while God's educational system is heart (Spirit) first, mind second.

This fleshly operating system had Saul killing the church and being in opposition to God and God's ways. He became Paul through receiving an outpouring of Christ in and upon his life. An abundance of grace, faith and love was poured out upon him, which he received in his Spirit and he teaches us to follow his example and to observe the, "pattern you have in us."

Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

Philippians 4:9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

The "pattern" or mode of operation is: we hear to receive the word, as it is this that brings understanding. Too many of us operate from a hearing to understand position, rather than a hearing to receive (through the Spirit) position.

Paul's devotion and dedication to His Heavenly Father and seeing God's purposes accomplished on the earth were second to none. Paul's life is a picture of someone who was captivated by God's love and because of this reality, no longer lived for himself. This is the life we have all been called and chosen to live as well.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all,

so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

He was dedicated to living his new life with God and others, because he knew who he now was in Christ. He dedicated and gave his life to see the church of Jesus Christ, come to know who she is called to be and how she is called to live. This was Paul's primary calling for his life, outside of being this person himself and it is to be ours as well.

This book is called Imitate Me, because God wants us to look at Paul's life and imitate how he went from Saul to Paul. It's not that we will all be apostles, but we are to imitate Paul's ways and patterns.

I wonder how many of us relate to Paul and his life and what he went through. I wonder if we find ourselves relating more to others in God's word, and yet they didn't say, "Imitate me, as I imitate Christ." I am all for looking at others' lives and relating to them and what they went through, but I also desire to relate more to Paul and his life, as he is the one who said, "Imitate me, as I imitate Christ."

Paul has, living within him, the promise of the mystery, Christ in us the hope of glory and so should we. We have been called to live in a time where the Spirit has been poured out on all of mankind and we are to come into the fullness of what this all means now. We live in a time where the empowerment of God is different, compared to those pre-Christ, so it is my hope that we are all entering into what is fully possible in Him today. We are to be living our lives from the finished work of the cross and not towards it.

It's from this posture that we are also going to look at a number of Paul's absolute statements of faith, because he was living his life from being in Christ, and it is my hope that his life, how he lived and how he came into the true knowledge of his Messiah, will inspire, encourage, and awaken us to truly imitate him as he imitated Jesus. Acts 26:29 And Paul said, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."

1 EDUCATED UNDER MESSIAH OR MAN

Educated under what learning system?

John 7:14-15 But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and began to teach. The Jews then were astonished, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?"

This is a very powerful and important question we must all ask. Jesus walked into the Jewish temple and began to teach and from His teaching they were astonished, asking this powerful question.

"How has this man become learned, having never been educated?"

Jesus wasn't educated under the same system as the temple system and the Jews recognised this. He never went to the school they all went to. He was a rabbi and yet where did He get His knowledge from? It certainly wasn't the place the Jewish teachers got their knowledge from. The Jews where educated under man, while Jesus was educated under His Father.

Verse 16 see's Jesus telling us whose teaching it was and where He had received it from.

John 7:16-17 So Jesus answered them and said, "My teaching is not

Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.

We see in the book of Acts the same thing happening between Jesus' disciples and the Jewish leaders, in relation to their opinion of the disciples being uneducated and untrained.

Acts 4:13 Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognise them as having been with Jesus.

What's fascinating is that just as they were astonished by the teaching of Christ, they also observed the confidence that Peter and John had from being with Christ. Jesus and His disciples learnt and received their knowledge from being under the same source, the Spirit.

Our starting point

For us to even be able to start looking at imitating Paul's life, we need to start this journey by looking at the primary learning position of Saul and Paul. We need to ask ourselves whether we are being educated under the learning systems of man or our Messiah, as this true reality will determine whether we will come into the life we have been predestined to experience and know. Although our lives are predestined in Christ, the decisions we make today and in the future determine whether we will receive the fullness of this life.

I wonder if we have seriously taken the time to look at the learning system of Saul and the learning system of Paul. This is the same man and yet the extremes to which Saul and Paul lived their lives are polar opposites. They are pictures of two completely different realities.

How on earth does a man who thought he knew God and God's purposes, a man who was so anti the church and on a mission to destroy the church in God's name, go from being Saul, to a completely different man - Paul? I'm talking about going from darkness to light, lost to found, not partial light or partially found, but fully found and in the light.

The answer lies in what educational learning system they were

under. We are going to look closely at both Saul's learning system and then Paul's, and along the way ask ourselves which one are we operating under?

In the book of Acts, we see Paul giving his defence before the Jews about who he once was and how he used to live. This passage has massive insights into who Saul received his education from, who he learnt under and how he lived his life.

Acts 22:3-5 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

Paul clearly states in verse 3 what learning system he was educated under, as Saul, and who in fact was his teacher. Educated under Gamaliel – man (flesh and blood), strictly according to the law of his fathers, being zealous for God. Saul was brought up in Jerusalem, under this system. This system and all its ways was all he knew or had been exposed to, so he lived completely opposite to the way he had been chosen and called for before the foundation of the world. We see Paul saying that as Saul he was zealous for God but this zeal was not in accordance with knowledge. This knowledge is a true knowledge of God.

Romans 10:2 For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.

Does any of this sound familiar for us today? Can we also relate to Saul and his life? Looking to receive our education from man, brought up in and around a building we mistakenly call the church, read the scriptures, have and hold to a form of godliness, but still not coming into the life we have been called and chosen to receive before the foundation of the world?

How does someone like Saul be in all this, being educated under the law and the prophets, which is the same law that Jesus fulfilled, and still live completely opposite to truth? How do we also as the church, be brought up around all that we are, and still find ourselves coming short of this incredible abundant eternal life in Christ?

The answer lies in the educational learning system Saul and we, place ourselves under. To place oneself "under" is a powerful action. It is a form of submission to another and a decision of heart, mind and will, to allow someone else to influence and affect your life powerfully. You are giving away authority and becoming vulnerable, towards the person or the system you place yourself under. This is not something one should do lightly as this defines and shapes the lives we live.

Let's look at the outcome of Saul's life from him placing himself under the educational learning system of man, rather than his Messiah.

Acts 22: 4-5 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

Acts 22:19-20 And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.'

Acts 26:9-11 so then I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

It's very clear to see that Saul's life was completely opposite to the life he had been predestined to know. We may say to ourselves, "Well that was Saul and we as the church are different." If this is our response, then I would invite us to rethink. We may not physically kill people and throw them in prison, but how much self-righteous judgement goes on in His body? How much of self still lives and chooses itself over God's will? How much division is there in God's body due to wanting to be right and prove others wrong? How much gossip, back stabbing, hypocrisy is there going on in His body today?

It's way too easy to deflect or justify this reality away, rather than taking a good hard look in the mirror and letting the evidence determine the truth. This is not to be the case for God's people, the church, but if we too are placing ourselves under the educational learning system of man, we will be no different to Saul.

Paul's educational learning system

Now, let's have a look at the educational learning system of Paul, as this is to be our learning system as well. This is the educational system we are to place ourselves under.

Galatians 1:11-12 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

We see in these two verses Paul's brand new educational learning system. In the following two verses, Paul gives personal testimony to his old educational learning system again to reiterate the crucial point.

Galatians 1:13-14 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

He uses the words, "former manner of life in Judaism." We see Paul use these same words, "former manner of life" in Ephesians 4:20-22 in relation to the church no longer living by her former fleshly manner of life in her learning. Paul had a reference for this former manner of life. He had a reference for this old way of learning and a reference for the new so he declared it from the roof tops for all who have spiritual ears to hear it.

Ephesians 4:20-22 But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,

If we are going to truly imitate both God and Paul we must learn from Christ, the way Christ intends. It is essential we are all set free from the educational learning system of our former life and all come under the new educational learning system of our Messiah. Paul says he learnt the Law under man and that he was advancing under the system of man and yet now he has just received the gospel, the good news, the Word of God, through a revelation of Jesus Christ. He is no longer under Gamaliel (man), but he has been powerfully catapulted under the new learning system of Christ, his Messiah.

Paul makes this point very clear with these words 'For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man'. Paul is saying he didn't receive this new reality, the Word of God like he received the Law. He wants all of his Israelite brothers to know the errors of their ways, as they were his errors. This new found knowledge that Paul preached didn't come from man but God alone. Has the gospel we also preach come to us from a revelation of God Himself or from listening to a man or woman who speaks words about God, like Gamaliel did? Does everything we preach come from receiving revelation or from human learning? One is of God and the other is of man.

These educational learning systems are miles apart. One produces the life the scriptures declare and the other produces a counterfeit version. The evidence of what learning system we are actually under is found in the demonstration of our lives. We may think we are under the learning system of Christ but do we have the corresponding evidence of this in our lives.

If not, then can I suggest we may want to re-evaluate our position. He goes on to make his point crystal clear by saying 'For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Once again he is saying I didn't receive the knowledge I now have

from Gamaliel, or any other man. I didn't receive or learn under the system of man or the flesh. I received this brand new knowledge that is empowering me to now live in righteous alignment to God through a revelation, an unveiling of Jesus Christ Himself. It's what Jesus accomplished at Calvary or the work of the cross, that gives life to the words of the cross.

This is where his new life as Paul began and it is where it continued until he died. It is this new educational learning system that enabled and empowered Paul to be a true imitator of the truth. Jesus Christ and His learning system is what enables and empowers us to be and do the same. The truth that Paul declares is the exact truth Jesus declared. Let's take a look at what Jesus taught in Matthew and John.

Matthew 16:17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you. Flesh and blood being man. Although man can speak revelation man can not reveal anything of God to another man. This is the role of the Holy Spirit. The only knowledge we have is the knowledge that the Holy Spirit has revealed in us. Apart from that all we have is information. This is why it was when Paul received a revelation of Jesus that the word of God or the gospel came alive in him. As much as man may like to and hope to, man can not bring to light the Word of God in another person or people. Man can only plant seeds but God causes the growth.

John 3:27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.

1 Corinthians 2:10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

These three passages make God's learning system crystal clear and yet my experience tells me that many in the body of Christ still try to understand the Word of God through the educational system of man. If we are learning from Christ, then we will all have the life of Christ. Having the life of Christ in us is the evidence of us learning from Him.

Jesus taught us that we must come to Him and then learn from Him.

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

We know that to grow and mature we must grow in our knowledge and understanding of that which we are learning about. In the same way if we are to grow and mature in the life we have been predestined to come into, then we must grow in our knowledge and understanding of His life and who He is.

We must be a people who yoke ourselves to Christ and not to everything else we can yoke ourselves to. There are so many things we can be yoked to and yet we are taught by Jesus to be yoked to Him. To be one with Him in all things. Jesus says His yoke is easy and that the burden He has is light. It is only easy and light when we are learning from Him. This position of being weary and heavy laden is not unique to non-followers, who have not yet had the opportunity to lay their burdens at His feet through their relationship with Him. If, as His followers we are functionally driven and led, and try to find rest in our own works, or our own ways, then we too will know this weary and heavy laden position.

It's a follower who has exhausted themselves trying to come into life through all their own works, strengths and efforts, thinking they are His works. This is why Hebrews 4:10 is very clear on how one enters His rest – the reality of Jesus' yoke being easy and His burden light. One discovers and enters into the rest that is found in the Messiah, and one ceases from their works. It's the perfect promise.

It is fully possible to live our lives every day from the rest that is in Christ Jesus. To come short of it would be to miss out on one of God's greatest promises for the church and we are taught to seek it diligently.

The heart is the place of understanding

It may surprise us to hear that the mind is NOT the first place of understanding when it comes to the things of the Spirit. If we attempt to understand God and His words through our minds first, we will only be led into a false knowledge that produces a false life. This is the pharisaic position that can appear to be right and in alignment to God, but in essence fails to be able to live and walk in the manner in which Jesus did.

When hearing to understand is our first placed mode of receiving from the Spirit, we will never come into the life we have been predestined to receive. We must be a people who hear to receive. It's the role of the Holy Spirit to reveal in our heart the Word of God, not our ability to learn through our intellect. Yes, God has given us a mind to love Him with but this is a renewed mind by the Spirit, not our natural mind.

1 Corinthians 2:12-14 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

This one passage clearly outlines all we need to know about how God's educational learning system works. We have been given the Spirit to understand the things freely given to us by the Spirit, which things we then also speak in spiritual words and thoughts. The man who attempts to understand these things from the mind first and not the heart, has placed himself under the learning system of man, causing himself to not understand what is shared because they are spiritually appraised.

Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Why do you reason in your heart?" **Luke 5:22** But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts?

Jesus knows the place of where all our belief, unbelief, mind sets,

thoughts and attitudes come from. He knows it's not the mind but the heart of man, hence Hebrews teaches us that the word of God judges the thoughts and attitudes/intentions of the heart. When the truth is spoken, the mind gets activated and the heart is exposed for what truly lives in it. As Jesus taught, "Out of the heart the mouth speaks."

This is why the heart is the epicentre of understanding and life and why Proverbs teaches us to watch over our hearts with all diligence, because from it flow the springs of life.

To be operating from the mind first is to be eating from the knowledge of the tree of good and evil. It is still knowledge and it can be good, but it's not a knowledge that enables you to walk in the power of Christ, because the root system of this tree is dead. The scriptures teach us we are to be rooted in love and that Christ is our root system. He is the tree of life so if our root system is in Christ then we will have the power of Christ living in us to walk in the exact manner in which He walked. We will have a knowledge and understanding which is transformative in nature and empowers us to live out what the truth calls us to.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is based on logic, rationale and reason. The tree of life is based on revelation. To continue to try and understand in the mind first is to continue to base your relationship with Christ on reason, rationale and logic. One who lives like this will never enter into the life one was predestined for and this would be an absolute shame and one that grieves the Father's heart.

Today is the day to turn from this man centred learning system and repent. Turn to Christ and confess your sin and ask Him to reveal His educational learning system which you have been chosen to learn from. He is faithful and trustworthy to reveal this in you, so you too can get on board with truly imitating God and Paul.

2 IMITATE ME AS I IMITATE CHRIST

I want to start this chapter by looking at what I consider to be the most powerful and boldest of Paul's statements of faith.

Imitators of Christ

1 Corinthians 11:1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

When we read this what do we think? Because we have hindsight we can tend to read this and go, "Well yes, of course," but what if we were there when Paul actually said it?

How would we respond today if someone came up to us in the body of Christ and said "Hey, be an imitator of me, just as I also imitate Christ? Look to me as an example of someone you would want to model your life on."

Would we laugh and say, "Whatever!" Would we get angry and say, "What arrogance!" Would we get extremely offended and say," Who does this person think they are?" Would we want to put this person in their place and tell them to pull their head in, or would we receive and accept this and say, "Yes Lord," because of our ability to hear and receive the truth that is being spoken?

If there is one thing I do know, it is that our Heavenly Father

has allowed this statement of Paul's to be in His book of life, which teaches me, the Father is more than comfortable with Paul making this statement about himself.

Paul lived his life from truth. He wrote from the work being done, rather than what still needed to be done. Paul lived his life from the 'finished' work of the cross. It was a full place and reality that Paul wrote and was living his life from, and it is this reality and place, that we are to live our lives from as well.

Psalm 19:7 The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

I love this entire verse, but it is the second part of it I would call our attention to. The testimony, the true work of what Jesus has done and is doing in us and through us, makes wise the simple. The true work of God, takes the incredible wisdom of God and makes it simple to live out.

We cannot imitate the man's life, until we receive what he received, the way he received it. We can try and copy it but we will fail miserably.

As I mentioned in the introduction, I personally believe that Paul is the greatest model and example for us to look to, because he has a clear reference for who he once was and who he had become in Christ. He knows how lost he once was as Saul and how God's love was covering him, while at the same time, coming to realise how God's grace was propelling him forward, into the son he was called and chosen to be.

Grace is God's empowerment to live out what truth calls us to.

1 Timothy 1:12-16 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate

His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

By God allowing the words "be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" in His living word, He is signalling to us that this is a statement of truth. Paul is the only one who makes this statement about himself in God's word, and God allows this statement in His living word, so what is it about Paul that God would want us to imitate?

It requires an incredible measure of being poor in Spirit to make this proclamation of truth. The depth of humility of Spirit that one must be in to make this statement, and for God to allow it, is nothing short of breath taking.

This statement comes from a position of knowing who you are in Christ and the mantle that has been bestowed upon you by God. Paul is teaching the Corinthians to imitate the life that he is living. Paul is saying if you want to see a physical demonstration of who we are to be and how we are to live as His followers, then look to my life.

God's Pattern

Philippians 3:17-18 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.

What is this pattern that Paul is referring to here? If we are going to follow his example and truly imitate him, then we need to walk in the pattern in which Paul and others walked.

Remember, Paul who was Saul, had attempted to walk in a pattern before and we see him saying in Philippians, that all the things which came from that previous pattern, he counted as loss and rubbish in comparison to the knowing of Jesus Christ.

The pattern that Paul and others walked in was a two-fold pattern. Firstly, it was in receiving within them the true knowledge of who God is and who they were in God through hearing. Secondly it was in living this knowledge out by faith in Jesus Christ, no longer was he trusting in himself and in his own ability, but living his life out by faith in Jesus.

Galatians 1:15-16 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

We will look at this two-fold pattern in the Chapters "Predestined to Receive the Son Within" and "From a Life of Self to a Life in Faith".

Hebrews 3:1 teaches us that Jesus is the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. Paul was called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. Are we making the connection here of the apostolic life that we are being called to imitate?

As we know we are not all called to be apostles, but it is my deep rooted belief that we are all called to be apostolic in heart, mind and deed. Paul is calling us into this apostolic life. A life that Jesus and Paul lived out and a life we are being invited to imitate.

The Apostolic calls us to a standard in Christ that we cannot achieve or reach through our own strength or ability.

The Apostolic Standard

What is this apostolic life that we are being called to imitate? What are the attributes or the values of this apostolic life? What is the culture and priorities of this apostolic life?

The first attribute of this apostolic life is a life of sacrifice.

1: He was Sacrificial

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Jesus sacrificed His own life so that we could have life and a life of an abundant measure. This abundant measure is not only for now but also for the future.

The second attribute of this apostolic life is being selfless.

2: He was Selfless

Luke 22:42 says, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

Philippians 2:5-8 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus was selfless and was wholeheartedly committed to accomplishing His Father's will and not His own, even though this would cost Him His very life. He only had one thing on His heart and that was His Father's will.

The third attribute of this apostolic life is being set apart.

3: He was Set Apart

Hebrews 5:9-10 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:11-17 Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested of Him, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Jesus was set apart by His Father. He wasn't of the order of the Levitical priesthood, but He was of the order of Melchizedek. A Spiritual lineage without genealogy, having no beginning of days or end of life. Jesus' line is of the Spirit and according to the power of an indestructible life.

The fourth attribute of this apostolic life is being a servant.

4: He was a Servant

Philippians 2:5-9 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason, also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.

Jesus has modelled for all of us true servanthood. He was the ultimate servant of His Father and His Father's will. He didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped even though He was God. He was the perfect example of the bondservants we are all called to be.

The fifth attribute of this apostolic life is being sent.

5: He was Sent

John 17:18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

John 3:17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

Jesus was sent by the Father into the world to lead the world back into right relationship with His Father and to discover the promise for which we were all created.

God's People Are to Be Apostolic

Here is what is so profound. You and I, the church, have been called and chosen to be Sacrificial, Selfless, Set Apart, Servants and Sent. We have been called to be apostolic in heart and mind, to have the culture and value system of Christ within us. The culture which we are to live from is to be an apostolic one, because it is Christ's and Paul's culture. This is the life we are to imitate.

Colossians 1:13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His Beloved Son,

God has transferred us from the domain of darkness and into the domain of light, so we would live like the Son. God is looking for the church to walk in the manner in which Jesus walked. This is the goal.

We are called and chosen to have the nature, character and life of Christ operating within us.

1 John 2:6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

Let's have a look at the scriptures that relate to us in relation to being Sacrificial, Selfless, Set Apart, Servants and Sent.

1 John 3:16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Luke 9:23-25 And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellences of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

2 Corinthians 6:3-10 giving no cause for offence in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in sleeplessness, in hunger, in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, by glory and dishonour, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.

Matthew 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

All the scriptures above relate to us as His people. We can see who we are called to be and what we are called to demonstrate and model. We are called to be Sacrificial, Selfless, Set Apart, Servants, and a Sent people. We are called to carry and live from an apostolic heart and mind culture and value system.

1 Corinthians 4:8-17 You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you. For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honour. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now. I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore, I exhort you, be imitators of me. For this reason, I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.

This is what it truly means to be ambassadors for Christ. To be Christ's representatives on the earth is a tall order and one that the church must take full responsibility for. Paul is inviting us all into this position; the position that he was now living from.

One of the greatest mistakes we make is to think that Paul was someone special and that God treated him differently to us all. I am not saying that Paul didn't have a specific task, function or role in the body, which is different from others, but what I am saying is what Paul received, in relation to the Spirit, is to be no different to what we receive.

So many times I have heard people say that what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus was very specific for Paul alone and that this doesn't really relate to us. This language separates us from this reality and we end up convincing ourselves that what Paul received was specific for him and him alone, and by no means related to us.

Have we found ourselves in fact saying this and thinking this way? It is this thinking that I want to challenge and hopefully convince us to have a completely different mindset on. What happened to Paul on the road to Damascus is critical, in fact it is fundamentally essential for us and needs to be our reality as it was his, if we are to truly imitate him, as he imitates Christ.

The Great Humbling

Let's have a look at what happened on the road to Damascus. The comparison between what actually happened and what we think, what has been taught or simply assumed, may just surprise some of us.

Acts 9:3-9 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."The men who travelled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

So let's look at the facts as to what has happened. As Saul is approaching the city of Damascus a light from heaven suddenly flashes around him, which causes him to fall to the ground. Christ is speaking directly to Saul and asking him why he is persecuting Him. Saul is unaware of who is speaking to him and asks who are you, to which Jesus replies "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting..."

The men travelling with Saul hear the voice but see no one. Although Saul's eyes are open, he can no longer see physically. He has been blinded by this encounter with Christ and the men he is with, now lead him by the hand into the city of Damascus. Saul is in Damascus three days without physical sight, food or drink.

What do we notice about what has happened so far in relation to Saul's encounter with Christ? He has been physically blinded by his encounter with Jesus. Nothing from a transformational perspective has taken place. Saul is still Saul. He still is thinking like Saul and acting like Saul, although while at the same time, Saul is starting to crack and break because of what has happened to him physically.

Put yourself in Saul's shoes. You are the crème de la crème. You are a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. You are self-reliant and in control of your life and your own future. You are zealous for God and, in your own mind, think you are serving God. You have been educated under Gamaliel and you are well ahead of your fellow counterparts. You are persecuting the church and on a mission to see the church destroyed and in a moment in time, completely outside of your control, you are struck down and made blind. You find yourself being confronted by a voice that you and others can hear but can't see and the voice is telling you, that it belongs to the one you are persecuting.

The voice then tells you to get up and enter the city and it will be told you what you must do.

"but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."

I can't imagine anyone telling Saul what to do and yet here we have this voice telling him what to do and he does it. He gets up and allows others to lead him into the city.

Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.

Saul is having to rely on others to help him. He is no longer in control and he is starting to realise just how fragile he is. The great Saul is starting to crack. The great Saul is starting to break. Has this become our reality as well? Has the temple of self, fallen?

Luke 20:18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.

Biblical Repentance

The Spirit of pride is starting to fall apart into a thousand pieces. The strength of man is found out for what it really is – absolute foolishness. The great Saul, who is the Hebrew of Hebrews, who was educated under Gamaliel, is falling apart. Just like Rome fell, the great Saul is also falling and being brought to his knees by this act of God. Don't we all need to find this position before God? Don't we all need to be brought to a place of true repentance?

The vessel of pride is about to be smashed into a trillion pieces so it can be replaced with a new vessel - a vessel of humility. Saul is being humbled and is being prepared to receive the Holy Spirit.

This reality brings to light the words that King David wrote in Psalm 51, as he also had his breaking moment after committing adultery and murder. The words David uses are describing the new reality he has discovered in God through Godly repentance. He has come into a new way of being in God, now seeing and operating from God's first placed position.

Psalm 51:16-17 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken Spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

What is the first placed position? A broken Spirit and a contrite heart. The church of Jesus Christ is to come to this position in her own life, otherwise she will never experience the fullness of life that Paul discovered in Christ. We are all to have the Spirit of pride broken in our lives. We are all to live from a contrite heart. How can we imitate Paul if we don't go through the same process that Paul had to go through?

People say what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus was just for Paul, because we miss what actually happened to Paul. Have our minds created this false scenario, assuming one thing, but not the right thing? Have we assumed it was at this point that Saul's life changed to Paul, when in fact what is really happening is that the temple of Saul is disintegrating?

God did what He did to get Saul's attention. God also allows or

even does certain things to get our attention as well. God's intent for allowing or doing these things is never to hurt us, but to help us. God's intent is always love, even when we can't see it. He helps us get to where He intends us to go, because He knows we will never choose His way if we are left to our own devices.

How many of us can relate to this?

Saul is being humbled and is being prepared to receive the Holy Spirit, just like all the other people at this time, who had also gone through this repentance process. A man by the name of Ananias comes and lays his hands upon Saul, just like Saul had seen in the vision and not only does Saul receive his physical sight back, but he is also filled with the Holy Spirit.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit opens up the realm of the Spirit, and it is from this posture that Paul now started to live his life. This is to be no different for us. We are to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to live our lives being led by the Spirit.

Romans 8:14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Paul had a specific task, in connection with God's will, that God would have Him accomplish and he was graced by God for that task, but before he could start he would need to fall upon the cornerstone and be broken into pieces. We are to be no different. If we haven't fallen and been broken into pieces before we start serving God in the roles He has for us, we will end up defining these assignments to our own personal detriment. Sure, we are fully committed but are we fully surrendered? When we ask Christ into our lives for what He can do for us rather than surrendering our lives to Him, we simply incorporate Jesus into our lives, we add Jesus on to our lives rather than Jesus becoming our life source. When we do this we never come into the life God has for us. Paul was to make known the mystery that had been kept hidden until the appropriate time. Christ in the church the hope of glory. He was empowered by God to make every follower complete in Christ. What an assignment. He could only live like this because this very work had happened and was happening in Himself.

Colossians 1:25-29 Of this church I was made a minister according to

I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose, also I labour, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Paul was also to go before the Gentiles, kings and the sons of Israel, and share with them the gospel of the kingdom.

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

God filled him with the Holy Spirit for these purposes.

Acts 9:17 So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

The argument that Paul was special and therefore we can't ever be like him, is one we have created unknowingly, and it keeps us in a place of smallness. We are not all called to be apostles and we are not all called to the tasks Paul was, but we are all called to imitate Paul, through the power of being filled with the Spirit, like all the other followers we read about in Acts.

Paul lived his life by faith in Jesus Christ and from having Christ's life formed in him and we are to be no different. This is the life we are to imitate. If we are going to imitate Paul, then we need to know and understand Paul's journey and process. We need to look at his life and teachings and learn from him.

Ephesians teaches us that the manifold wisdom of God is to be demonstrated through the church. This will only be our reality, if we come into the true knowledge of God within us. This is what enables us to imitate Jesus and Paul.

3

SET APART AND PREDESTINED TO RECEIVE THE SON WITHIN

Galatians 1:15-16 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles...

Let's look at the words of this passage and see what we can learn from Paul.

"But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace."

Set Apart for God

Paul is not only declaring his own living reality, but he is declaring ours as well. Paul says before he was ever conceived in his mother's womb he was set apart for God, for a particular period in time and for a particular reason. We are no different. All those who are foreknown by God have all been chosen and predestined to know God and His purposes.

Ephesians 1:4 says "...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him..."

What an incredible reality to know that before we were ever conceived, we were already chosen in Him. This truth, if believed by us,

creates so much trust in God. Knowing that we have been chosen means that we are not an accident. Being chosen means God has intentionally hand selected us to be His people for a specific purpose. Wow, did we capture that?

This makes sense of the words "knowing the hope of His calling" and "to live a life worthy of His calling".

Ephesians 1:18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling...

Ephesians 4:1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

Paul knew what the Father's calling was, and we are to know it as well. As God's children we have been hand selected, marked by mercy, chosen from love, to be set apart for Him and His calling. This is why the bible says that man cannot come to Jesus unless God is drawing man to Jesus. We did not choose God, God chose us.

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

All those people that the Father is drawing to the Son, the Father has hand selected and chosen them to know Himself and His Son. Once again this reality births so much life in us, if we can capture this truth through the power of revelation. To know we are not an accident and that we have been created to be His, is an incredible life giving reality, and one we are to be living our lives from.

Paul knew of this living reality and as followers who have been called to imitate Paul, we are also to know this reality as well. Notice from where the calling comes from. It's not from our ability, choice, or means, but through His grace. Paul was called by God's grace. We are called by God's grace. God's grace not only calls us but God's grace also empowers us to live the lives we are called for. Everything we are becoming and everything we accomplish, is to be accomplished through God's grace and God's grace alone.

Without God's grace or power operating in us, it is impossible to live this life of imitating God. We will try in our own strength and fail miserably. Trying in our own strength is called legalism and this is the very thing grace sets us free from.

Let's now look at the second part of this passage of scripture.

"Was pleased to reveal His Son in me, so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles."

Christ in Us

I cannot stress enough how essential it is we come to understand this position of, in me. This is the starting point in which Saul became Paul. Saul was lost and now Paul has been found. There was and is no grey area here. Paul went from being lost to being found because of receiving the Son *in* him.

There is no partially lost or partially found. We are either lost or found. There is to be no middle ground. If there is a middle ground it's because we have created it through psychologically appealing to people, to get them found, rather than the power of the gospel rescuing them out of darkness and into light.

If we are not receiving the knowledge of God via this way, then we are not receiving the true knowledge of God, which makes us free. It is only in receiving Jesus Christ, the Word, this way, that we come into this new life within us.

John 3:27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.

Anything less than this and we will find ourselves not being able to imitate Paul. This is what enables Paul to be the accurate demonstration of a son, an ambassador, a representative of the kingdom of Heaven, which in turn gives him the authority to write the words, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ."

Look at all these other scriptures below and notice the same pattern in all of them.

2 Corinthians 12:9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell *in me*.

Colossians 1:29 For this purpose also I labour, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Galatians 4:19 My children, with whom I am again in labour until

Christ is formed in you.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you...

John 7:37-39 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John 4:13-14 Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

Having the Word of God being revealed in us continuously is the pattern that creates and forms Christ's abundant life in us. This is to be our literal reality and experience and it is this that Paul was in labour for, "My children, with whom I am again in labour until Christ is formed in you." The question remains, are we receiving the Truth within us?

Complete in Christ

Colossians 1:28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

What does it mean to be complete in Christ? Who is this "every man" that Paul wants to present complete in Christ? In verse 29, we see Paul saying it is for this purpose that he is labouring and striving in God's power, to see this reality become an outcome.

If we don't come into the revelation of what Paul is labouring for, then we will, unfortunately, miss out on the powerful life and reality we were all destined for. A complete life in Christ, where Christ in us, is our literal source which we live from. Christ is not just our resource but He is our very source of life. We don't incorporate Jesus into our lives rather He is our life. We don't live towards this reality but we live from it, because Jesus is our life.

Colossians 3:4 When Christ, who is our life is revealed...

How well do we know and are experiencing this life in Christ? John 1:4 says that in Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The brightness of the literal life within us is determined by the literal life of Christ being formed within us. The formation of Christ in us is a reality, that I fear, many in the body of Christ have skipped over in the place of pursuing works for Christ.

We pursue outcomes that we believe we can control and accomplish in our own ability and strength, giving us a sense of accomplishment and self-worth, and we completely miss the formation of the life in us, from which all our works are to be accomplished. We can be guilty on both accounts. Not only do we skip over this formational life of Christ in us, but the works we set out to do are done in our own strength and power, they are temporal works of hay, wood and straw, and not eternal works inspired, empowered and led by the Holy Spirit.

Paul wants to present us complete in Christ for a wedding date set in the future. Paul wants to present us spotless and blameless and as a pure virgin for her groom. Paul desires and lays his life down, through the power of God operating mightily within him, in order to see the church of Jesus Christ be made complete, by the Word of God that richly dwells within her. This complete life is a life that is formed on the inside and manifests itself in an outward expression into the earth.

I wonder how many of us have spent the time to come into the mystery that Paul was graced to declare to the church. A mystery that is no longer to stay a mystery, but is a real tangible reality.

Colossians 1:24-27 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

This being 'made complete in Christ' reality was hidden from others in the past, but they also searched God for the times that this would be revealed, as they knew of it, even though it would not be their reality. We are all on the side of time where we can have this mystery revealed in us to a measure that it completes us. We are no longer to be empty vessels, trying to live for Christ as empty vessels, but we are to be vessels full of the new covenant glory, made complete in Christ, because of His power to accomplish this powerful work.

Paul knew this reality of having Jesus as His source of life within him, being made complete in Christ, hence he can write and speak of it to others. We too are to live from this reality so we can imitate the life Paul lived.

This isn't a life where we polish the outside of the cup and dish, with works for Christ, but it is about allowing Him in to do an inner work of transformation.

Matthew 23:25-26 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

Only when the inside is clean will the outside become clean. It's when we are made complete in Christ on the inside, that we are able to demonstrate the life that Paul and Jesus demonstrated for all to experience. It is impossible to walk in the manner in which Jesus did and imitate God unless we are being made complete in Christ, and this is an inner work. Maybe this is why in my experience many avoid this aspect of Christ and continue to pursue outcomes and works for Christ, justifying this truth away by what they do for Him, rather than who they are becoming in Him.

If we are living like this, then we have to realise this is the Pharisaical position that Jesus is talking about here. It is the position of hypocrisy and it is a position of the flesh, and as we know flesh is anti the Spirit and is a stumbling block to the things of the Spirit, which is ultimately a stumbling block to Christ. This can be very hard to swallow and admit, but unless we do and repent of it, we are putting

this inner life reality and transformation, being made complete in Christ, at risk. As Jesus says, the inner part of the cup and dish must be cleaned, for the outer to become clean. We will know how much of this complete life of Christ has been formed in us when we are squeezed. Apples produce apple juice; oranges produce orange juice. When we are squeezed, what juice comes out of us, Flesh or Spirit?

The reason followers can hear, "...away from Me, I never knew you", is because their inner life (heart and mind) was left untouched never being made complete in Christ, which means we are full of self-indulgence, leading to doing things in His name but in our will.

This doing things in His name, but in our will, is a life that looks the part, but is really doing its own thing. When our heart and mind are being made complete in Christ, our outer life will follow suit, and we won't find ourselves ever hearing these words. We will be rewarded with the crown of righteousness.

Jesus addressed this very issue with the rich young ruler in Matthew, when the rich young ruler asked Him how he could obtain eternal life.

Matthew 19:16-26 And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." Then he said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbour as yourself." The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property. And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who

can be saved?" And looking at them Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

There is much to understand here, but I just want to look at one verse. Verse 21, we see Jesus say, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow Me.

There is that word again, complete, and in this man's case it's associated with the giving away of all his wealth. The challenge is people can give away all they have and not be made complete in Christ. The physical act of doing something doesn't guarantee us anything. Jesus is addressing something way deeper than the young man's wealth and we must see this, if we are to walk into this complete life in Christ. Jesus is addressing the young man's inner life, his heart and where his true treasure is.

Matthew 6:21 says "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also".

Jesus was addressing a heart issue and the heart issue wasn't his wealth, but who in fact was the god of his life. The young ruler was his own god, and because of this, he couldn't let go of his wealth and give it away. If we want this complete life in Christ in us, we must give Christ all of our heart. We must give Christ our complete heart, and not an incomplete one. We can no longer be the source of our life, He must become our source.

The gospel of Mark says that Jesus looked at this young man and felt love for him, even though Jesus knew he wasn't going to do what He was asking. I am so thankful that Jesus' love is covering us all, while we allow this true eternal work of the Spirit in our hearts and minds to be accomplished. I pray none of us will be like this rich young man, who walked away from allowing Jesus to do this deep complete work of the heart. We walk away at our own peril, while for all those who walk into this reality, the complete work will be accomplished.

The be-attitudes or the attitudes of being, is what this complete work of Christ looks like outworking in and through a person's life. As we partake of, and in Christ, this complete work starts to unfold and be formed within us. Failure to partake of this life in Christ will

have us being void of life. We will have a form of godliness but will have denied its power and we will be always learning, but never coming into the true knowledge or knowing of God.

This happens because we reject the true gospel, the Truth, which is the power of God unto salvation. We deny the true gospel, which is God's power to bring us into this complete life, by our continuous attempts to bring ourselves into this life through the wisdom of man, the intellect. It is the denying of God's kingdom way, that has us living this counterfeit, hypocritical form of godliness out. It looks good and sounds right, but it has no substance.

Only when we are made complete in the same mind as Christ, will we be able to live the way Jesus intends us to, with Him and one another. This is why the bible teaches us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Only if our minds are renewed by the Spirit, will we stop denying the way God builds us and receive His way. For our minds to be renewed, we must allow God to address the issues of our heart, as biblical belief starts in the heart, not the mind.

1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

We can not expect to operate from the way of the world and come into this complete life in Christ. It's impossible and this is exactly what the scriptures teach us.

1 Corinthians 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

It was Jesus Himself that said unless you are eating My flesh and drinking My blood, you have no life *in* yourselves.

John 6:53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.

Jesus went on to say that His flesh was true food and His blood was true drink and that he who eats and drinks of Christ, abides in Him and He in them.

John 6:55-56 For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

Once again the pattern is *in* us. We can see change around us, we can experience God in all the externals and see Him at work, but when the change and transformation occurs in us, our lives are going to be radically different. It's through this process that the pillars of steel, the fruit of the Spirit, start to become the substance we live from.

John 15:11 is an example of the point I am making. This passage is in context with the fruit of the Spirit being formed within us.

John 15:11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

What do we think our lives would look like if we all had Christ's joy in us more and more? What would it feel like? What would our response be to everything we faced? What would others see and experience when they come into contact with us? This is a position to be realised and experienced in Christ now. Joy and happiness are very different. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, while happiness is an emotional feeling, that comes and goes depending on our situation or circumstance.

Speaking from Christ in Us

Paul says God revealed the Son in him so that he might preach Him to the Gentiles. There is always a purpose behind what the Father does and the Father's process always sits behind His purpose. There is a massive responsibility given to all those who are going to preach God's Truth, and that responsibility is to preach God's version of Himself and not who we think He is.

The process of God for preaching Christ to the world is to have the Christ revealed within us more and more. To have His Son and the words that come forth from His Son revealed in us and coming through our lives, is the position through which we speak of Him. Anything less than this is a theoretical position and this position is void of power and life. It may be a place that is technically correct but it will lack the power that is to be associated and integrated with God's spoken word. The seed will lack substance.

In other words, anyone can preach the words of Christ, but not everyone preaches the Word of Christ, and it is the Word of God that must be declared.

The more the Truth is being formed within us, the greater the power of the words we share. The words we speak will not be persuasive words of wisdom, but will be the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

1 Corinthians 2:4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

1 Corinthians 4:20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.

God is looking for changed lives and a people who speak from this place of change and transformation. This is the place where the wisdom of God is spoken from and no other. This is the language and the words of the mature. This is the place that everyone who preaches Christ must preach from, as this is the authentic and true position, because one is testifying to the true work that Jesus has accomplished within them.

The apostle John said, "The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy". What Jesus has accomplished is the Spirit behind which the Word of God is to be declared. Nothing more and nothing less than this will suffice. This is the position of power and not mere words. One is giving testimony to the work God has done or is doing in them. This is why the bible describes the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit, that judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

4 FROM A LIFE OF SELF TO A LIFE IN FAITH

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Let's look at the words of this passage and see what we can learn from Paul.

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me:"

Paul is saying he has been put to death. All the operating systems of his fleshly ways have and are being surrendered and being put to death by the cross. Just as Jesus was crucified and killed, Paul is saying that he identifies with Christ through the crucifixion and death of his own flesh, so he can now live from the resurrected life and enter into the life he was created for.

The New Man

Paul knows he is now a new creation in Christ and he is determined to live from this new created order by the power of the Spirit.

It was Paul himself who wrote in Philippians 3:10-11, I want to

know Him and the power of His resurrection and have fellowship with His sufferings, being conformed to His death, in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul had come into the life of 1 Corinthians 1:18-19, hence it is him who writes these words.

1 Corinthians 1:18-19 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside."

Paul knew firsthand that the word of the cross is a word of absolute life and power. He had transitioned from believing it was a stumbling block and a word of foolishness, to knowing it was a word of abundant life. It is from this place he says, "and it is I who no longer live, but Christ lives in me."

"I", no longer has a place of existence in Paul. The god of self has been and is being put to death. "I", no longer has its way anymore. The temple of self must come down and be abolished if we are to live by faith in Jesus. Everything is changing from this moment on. There is a shift of the guard and the removal of one god and the establishing of the true God in Paul's heart and mind.

2 Corinthians 4:7-10 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

To live from the place of Christ being manifested in his body, is a new reality for Paul, but one that he is experiencing and living from. Having Christ in him and living from this position, is his reality and although Paul is not saying he is becoming a mini god, he is saying that the life that was in Christ, is literally being formed and established in him.

Paul knew that this life of Christ that was being formed in him by the Spirit, was literally giving life to his physical body, and this is to be our reality too if we are to imitate Paul. Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Paul was now living from the position of Christ living in and coming through him. His mortal body was being radically affected by the life of Christ being manifested in him. Paul had the resurrection power of God operating in him and it was this power that he lived his life from. It is this dimension of abiding in Christ that enables him to live for God and not himself.

Colossians 1:29 For this purpose also I labour, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

The Eternal Life Expressed

Maybe this will now help us understand how the man could say being whipped, beaten, shipwrecked, hated, persecuted, and put in prison, was momentary light affliction.

All this is made possible because he had been crucified with Christ, by the Spirit and not by the letter of the law. If we are going to imitate Paul as he imitates Christ, then we need to experience every aspect of Paul's process. We cannot skip the parts we don't like and only receive the parts we like. Paul's process is an all or nothing process.

Look at the next part of this declaration of truth, "and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God".

The reason Paul is able to live this reality out now is because Christ is being manifested in his body. The transition of living by faith in Jesus as opposed to living by faith in one's self, is all made possible because of this process of receiving living manna from on high. It's the formation of Christ's life in us, that enables the activation of this new way of living. Christ's life is literally living in the man.

Paul was no longer trusting in himself, what he thought, or in his own strength to accomplish things. He realised that living like this was futile and had him living in a completely opposite way, to the way God would have him live, "and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God".

I wonder how many of us are still living by faith in ourselves, in the wisdom of man, rather than by faith in Christ. Paul makes it his purpose to let everyone know that the message and the preaching he brought, were not in persuasive words of wisdom. He said this so man wouldn't put their faith in the wisdom of man but in the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2:5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Faith in God's Power, Not Man's Wisdom

How many of us are still firmly in control of our own lives, trusting in ourselves and our own abilities, determining who we will live for and what in fact we will live for? This is called the wisdom of man.

We live like this because unlike Paul we are still living. We are still not prepared to present our bodies as a living sacrifice as Paul urged us to.

Romans 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

The giving up of our life is our true act of spiritual worship. Does this sound familiar to what Abraham and Isaac had to go through and how Abraham was going to offer his son up to God as a sacrifice?

How many of us see our lives as our own? Jesus promises us if we lose our life for His sake, we will find our lives. We are so confused today because many think worship is just the singing of songs to God as opposed to the giving over of our entire lives and allowing our Father to mould us into His perfect image. This is our predestined destiny in Him as His people called the church.

Romans 8:28-30 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

I wonder if this is the reason many do not have this incredible abundant life within them. We resist the actual process God has put in place for this work to be done and we come up with our own multiple ways to deflect this true work being done. Of course, we do this all in the name of Jesus.

Paul was a man who went through the God-given process to receive the God-given life and he spoke of this when he said, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

If we truly want to imitate Paul, we must become a people who live our lives by faith in Jesus Christ. We must be a people who have crossed over the great divide from blindness to sight. We must be a people who hand over the control of our lives to Christ. We must be a people who live their lives by faith in Jesus Christ alone. We must live from the operating system of God and not man.

Faith That Sees

So what is this faith that we are to live by in Jesus?

Hebrews 11:1 teaches us what biblical faith is.

Hebrews 11:1-2 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained their approval.

In simple terms, faith is the ability to see the unseen. Faith sees into the realm of the Spirit, the unseen but seen reality, and it is because of this sight, that a powerful conviction is birthed called belief. We now have an unwavering belief, being fully convinced of God and the Truth He declares and we live this belief out.

The passage below is a classic example of what I am referring to. Romans 4:19-22 Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore, it was also credited to him as righteousness.

The entire bible is full of living promises to be received, realised and then lived from by God's people. Can we see these living promises that are in the unseen realm of the kingdom?

This is why Hebrews 11:2 says that the men of old gained approval by this kind of faith. Not any kind of faith. Faith is not wishy washy or half-hearted. It isn't yes and no, because all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ. It was Abraham's faith in God that was accredited to him as righteousness, hence he is known as the father of faith.

The faith I am declaring that we are to live from in Jesus is an unwavering, absolute, unshakeable, immovable kind of faith, that produces an absolute confidence, conviction and assurance of Christ in us. It's a faith that sees.

I hope we captured the enormity of this faith. That the men of old gained their approval, their righteousness in God, not by the sacrifice of an animal, but by their faith in God. As we know there was no animal sacrifice that could cleanse sin, as it was a shadow of the true sacrifice in Christ, until Jesus would become our once and for all sacrifice.

Hebrews 10:4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

It was the reality of their faith, the reality of the truth realised, known and acted upon in obedience to Christ, that made them righteous which empowered them to live righteously.

This faith sees the unseen Spiritual reality that exists in God and it lives from it. People's lives literally reflect the measure of faith that they have within them. Whether they live in faith or fear. Whether they live for themselves or for Him and others. How they are preparing and being made ready or not, is all determined by this ability to see.

Faith Brings Immovable Confidence and Conviction

Let me give you an example of this from 2 Kings 6:15-17:

2 Kings 6:15-17 Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was

circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Elisha can see something that his servant can't. He has a measure of faith operating within him that his servant does not have, and this becomes clear in the way he acts. The servant is in fear at the sight of an army with horses and chariots, while Elisha is in faith and speaks from this position of faith.

You can almost feel the fear as you read the servant's words, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" Elisha's words in response to his servant are words of faith, assurance and confidence. "Do not fear." He speaks the opposite to what he is hearing and seeing coming forth out of the mouth of his servant. He counteracts the language of fear with the language of faith.

The words of fear have to be apprehended and cut off before they have time to take root and start living, and Elisha's response to these words is swift and sudden. Elisha's words are words of life and power because of what he can see. They carry incredible weight because of his ability to see the army that was there to support them, **for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.**

These aren't empty words that Elisha is scrambling to find because of the situation he finds himself in. These words of life are anchored into the reality of what he knows. The unwavering belief and absolute conviction of what he can see is where these words come from. These words come from faith.

Words of Power

Unfortunately, too many followers profess words over their own lives today that are not anchored in this kind of faith. This kind of faith comes from revelation not proclamation. They are His words quoted by us but they lack power because they are not anchored in this reality of faith, conviction and unwavering belief. We may as well be

quoting words from the latest self-improvement book, because the impact is going to be the same – nothing.

I remember a while ago being in a gathering of God's people where a man got up and read from a particular passage and then said "The word of the Lord has been spoken". What made me chuckle a little, was that he even said this in a very 17th century kind of voice, as if this was going to make it sound more powerful.

Unfortunately, there was nothing powerful about it. Yes, the man had read from the bible and yes these words are of God, but the word of the Lord had not been spoken. This was just a man reading words off a page and the words contained no power and life. Jesus said, "My words are Spirit and life." These were just words.

In my opinion, the man above was not proclaiming God's word that is living and active from being anchored in this posture of faith, this ability to see, and this was very evident as his words were dry and lifeless.

There are people who speak the word of God and there are people who just speak the words. Elisha was a man who spoke the Word of God and we see this in his life. The next part of this scripture is awesome. Elisha models to the servant and to us, just how this faith, this sight to see what exists in God, becomes a reality.

Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

He turned to his God and he prayed and asked God to open the eyes of his servant to see, and the Lord responded and did what Elisha asked of Him. He didn't try and get his servant to muster up faith or whip faith up by some fleshly act. He didn't tell his servant to start quoting all these biblical words over his life to help with his fear, because he knew these words wouldn't be anchored in the very thing they need to be anchored in – faith – to make any difference.

No, he simply turned to the Lord and asked the Lord to open his servant's eyes to see and this faith was birthed in the servant. This is how genuine faith is birthed in us. God reveals His truth, His reality,

His life, His Son in us. We receive it, we don't learn it and study it. We ask God to open our eyes to see what already is.

Ephesians 1:18 *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

Once again if we are going to imitate Paul we need to live from this faith.

Hearing Is the Key to Faith

The bible teaches us that this kind of faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

There is a kind of faith that is produced from a kind of hearing, and a kind of hearing that comes by a certain kind of word. The word of Christ.

Being able to hear, believe, receive and accept God's word in the Spirit, is the key to this faith being formed within us.

Trusting in God and Faith in God are different things. Trusting God comes from knowing God through revelation, while faith is produced in us through hearing the living words of God.

We must have complete trust in God's faithfulness if we want to come into this absolute posture of faith in Jesus. I believe we have confused trust and faith with one another and pretty much see them as the same thing. I suggest to us that trust in God is what we need, when the measure of faith in God has yet to be formed, to what He is calling us to.

We are all to be coming into more and more of this deep rooted conviction of faith in Christ and living from it. This is the way followers of Jesus are to live and Paul is modelling this for us all, hence the imitating of his life.

The final part of this passage of scripture are these words, "Who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

The motivation for Paul to live this reality out comes from the immovable fact, that he knows that Jesus loves him and gave Himself

up for him. To come into this same reality where you have a deep rooted conviction in you, that Jesus gave Himself up for you, is transformational in nature.

When we come into the realisation of the love of our Heavenly Father and we taste His love for us, our entire lives start to change. God's love revealed within us is the greatest catalyst for change that man can experience.

To know you are loved and embraced with a love that is patient, kind and gentle. A love that holds no wrongs, that is not jealous and that believes and hopes all things, will affect your life so much, you won't even recognise who you once were and you will naturally start to live by faith in Jesus, as opposed to faith in yourself.

Paul has received this love and because of this, he knows that Jesus gave His life up so he could experience the fullness of the life he was called and chosen for.

Paul was determined to live this life out by faith and come into all that God had for him. Paul lived like this for the glory of God and the glory of the church. He lived his life by faith in Jesus so all those he would come into contact with would do the same. All those people include us. So are we living our lives by faith in Jesus and no longer living our lives by faith in ourselves or others?

It's the receiving of this love that enables us to live a life of love, faith and hope, no longer living for ourselves, but walking with and living for His will.

5

FOR I DETERMINED TO KNOW NOTHING AMONG YOU

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

I personally believe that out of all the massive statements of faith that Paul makes, this one has to be one of the greatest. We see in these five verses the humility of the man and the true heart posture of "blessed are the poor in Spirit" operating within him.

Paul or Saul as he was once known, was a man who prided himself on his lineage, his knowledge of the law and his ability to articulate the letter of the law with precision.

Philippians 3:5-6 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

"As to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless." I am not sure it gets much bigger than this. Saul was a somebody in the Israelite nation and he was excelling beyond his age, and yet the heart posture and language of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, is of a completely different man.

The Power of God Operating in A Person

Is this in fact the same man, or are we looking at a brand new person, who has had his eyes opened by the truth, Jesus Christ, who now says "I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God".

This doesn't sound like Saul at all. That's because it is not. It's now Paul. A man who speaks the words of Spirit and Life, rather than the letter of the law. A man who has heard, and is hearing, the frequency of the Spirit of truth and declares this with such captivating simplicity and humility, that for many, it is heard as complete foolishness and is a stumbling block.

All Paul is really interested in is proclaiming the true powerful work that Jesus has and is doing in his life. The testimony of God. The testimony of God is everything God has finished in the Spirit and the true work that God is doing in and through our lives, which enables us to overcome all things.

He doesn't want to confuse people with big long winded words about the law that he knows, but he desires to share the true testimony of Jesus Christ, how He has fulfilled the law, and that life is found in Him alone. In verse 4 we see Paul say his preaching is 'not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.'

We are all to be like Paul, as Paul said, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ." Our preaching is not to be in persuasive words, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. In other words, our very lives are to be the demonstration of what we preach, and we are to speak from this position in Christ. We are to preach what we practise, not practise what we preach. The actual reality of what we have come into is the place we are to speak from.

Words of Wisdom

This new Spiritual language coming forth from Paul's mouth, comes with the utterance of heaven, declaring a brand new reality in Christ, for all those who have ears to hear.

Philippians 3:7-9 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

Don't you just love the heavenly language that now comes forth from Paul's mouth, which speaks of the new life he has received through knowing Christ intimately? We now see the complete opposite statement to the one he made before, in relation to where his righteousness comes from.

...not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

Where once upon a time his righteousness came from the law, his true righteousness now comes from God on the basis of faith in the Son. This is why Paul in Romans 1:16-17 is able to say with boldness and much passion, that he is not ashamed of the gospel, for in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. He goes on to say it's the righteous who shall live by faith.

Verse 2 is also very revealing of Paul's new heart position in Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

True Knowledge That Changes Us

To know nothing except Jesus and Jesus crucified seems so little and limited, compared to all the mysteries of the message of the kingdom. There is way more than just Jesus and Jesus crucified isn't there? What is Paul talking about? Has he lost his mind or has he in

fact found the mind of Christ? He knows, knowing the person who was crucified on the cross intimately and knowing the power of the resurrection, is the key to receiving the abundant abiding life that Christ promises us. Have we come to this understanding yet?

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

It's in the person and the power of the word of the cross that true knowledge exists. A knowledge that is transformative, rather than just informational. A knowledge that when received within a person, builds the eternal life of Christ within us, His body – the church. No wonder Paul said that he determined to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Led Astray in Our Minds from True Knowledge

This explains why Paul wrote what he did in 2 Corinthians 11:3 as a warning to the Corinthian church. I don't think it's any coincidence, that in his first letter to the Corinthians, he writes what we have just discussed. In 2 Corinthians 11:3 he is afraid that the Corinthian church will be led astray in their minds, from the simplicity and purity of a devotion to Christ. Can I encourage you to go and meditate on 2 Corinthians 11:1-6 and ask the Holy Spirit to bring revelation of what is being shared? After doing this ask yourself does this sound familiar to 1 Corinthians 2:1-5?

He compares Eve being deceived by the enemy, in other words the fall of mankind, to the church being led astray in their minds from this intimate all-knowing relationship with Jesus. The reason man is led astray in his mind, is because he attempts to come to know God through his mind, the intellect, as his first placed priority. Man attempts to understand the words of God through his carnal mind, rather than know God Himself through the Spirit's power of revelation. This is the operating system that Saul lived his life from until he had a powerful encounter with Jesus, and he began to learn from Christ.

Ephesians 4:20-24 But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in

Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the Spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Paul was awakened to and freed from this false way, so he exposes it, so that no one else might be caught in the deceptive trap that held him for so long. He obviously sees it operating in the Corinthians, hence he warns them in the hope they will hear the Word of the Lord and turn from this false way.

If our first placed position is to attempt to understand God through our carnal minds, we too are operating from the flesh - the false way. This can be hard to swallow, but it is the truth, and explains why we may be unable to demonstrate the Spirit life we are called to. Far too many followers of Jesus are attempting to come into the eternal life that Jesus promises within us, through the learning of man's ways.

It should come as no surprise then that Paul writes in Romans 12:2 that we are not to be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. This renewal is done through the Spirit. May we learn the way of the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 11:4 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different Spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.

We can preach another Jesus or receive another gospel without realising what we are doing. This is how deceptive this all can be. We would probably all say this wouldn't be me and yet if we try to come to know God any other way than the way God teaches us, this will be us. Notice Paul says another Jesus. It's not Buddha, or Allah or evolution, it's another Jesus. Another Jesus, can be when we take our interpretation of the words of Jesus and preach them as the word of Jesus. This can very easily be done from a place of ignorance due to unbelief.

1 Timothy 1:12-14 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even

though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus.

The Other Jesus and The Different Gospel

Paul addresses this "another Jesus" in Galatians 1:6-8 using the words a 'different gospel'.

Galatians 1:6-8 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

Paul says he is amazed at how quickly the Galatians are deserting Christ for a different gospel, which is really not another gospel, but it is, because it is a distortion of the gospel of Christ. The Galatians were in fact going back under a number of ceremonial practises which were no longer required. How many of us live under modern day ceremonial practises without even realising it? These practises produce no life.

Again, notice Paul doesn't say a different religion or faith system, but a different gospel. A different gospel is anything but the complete gospel that Jesus Christ preached. Incorporating Jesus into our lives isn't the true gospel. The true gospel message is the complete loss of one's life to find the life Christ has for us. It's a complete death to one's old life and the discovery of a brand new life found in Christ.

Many have proclaimed the prosperity gospel, the claim it and grab it gospel, the signs and wonders only gospel, or the works based gospel. This goes on more than we even realise and it happens right under our noses, but because our minds have been led astray from the simplicity of truly knowing Jesus Christ and Him crucified, we easily and readily bear these other gospels beautifully.

Great Confidence in Christ

I love how Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:5-6 that he doesn't consider himself the least inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though he is unskilled in speech.

2 Corinthians 11:5-6 For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.

He is not fazed by these 'eminent apostles' because of the true knowledge of Christ he has. True knowledge is experiential knowledge, that only comes through the power of revelation of the person, Jesus Christ. This knowledge is not attained through the intellectual study of the words on the pages of the bible, but by divine revelation of the Holy Spirit. Paul knows it's the true knowledge of Jesus Christ, that comes through the word of the cross, that enables him to live like Jesus. It's not how well he may be able to articulate words, but his ability to live as the Word lived.

This is why we see him say in verse 6, "in every way we have made this evident to you in all things".

Just like in 1 Corinthians 2:4, Paul lets the demonstration of his life of the Spirit and of power do the talking, not his ability to speak persuasive words.

Have we ever taken the time to ask the Holy Spirit what Paul was ultimately afraid of, that the Corinthian church were being led astray from? The obvious answer is from the simplicity and purity of a devotion to Christ. The question I would have us all ask ourselves is, what is the promise of inheritance for the church that can only be discovered through this intimate relationship?

Paul addresses this in Verse 2 of 2 Corinthians 11, by saying this. 2 Corinthians 11:2 For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.

What is Christianity really all about? Right here is the eternal purpose for God's people and yet how many of God's people actually have a revealed understanding of this promise and are living as a

pure virgin? One who is faithful and obedient and no longer living as they used to, when they were of the world. Paul gave his life and no longer considered his life of any account as dear to himself, so that he may finish his course and the ministry which he received from the Lord.

Revelation Is the Key

A big part of Paul's ministry was to present the church as a pure virgin. A people who have been made complete in Christ. A people who love God and love people, who are faithful and obedient to His will. A people who have been set apart, consecrated unto Christ, for the wedding of the Groom and His bride. Being made complete in Christ is just that. We are made complete from the inside out, having His divine nature built within us. Flowing in the gifts and works of the Spirit in alignment to His orders.

Paul said the mystery that is great is the mystery between Christ and His church. Mysteries must be revealed to us. A verbal or mental agreement of the mystery is not enough to have us living in alignment to the truth. The context for the entire scriptures have their origins in this mystery.

When Jesus saw that the scribe had answered him correctly He said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Remember where the kingdom of God is. You are not far from having this true eternal life formed and established within you, but as of yet, you are still void of it. What does the bible say the kingdom of God is? It is certainly not about taking physical dominion of land or territory firstly. It is far greater than this. For me to give you the answer wouldn't do you any good, search the scriptures for yourselves as they will tell you.

I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling...

Wow, these words really do define the man that Paul has become and the way He approaches the Father and the Father's will. He is now held in a reverence for God that is brand new to him, and the weight of awe and wonder is now his reality. How comfortable are we in weakness? Paul realises his absolute reliance on the Spirit for all things and without the Spirit, he has nothing to bring and nothing to share. The teaching of the branch abiding in the vine is very much his new found reality, because he knows the branch himself, cannot produce any fruit or life, without the vine.

This posture is the polar opposite of the one he lived from as Saul. The spirit of humility is now very evident in his life.

Leaning in to Christ

This fear is not one that has us shrinking back from God, but one that has us leaning into God. It has us pressing in for more of God and wanting to come into more of His transformative Word. We are not people who shrink back when confronted with the enormity of God and His Will, but we are people who press on and into Him.

The scriptures teach that there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out all fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. Did we hear that through the Spirit? The one who fears is not being perfected in love. This is 1 John 4:18. Romans 8:15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

Hebrews 10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

1 John 2:28 Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

1 John 2:5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him.

The promise of God is that if we keep His Word, then the love of God is truly perfected in us. If the love of God is perfected in us, then there is no fear. To have fear is to not have the love of God being perfected in us. Only through weakness can this transformation and building work occur.

Paul knows that when he is weak and only when he is weak, is he truly strong. When he says weak, he means coming to the end of his strength. He means coming to the end of his ability to make things happen. He means coming to the end of being able to produce anything or an outcome. He means coming to the end of oneself and relinquishing the absolute control of one's life and the need to keep one's life going. He means being wholeheartedly dependent on God for everything and anything, and he knows this is the greatest place to be in, hence the title of this chapter, "For I determined to know nothing among you."

2 Corinthians 12:9 Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

From Weakness to Strength

This weakness is seen as foolishness and absolute insanity in the eyes of the world. A world that builds itself up on its ability to be in control and is so dependent upon itself to exist, succeed and map out its own existence. A world where the strong survive and thrive is something to go after and seek because this is what it values.

Paul knows that God's power is perfected within him in his weakness, because he has become the recipient of that very power and it is this that has him saying that he will boast about his weaknesses. If we as God's people, are not living from God's power, then we are not living.

I wonder how many of us in the body of Christ, especially leaders, actually go around boasting about our absolute inability to make any eternal difference in our own lives and the lives of others we walk with or lead. How many of us realise just how dependent we are on Christ to do the work in and through us and others. Paul discovered this place through being someone who fell upon the Rock and had the Spirit of pride, i.e. self, that was operating within him broken to pieces.

Luke 20:17-18 But Jesus looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone'? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

How many of us have actually found this place of having the Spirit of pride – self, broken into pieces, never to be put back together again? King David wrote about finding this heart posture in Psalm

51:16-17, so we would all be made fully aware of our absolute need to be broken and contrite of heart.

Psalm 51:16-17 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

This reality brings us into knowing without a shadow of a doubt, that only in our weakness can we become strong in Him. Just like Paul, we no longer reject the stone that the builders rejected as the chief cornerstone. You will know if He truly is the chief cornerstone in your life because you will have the corresponding life of this within you and this life is immovable. This life is not found in human wisdom.

Falling On the Cornerstone

When you have fallen on the Rock and have been broken into pieces, you are eternally impacted and changed. What was once in opposition to Christ, is no longer there and you now have the capacity and ability to act and live differently to how you once did. Just like Jacob who had his hip dislocated out of its socket, you now walk with a limp, the limp of true humility. You now find yourself engaging in ways and conversations, that would have once repelled every part of you.

Jesus is not only talking to the Jews here who would reject Him, but to "everyone" who falls upon the chief cornerstone. Everyone is everyone, Jew or Gentile, male or female. It is my personal conviction that this, for many in the body of Christ, is a road less travelled, hence we still see a lot of pride, i.e. self, in a body that by now should really be humble. This is why there is much division and a false sense of Spiritual oneness in the body, because many avoid this road and go down multiple other paths, creating our own version of oneness, which is actually conformity to the flesh.

Builders Will Build

I love how God uses the word "builders" in Luke 20:17-18. The Jews were to be the people that God would build His kingdom in and

through upon the earth, and yet as builders, they rejected the chief cornerstone. Builders are known for building things, so as builders they continued building their own thing in the name of God. Just because you reject the cornerstone, doesn't mean you stop building things and you will even use His name to build them. This is just as much the case today as it was then. A common phrase we may often hear from followers is, 'Let's build the church', never realising we fundamentally cannot build anything eternal. To continue to try will see us building our own empires. The only problem is we genuinely believe the empires that we build are of Him, and He will actually let us live like this.

Psalm 127:1-2 is very clear and explicit on who does the building work:

Psalm 127:1-2 Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labours; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.

This is a really simple statement that for some reason we completely miss, even though it is clearly written in front of us. We can clearly see from the scriptures who builds whose church and what happens when man attempts to do God's part. If we have not learnt this lesson, we will be unable to imitate God.

This is no different to Matthew 16:18, and yet because of Spiritual deafness and blindness, we miss this completely causing us to build counterfeit models, thinking they are the real deal. This, for many is not the intent of one's heart, but just because you don't intend something, doesn't mean you don't actually do it. You can for all intents and purposes, fully believe what you are doing is right, but it is a path that actually leads to death. If it is of Him we will have the life of Him and be able to walk as He walked, imitating God.

Matthew 16:18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

Wisdom Is Demonstrated

Wisdom in Christ in its most mature form, is the ability to demonstrate a Christ like life. Paul is saying his life is a demonstration of the wisdom of God. His ability to live as he was living is wisdom. This is what Paul is calling us into when he says imitate me as I imitate Christ. We too are called to be this living wisdom, becoming a letter for all to read and see. We don't know anything we haven't become. Matthew 11:19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

Ephesians 3:10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

We can see from the passage in Ephesians above that the wisdom of God is to come forth from the church, God's chosen vessel upon the earth. The heavenly realm is to witness the Church being able to demonstrate the manifold wisdom of God. The lack of the reality of this upon the earth today by the body of Christ as a whole, is the evidence of where the body of Christ is truly at, with what she calls wisdom and her ability to live wisdom out.

Far too many followers in the body of Christ are satisfied with mere head knowledge. What gets built is directly reflective of what it is built upon.

Why would a lost world know that Jesus was sent for them?

Because of the wisdom that is being demonstrated upon the earth by the church for itself and its neighbour, people are experiencing the love of heaven first hand through the church. The church is to love people with the love of the Father.

For way to long, the church of Jesus Christ has been happy and content to call wisdom, informational knowledge. The acquisition of facts, principles, patterns and truths, stored in the mind, is what we have called wisdom, and yet the scriptures clearly teach us that wisdom in her fullest form is vindicated or made right by her deeds.

Truly Imitating God

It is this dimension of the Spirit that enables and empowers us to be imitators of God. Not people who try and copy what God is doing, but having His life in us, that He flows forth from us. We cannot help be anything but imitators of God, if this is our true position of wisdom.

What do we see about this passage below?

1 Corinthians 1: 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Notice that Christ is not only the wisdom of God but the power of God. If we have Christ being formed within us, Christ in us the hope of glory, then certainly we will have the intertwining reality of the wisdom of God and the power of God coming forth from us and being manifested upon the earth for people to experience and touch.

Because we now have Christ being formed within us, He becomes our how to, and we now get to demonstrate the fruit of His life abiding in us. This abiding life outworking itself in our lives happens so innately, that we are not really even aware of who we have become and this way of being just becomes our natural expression of living.

When we are living like this we no longer have to try and sell Jesus to people or convince them of Jesus, but we can just let them see Christ by the way we are living. They can come and pick the fruit and be the recipient of the fruit, and as we share we can rest in the fact that what they see and hear is not our own wisdom, but the power of God. It's essential for us as the body of Christ that we all come into this abiding life, so that our faith and the faith of others, would not be found resting on the wisdom of man, but on the power of God.

So that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Where Does Our Faith Rest?

Paul did not want people looking to him or to any other human being, when it came to where people should be resting their faith. If we can't at least see the physical demonstration of our faith in Christ, wisdom, then we will naturally look to find wisdom from our fellow man. We will look to find wisdom in what someone knows, not in

how someone lives their life. We do not know anything we have not yet become. This is the fatal mistake that many make. This is how the world functions.

By becoming wisdom that people can touch, see, hear and experience, people get to experience the reality of a God they can't physically see. This is massive as Jesus came and was the manifestation of God on the earth for all to touch, see, hear and experience. He was the exact representation of His Father and we too are to be the representatives of our Father. We are to re-present God to a lost world. We are to be ambassadors of the kingdom we are from and represent our Father's kingdom well. We are the righteousness of God and we are to live out lives of righteousness.

The one who knew no sin, who became sin on our behalf, did so for the purpose of the church becoming the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Paul knew that it was the power of God that is discovered in the message of the cross, that propelled people into this life of righteousness. As previously stated, this is why he spoke of determining to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Paul was fully aware that in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, and that a man or woman who lives their life from faith, will discover just how righteous they have been made in Christ, and live accordingly.

To not be living this life of righteousness out, would be to not know just how right we have been made in God, which is profoundly sad for all those who profess Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

If we actually do live this supernaturally empowered life out in Christ, there is very little chance that anyone would rest their faith on the wisdom of man, because all would know that what is being demonstrated in front of them is impossible for man to model. Followers require a power from another source to be able to demonstrate this powerful reality of life.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But

by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I laboured even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

Empowering Grace

This is what Grace is. Grace is the empowerment we need to live out what Truth, Jesus, calls us to. How familiar are we with the grace of God operating in our lives? Do we have a reference for His grace in us? The grace of God, which is another word for the power of God, propels us into a new found passion and purpose and has us realigning our entire priorities toward Him.

Without the grace of God operating in us, it is impossible to be the demonstration of truth upon this earth that we have been called and chosen to be by God.

When our faith rests on the wisdom of man, our faith is firmly anchored in the temporal.

This is extremely dangerous for us because the temporal can move and shift and fall at any given time. All it takes is for something to not go to plan and our faith falls and crumbles into ruins.

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

It's very easy to say that our foundation is Christ, but when things don't go to plan, we and those around us truly get to see who our foundation is.

When our faith rests on the power of God, our faith is firmly anchored in the eternal. Paul said the life he lived, he now lived by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the eternal. He is the eternal life and the source of the eternal. 2 Corinthians teaches us that we are not to live by sight of the temporal, but by faith in the eternal. When we sow to the temporal we reap from the temporal, but when we sow to the eternal we reap from the eternal.

Living It

Paul said in Corinthians that the kingdom of God is about power and not words. He says he comes to test not the words of those who

are arrogant, but their power. It's one thing to be able to articulate the information one has about God really well and really clearly in a precise manner, and yet it is an entirely different thing to be able to demonstrate what one speaks. This is the only thing that really matters, as Christianity has very little to do with what you profess to know and everything to do with how you live.

The true knowledge of God will always produce the true demonstration of God, hence our faith better be on the power of God and not on the wisdom of man. It was Paul himself who acknowledged that although he may have been unskilled in speech, he wasn't in knowledge, and that he had made this evident to them in his demonstration of truth through grace.

2 Corinthians 11:6 But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.

Paul also instructed Timothy to guard what had been entrusted to him and to avoid worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments that paint themselves up as knowledge, but are false. This reality leads people astray from the true faith.

1 Timothy 6:20-21 O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge" – which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.

This reality can be and is very prevalent in the body of Christ today. It's ultimately the opinions of man being declared as the Word of God. It can sound right and promises us much, but delivers on nothing and leaves us with a sense of being Spiritually abused and manipulated.

Let's stick to Paul's two words or phrases that he gives us and we will not go wrong but find ourselves coming into the fullness of life Christ promises us.

1 Corinthians 2:2 For I determined to know nothing among you except *Jesus Christ*, and *Him crucified*.

6 I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

Romans 1:15-17 So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

As we have done with the other verses, I want us to break down each of these three verses and see what sits behind each one. Let's start with verse 15, "I am eager to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome."

Why is Paul so eager to preach the gospel to all those who are in Rome? Remember this is the man Saul who was a persecutor of all those who believed in the Gospel and made it his life's mission to destroy the church. The message of Jesus Christ was utter blasphemy to this man Saul and yet here he is, now saying that he is eager to preach the very message that he once loathed and hated with a passion.

What has Paul discovered in the gospel that stirs up such motivation that the man would go from this state of being a persecutor, to someone who would lay his life down for the very thing he hated?

Receiving The Gospel

Galatians 1:11-12 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

How did Paul receive the gospel or the Word of God? It wasn't through the agency of man. He says he neither received it from man nor was taught it by man. Paul received the gospel, the Word of God, through the revelation of Jesus Himself. Paul is led to the person and it is the testimony of what this person accomplished through His death on the cross, and then His resurrection, that has transformed Saul into Paul. This must be our reality too if we are to imitate Paul.

Paul didn't receive the *words*, describing what Jesus accomplished, but he received the *powerful work* of what Jesus accomplished. This brings understanding as to why Paul said this in Philippians 3:10:

Philippians 3:10 that I may know Him and the *power of His resurrection* and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

Paul had experienced the power of the resurrection and we must as well, if we are to be imitators of God. The power that rose Jesus from the grave, Paul had received and experienced in him, and he wanted to experience more of it, because he had firsthand experience and knowledge of what it accomplished in him.

Receiving the words of the gospel and receiving the work of the gospel, are two very different positions and so the question remains. How did we, and how are we, receiving the gospel or the Word of God, because the way we receive it, plays an integral part in the life we are able to live out.

As previously stated, the gospel isn't something we receive psychologically, i.e. through the mind, but through the power of God.

When we are receiving His truth the way He intends, we find ourselves coming into this complete work of the Spirit. Our lives firstly are defined by the fruit of the Spirit. We then operate in the gifts of the Spirit, in alignment to Him and we get to see the works of the Spirit played out in front of us and through us. We get to see God's intentions outworked His way, through His empowerment and all

done from a posture of His rest within us. These you could call the outcomes of the Spirit. It was Jesus who said He builds His church and the church He builds; the gates of hades will not overpower.

If we are going to imitate Paul, just as Paul imitated Christ, then we all need to be defined by this truth, this gospel.

Partaking of The Gospel

Paul was a partaker of the gospel. What does this mean? The scriptures teach we are to be partakers of Christ. To partake of the gospel, means to be a recipient of the divine, supernatural work that Jesus accomplished at Calvary and then live our lives from this place, doing the will of God. It means to experience within us the power that raised Him from death to life, and then walk in the manner in which Christ walked. This is not a one off event but an ongoing reality and experience in Jesus Christ. Like Paul, we too are to live like this, to win more people for Christ.

Living like this in Christ comes with a whole lot of risk, but risks that must be embraced by us, if we want to truly experience the life we are called to live. Many will not understand or perceive living like this, is of Christ and we will have to know how to deal with the trials and tribulations that come our way, if we are to continue on this path and be obedient to the Father's call. When I say many, I mean those who are followers and non-followers of Jesus.

You will be lied about, misrepresented, misunderstood, be perceived wrongly, gossiped about, be verbally abused, judged, sentenced unfairly and ostracised, and you must be ok with all of this, while pressing on in Christ, so that all those Jesus desires to reconcile to Himself will be reconciled.

The Gospel Opens Our Eyes

1 Timothy 1:12-16 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith

and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

Paul has come into the powerful revelation of just how right Jesus Christ has made him. He has received the true gospel and the true gospel brings with it the righteousness of Christ. Paul has come to the realisation of just how much God's mercy and grace has been covering him in his unbelief and pride. The man's absolute ignorance of who the Father is and what the Father has truly accomplished for him, is now glaring at him. His true heart state and the way he had been living, anti-God and His ways, has been revealed and he's been awakened to his true state. His newly revealed knowledge of who the Father is and his state before the Father has propelled him into a new reality.

He shares how God's mercy and grace was more than abundant and was covering him. He shares without even knowing it and being completely unaware of it, just how much he is being loved by Christ. It is from this new reality that Paul then says, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all." This reality of the gospel needs to be our reality as well if we are going to be imitators of Paul.

Paul identifies himself as the worst sinner of all because of the revelation he now carries of God's mercy, grace and love for him. Paul has a reference point for what Jesus is saving him from – himself. If the passage stopped here Paul would be left in a state of depression and condemnation, looking at a hopeless future. Glory to God that it doesn't stop here and that this is only half the equation as far as Paul was concerned.

The second half of the equation that Paul knows is found in these words: "Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life."

It was for the fact of who Paul (Saul) was and the way he was living, that he discovered the incredible mercy of God. The fact that God did not strike Saul down for the way he was living, was in fact the demonstration of how patient, merciful, gracious, and loving God is towards all those who are anti Him, His ways and His truth. It's very hard to imitate God when you are in fact anti Him, His way and His truth. We can be in this state ourselves and never know it until our eyes are opened by the gospel.

This is the same today, whether we are followers of Him or not. As His followers we can profess to live for Christ and live for His will, when in fact we are living for self, but professing something different. When we do this we abuse His mercy and love, never coming into the reality of the purpose of His mercy and love.

Paul's life as Saul gives incredible testimony to the mercy and love of God towards mankind. His patience towards Saul is amazing and it is the same patience, mercy, grace and love that God bestows on us. God acts like this towards us so we will "believe in Him for eternal life". and be just as passionate to share Christ with others, as Paul now is. We are also no longer ashamed of the gospel when we are awakened to the reality of it, like Paul was. We become imitators of Paul.

The Gospel Builds Us

God's desire is for us to come into an eternal life within ourselves, having the Kingdom of God formed and built within us. It is a life where the abundance of His fruit is abiding in us. A life where the Spirit dwells and abides and is continuously flowing forth from us. A life that stands all the pressures that this world throws at it and glorifies the Father, because of the work performed by God within it. Luke 6:46-48 "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.

Let's now have a look at verse 16. "For I am not ashamed of the

gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

Not only was Paul eager to preach the gospel but he also states how unashamed he is of the gospel. Paul goes on to say he is unashamed of the gospel, because he now knows it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew or the Greek.

The eyes of his heart have been opened to the reality of truth. He can now see God and the purposes of God in full colour and clarity. He has been brought into God's version of truth by the power of the gospel being revealed within him. He has been awakened out of a deeply deceived position and brought in to the incredible light of life in Christ. Once again, this is to be our experience as well.

No wonder the man is unashamed of the gospel. He realises just how dead he was and how alive he has now become. He literally knows the reality of being dead and then being brought to life through the power of God. He knows just how lost he was and just how found he has become. There is no middle ground or double mindedness in Paul. Is it any wonder that Paul said he wanted to know Christ and the power of His resurrection more and more?

Philippians 3:10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection...

The Gospel Empowers Us to Live to This High Standard

I wonder if we too have come to this same position in Christ. Have we come to the position where we are unashamed of the gospel because of its power to change us? Have we come to the place where we, with absolute boldness and courage at the leading of the Spirit, declare to others what Jesus has done in us, for us and through us?

Do we find ourselves being compelled to share with followers and non-followers, the greatness of what Jesus has done and is doing in us, because of the gospel we have and are receiving? When I say gospel, I mean the entire word of God, the good news? If we are not, can I encourage you today to turn to Him and start asking for the reality of what Paul received, that is the gospel received in word, power and the Holy Spirit causing a full conviction of belief.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only,

but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

Trust me, when you receive the gospel this way, it will make you wonder if you ever knew the gospel before this.

I fear that many followers of Jesus have only received the gospel through words and in so doing, only have a mental agreement with the truth. This is not wrong, but God wants us to come into the living conviction of the truth, which causes life and radical change, so we may be imitators of God. We are not to stop pressing in until we receive the living, full conviction of truth in our inner most being, which empowers us to live as a Christ did.

This is what it means to believe the way Jesus intends us to. To believe means to be fully convinced. It is this position that Paul knew, and it is the position that we are to know and imitate. It's where our actions match our words and we live this position out continuously by faith in Christ.

A full conviction enables and empowers us to live differently. Paul started to live differently because of the gospel he received. He was a changed and changing man. He started to live completely opposite to the way he once lived. Can we also give testimony to this change of life? Have we become different from who we once were and how we once lived? If not, then I would ask you to ask yourself, how have you received the gospel and how do you continue to receive it?

The way in which we receive the gospel makes all the difference to our lives. Paul spoke with such boldness and courage and said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel" and continued to declare God's truth in the face of extreme opposition and persecution, because of the way he received the gospel. He knew he had been justified and sanctified by Jesus Himself and his life would reflect this reality continuously.

If we don't discover the work of the gospel, we will only have a form of godliness. We may look the part and be able to do certain things through the flesh, but we will ultimately lack the power to live this Christian life out and walk in the manner in which we have been called. We will fail to imitate Paul and Christ as we are called to do.

This is why Paul is able to say in Colossians 1:29 and in Romans 1:9,

that the serving and the work He does with and for God, is all done from the power that is operating within him. It is God that supplies His power within us. He says I strive to present every man complete in Christ, through the power that operates within me. This is not his own power or strength, but the power God supplies to accomplish the work of God. This power is a constant substance in Paul. It's not here one minute and gone the next, it is constantly present and he is living from it.

Colossians 1:29 For this purpose also I labour, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Romans 1:9 For God, whom I serve in my Spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you.

1 Peter 4:11 ... whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies...

To not live from this place is to live from our own strength, which is a form of legalism and will only end in burn out and frustration. God gives us His grace through the gospel to live out what truth calls us to. When we are in this reality, we don't have to focus on outcomes as they will just naturally flow. They are produced through us being recipients of the work of the gospel. It is this gospel that empowers and enables us to imitate Paul as he imitates Christ.

Verse 17 is the outcome of the gospel, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith'."

Our True State

The gospel reveals to us the righteousness of God and just what He has done for us in making us righteous in His eyes. We have been made perfect by the blood and body of the lamb.

Hebrews 10:14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Do we know how right we are in God's eyes? Do we know just how holy we are in His sight? We can't make ourselves any more holy than what He has made us. Our challenge is to believe in our hearts and come into this renewed mindset and understanding through the power of God's gospel, His word, and then live from this new position by faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul says that the righteous man lives by faith in Jesus Christ. It's hard to live by faith in Jesus if we don't know just how right we have been made through Him. If we are constantly believing lies about ourselves, lies that we either tell ourselves because of our wrong thinking, we will never receive the life that He has for us.

Our true enemy is our *inner me*. We tell ourselves we are not good enough or not worthy enough of His love. We tell ourselves God could never forgive us for what we have done, even though He has already forgiven us and remembers our sin no more. To think like this and to continue to live like this is to nullify what Jesus accomplished for us at Calvary.

If there was one man who could have condemned himself over and over again for his past behaviour it would be Paul and yet Paul doesn't do this because he knows just how right he has been made by the gospel. He has been set free from Saul and everything that went with being Saul. Is it any wonder he said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel"? Paul's new life is the demonstration of the power of the gospel at work within him.

I wonder if the gospel is having the same impact on our lives today, where we too can say with all confidence and boldness, "We are not ashamed of the gospel." This gospel enables us to imitate Paul as he imitates Christ.

7 FOR THE LOVE OF GOD CONTROLS US

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died, and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

"For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all."

Love Is to Control Us

What a powerful statement to make to say that you are controlled by the love of Christ. That all the decisions you make, the way you live, your priorities, where you spend your time, energy and resources, and ultimately what you live for, is because of the love of Christ you have received

What are we controlled by? What determines the decisions we make and the priorities we hold to? What determines who we live for and how we live for those things? Do we live from Paul's reality, the love of Christ, or are we still wrapped up in the love of self?

This is a massive truth that we must allow ourselves to be confronted with and apprehended by. If we are not living for God, then

we will be living for ourselves. We will be actively building our own empire as opposed to allowing the kingdom to be built within and through us. We either live for the one true God or we live for the god of self. The choice is ours.

The context surrounding 2 Corinthians 5 is all about the temporal and the eternal. The chapter starts by talking about our future eternal home and reality and also has us focusing on a greater reality to be experienced by God's people now. Paul's purpose is to get our eyes off ourselves and what we experience in this mortal body, and to paint an accurate picture of where our true life exists. The bible says God has prepared us for this very purpose.

The revelation of this living reality plays a significant part in our ability to live a life controlled by the love of Christ. In verse 7 we see Paul write these words, "for we walk by faith, not by sight".

We don't walk by physical sight and what we see in the physical, but we look into the spiritual dimension and live our lives from this perspective. This is a divine perspective because its anchor is in the Spirit and this is where God's people live from.

Paul then shares about the judgement seat of Christ and how we will all be held to an account for the life we have lived, whether good or bad.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

What will our judgement seat look like if we have lived a life controlled by the love of Christ? What will our judgement seat look like if we have lived a life controlled by the love of self, which is lust?

There is a reward to be received at this judgement seat. Those who are controlled by the love of God, living for what they see in the eternal realm, will receive a reward at the judgement seat of Christ. In contrast, those who live for temporal things, being controlled by the love for self, will suffer loss at this judgement.

The Consequences of Living for One's Self

Paul goes on to say how he and others are trying to persuade men

and make them aware that this judgement seat is coming.

2 Corinthians 5:11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

Look at the words with which he starts this statement, "knowing the fear of the Lord". Paul knows what awaits all followers, and he is attempting to wake the church up through writing these words. He knows that followers who are not living from this eternal posture will be living for a temporal one and this is living for one's self.

To be controlled by love one must know the love of God. One must have and be experiencing 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 love, for this is the love of Christ. One cannot be controlled by a love that they have not tasted or experienced. If you do not yet know a measure of His love by which you are being controlled, then it is not too late to ask, seek and knock on heaven's door for it.

Receiving His Love Humbles

God responds to hungry, thirsty and desperate hearts. Hearts that want Him and His ways more than they want their own. The bible describes the love of the Father as wide, deep, tall, and long and that it is a love which surpasses knowledge.

Ephesians 3:18-19 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

This love is available today, as it was when Paul wrote these words – just as it has been from before the beginning of time. If we will pursue love as the bible teaches we will experience a love so overwhelming, magnificent and transcendent that we will never be the same again.

Romans 5:5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

It's the love of Christ operating within us that enables and empowers us to live out the truth that 2 Corinthians 5:15 declares.

"and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

Paul was the greatest advocate for the church to no longer live for one's self, but to live for Jesus alone. The church has been called to imitate Paul as he imitates the Christ. In other words, the Church are to be the greatest example of a people who no longer live for their own selfish desires and wants, but are wholeheartedly devoted to becoming mature sons and doing the Father's will, from the motivation of love and not task or function.

Notice how Paul says that Jesus died for all, so all could have the opportunity to live for Him. Jesus doesn't discriminate a person by blood line, nationality, colour, culture, education, intelligence, ability, or gender etc. We all have the opportunity to no longer live for ourselves and to live for Christ. It then becomes a matter of our personal choice and choices as to what we treasure and where our treasure truly lies.

Luke 12:34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

We see Paul declaring an awesome truth in 2 Corinthians 5:17 for all those who are in Christ. It would have to be one of God's greatest promises for His church, His sons. Let's look at it.

Living as A New Creature

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

If we are in Christ, then we are a new creature. Not because of our ability to become a new creature, but because we are now in Christ. Christ qualifies us and Christ empowers and enables us to live as a new creature.

Because we are a new creature it now becomes possible to live as a new creature. A new creature no longer lives for itself, but it lives for the one who made it a new creature. The eating of Christ's body and the drinking of Christ's blood is what enables us to live as we are called to. God has made the way possible for the church to live from the eternal place now no longer dieting on the temporal and living from this temporal position.

John 6:27 Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."

Deuteronomy 8:3 He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.

God is going to judge us for the way we have lived our lives on earth. As mentioned this is why there is a judgment seat for the church. He is not going to judge us for our sin, but for our obedience to His commandments. He's going to judge us on whether we lived for Him, because we were new creatures or whether we lived for ourselves, as a new creature. God is the God of truth and reality and He expects to see the reality for which He died demonstrated by His people. He looks to see a church living to glorify His name and not their own name.

Romans 15:9 and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy...

Being A Model or Letter of the New

As mentioned God has given the church everything she needs to live a life of godliness. God has given the church His Spirit, His love, His power, His word and His gifts, to see a people established on the earth, who no longer live for themselves but Him. A people He has raised from death and into life. Therefore, if we are in Christ there are no excuses for not stepping into the fullness of life that He has for us.

God expects to see a body on the earth, where He is the head, that truly reflects Himself. He has always been looking for His bride and His bride will model Christ like behaviour. How did Christ live? For Himself or for His Father's will? Christ lived for His Father and for others. He gave His life to serve the Father and others and we too must live the same if we expect to be His bride.

All that stands in the way of us becoming this people is us. God's patience with us is incredible. While we continue to live for ourselves, God's patience is being outworked, even though we are unaware of it. He waits and waits and waits and waits, in the hope

that we will realise just how foolish we are being trying to live for ourselves, rather than living for Him.

1 Timothy 1:15-17 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul is saying his very life is the demonstration of God's patience. Paul came into the life he was called and chosen for and I would ask us, are we?

Jesus gives us very clear instructions as to what no longer living for yourself looks like and what starting to live for Him looks like. His starting point to everything is relationship.

The Great Commandment is the greatest challenge God has given to every man He has given life to. Whether you are a follower of Jesus or not, the greatest test known to mankind, is to love God with ALL your heart, soul, mind and strength. This love must be from heaven's perspective and not our version of heaven's perspective.

The reason this is our greatest test is because we cannot do this from our own strength, ability, wisdom or knowledge. We are completely unable to live this truth out without the grace of God being a reality in our lives. His grace is the power to live this reality out.

As His followers we need to be living from the power of God, operating within us, if we expect to be able to live out the greatest Commandment. We need heaven's operating system working in us and not earth's. Paul gives us heaven's operating system in Colossians 1:29.

God's Operating System: His Power

Colossians 1:29 For this purpose also I labour, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Paul cannot make it more clear in what he is teaching here. He is saying that he strives, he lives his life out, his new created life, in

accordance to God's power, which mightily works within him.

This is how we are to live. Paul said, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." Christ lived with the power of His Father living within Him mightily.

Acts 10:38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power...

Paul lived with the power of God mightily working within him. We too, are to live with the power of God working mightily within us. This is what enables us to be controlled by love and no longer live for ourselves, but live for the one who died for us.

Do we know about this power that exists in God? Because if we don't have a reference for it, then how can we live mightily from it? The answer is simple, we can't. If we find ourselves with no reference for this power, then we need to get on our faces in prayer and with supplications and piety, start asking God to reveal it in us.

Jesus told His disciples that He would send forth the promise of His Father and that they must stay in the city until they were clothed with power from on high.

Luke 24:49 And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Unless we experience this reality of being clothed with power through the receiving of the Holy Spirit, we will all struggle to live out the Great Commandment of loving God with ALL we are. We will attempt to do this in our own strength, but fail miserably from exhaustion, stress and burn out, which leads us into disillusionment, thinking this reality in Christ is impossible.

We are right to some degree. It is impossible with man. When we operate from the natural and haven't received God's power we tend to have people, or animals, or possessions, or objects at the centre of our lives and we will pour out our human affection on these things, finding ourselves not worthy of Jesus.

Matthew 10:37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

It is only with the right operating system in God, His power working mightily in us, that we will naturally find ourselves being able to live out the Great Commandment of loving God with ALL we are, hence being controlled by the love of God is essential to this imitating life.

8 I DO NOT CONSIDER MY LIFE AS SOMETHING OF VALUE OR DEAR TO ME

Acts 20:22-24 And now, compelled by the Spirit and obligated by my convictions, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly and emphatically affirms to me in city after city that imprisonment and suffering await me. But I do not consider my life as something of value or dear to me, so that I may with joy finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify faithfully of the good news of God's precious, undeserved grace which makes us free of the guilt of sin and grants us eternal life. (Amplified Version)

This is another powerful statement of faith by Paul, which shows us the man's heart and devotion to both God and the body of Christ. Let's break the verses down and be inspired and captivated by the man's insatiable love for God.

Living by The Spirit's Conviction

"And now, compelled by the Spirit and obligated by my convictions..."

When was the last time you were compelled by the Spirit into

action? When was the last time you were obligated by your convictions to act? Paul lived his entire life for Christ being compelled by the Spirit and being obligated to live out the convictions of his heart.

Even as Saul, Paul lived a life that was compelled by the Law and he carried out the convictions of his heart.

Acts 22:3-5 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strictness of the law of our fathers, being ardent and passionate for God just as all of you are today. I persecuted and pursued the followers of this Way to the death, binding them with chains and putting followers of Jesus both men and women into prisons, as the high priest and all the Council of the elders Sanhedrin, Jewish High Court can testify; because from them I received letters to the brothers, and I was on my way to Damascus in order to bring those believers who were there to Jerusalem in chains to be punished. (Amplified Version)

Maybe this is why God chose him as the instrument to go to the Gentiles, because He saw the nature of this man, totally dedicated and abandoned to what he believed in and carried a conviction of. Paul was a man who lived from the convictions of his heart. He was single minded in His approach to the Father and what the Father was asking of Him.

Our convictions move us into action. The bible says, "Faith is the conviction of things unseen." Paul was a man of faith and so he was moved to act by His faith in Jesus Christ.

"I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly and emphatically affirms to me in city after city that imprisonment and suffering await me."

Paul is unsure what will happen to him in Jerusalem, while at the same time he has been told by the Spirit that imprisonment and suffering await him in every city. I wonder how we would all respond to this reality. Would the fact that we know that hardship awaits us put us off from going anywhere? Would we be paralysed by this reality or would we be like Paul and not let this truth hold us back in fulfilling God's purpose?

We see Paul saying in Acts 20:20 and verse 27, that he doesn't

shrink back from declaring the whole purpose of God. As followers we must be able to receive all of God's truth and not just the parts we know or the parts we like, and somehow ignore or justify the other truths away.

Persecution and Suffering Are All Part of God's Will

As His followers, if we truly become the demonstration of His truth, we will all be confronted with this reality time and time again. Suffering and hardship, tests and trials are a way of life for all devoted followers of Jesus, because living a devoted life for Jesus, causes persecution from all those who don't understand Him or us.

Remember, we follow a God who was killed for living the truth out.

1 Corinthians 2:7-8 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

2 Timothy 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

There is no way around this. If we truly live our lives like Paul and imitate Paul's life as we are called to do, we will invite persecution and suffering into our lives. I wonder what this means for us if we are not experiencing this persecution for Christ. What's interesting is where the persecution comes from. Jesus' greatest persecutors were in fact the very people He came to save, the Israelites.

Matthew 15:24 But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Matthew 27:22-23 Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Crucify Him!" And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!"

The greatest opposition to truth generally comes from those who have some reference for the truth. This can even be from those who are in fact the closest to us. This reality didn't stop Jesus or Paul and it is not to stop us from being people of truth and declaring His truth to the earth. Like Paul, our lives are hidden with Christ and we do not

consider our lives of any value or dear to ourselves.

"But I do not consider my life as something of value or dear to me, so that I may with joy finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify faithfully of the good news of God's precious, undeserved grace which makes us free of the guilt of sin and grants us eternal life."

Now there is a statement and a half. To not consider one's life of value or as dear to oneself, so that with joy, one would finish what God has entrusted to one to accomplish. Paul knows that if he is trying to hold onto and control his life, even trying to protect himself from physical death, then he will never be able to finish his course and the purpose that the Father had laid out for him. This is a message for us as well. Remember Paul's words, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ". What enables Paul to live like this and enables and empowers us to live like this, is the revealed knowledge of God we carry within us. We cannot live to this capacity, and demonstrate this reality, if our revealed knowledge of God is not increasing. On the revelation of Jesus Himself, the church is built.

We, like Paul, must constantly be receiving something greater than ourselves if we are to consider our lives of no value or dear to us. There is a joy in Christ that enables us to finish our course, and finish well, no matter what we may be facing. This is all to be accomplished from a place of rest in Christ. This is not a heavy burdened posture but an easy and light one.

The writer of Hebrews writes, "For the joy set before Him He endured the cross."

Hebrews 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus had a joy that was set before Him that empowered and enabled Him to go to the cross. Jesus Himself said He speaks of these things, so that we may have His joy made full in us.

John 17:13 But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.

It was this reality in Paul that had him testify to the goodness of God and the life that is available in Jesus. Paul was so in love with The

Father that he was even ready to be bound and killed in Jerusalem for His Lord and Saviour Jesus, no matter what anyone else was saying. This is what it means to be compelled by the Spirit. We have a "no matter what" attitude.

Acts 21:13-14 Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

We see a man who was so in love with Christ to the point where he was far more concerned with seeing His Father's will accomplished on the earth, than the preservation of his own life. I wonder how concerned we all are for our Father's will in comparison to our own lives. How much time do we spend protecting our lives and looking after ourselves, making sure we have all the comforts and mod cons, compared to being prepared to lose our life for the name of our Lord Jesus and His purpose?

This is a very confronting and challenging reality, and yet this is how many of Jesus' followers lived and still live today. As followers of Jesus, if we are not experiencing some form of persecution for our faith, knowing that persecution comes in many forms, then I suggest to us we are not really following Jesus and living a life of godliness. The reality of persecution being a part of our lives is evidence of us living a life of godliness.

2 Timothy 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

As we truly follow Jesus and allow His truth to be formed in us and shape our lives, many people in our lives will misunderstand, misinterpret and even speak against us. Many will be offended and upset by our choices and actions and the priorities we hold and live to. We will become a very peculiar people to many and when I say many, I do not exclude fellow brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

The bible says even members of our own household will in fact be our enemies. Our own household can be the members of our physical family as well as our Spiritual family, and sometimes these are exactly the same people.

Matthew 10:34-36 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.

This is a very clear pattern in scripture and one we must get familiar with and know how to live out from a position of love, if we want to receive all that Christ has for us. When we are compelled by the Spirit because of our love for God, we find ourselves being able to live this reality out and be the overcomer that God's word speaks of. This is the same posture and position that Paul lived his life from.

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THE FIGHT FOR A LIFE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

2 Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

In the passage above Paul describes his life lived out in Christ, in the form of five F's: Fought, Fight, Finished, Faith and Future.

These five F's highlight what a life committed to Christ will become like and the prize that awaits all those that live this life out. There is a crown of righteousness that awaits all those who live out this life of righteousness by faith in Christ.

We have already looked at what it means to be righteous in Christ in previous chapters. Living a life of righteousness is different from being righteous. Living a life of righteousness is a life that lives in right alignment to God in all areas, by faith in Jesus Christ.

"I have fought the good fight."

The Battle Is Over

Even though Paul uses words like fought and fight, and how he has fought a good fight, it's important to realise that the battle has been won by Christ and that the battle is over. The enemy got defeated at Calvary and he knows this, hence he uses deception, lies and temptations as his weapon to lead us astray. This is why the emphasis for us as God's people, is to live out a victorious life of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 15:56-58 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

This is why the true fight is the fight of the Spirit versus the flesh. If we are still living from our flesh, we will never live a life of righteousness out. We have been made right by Christ, so that we can live out a life of righteousness. Living a life of righteousness is what the fight is really about and what the enemy is trying to lead us astray from, through his lies and deception.

1 Peter 2:24-25 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

A life of righteousness is a life that lives in right alignment to God in all areas. Whether it be in the fruit of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit or the works of the Spirit, a life of righteousness operates in absolute accuracy to the Father's ways and mode of operation. This life doesn't operate from its own strength or its own initiative. A life of righteousness only does what it sees the Father doing, and it operates from being sent and not because of need.

The scriptures teach us that all scripture is profitable for teaching, for reproach, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Jesus was baptised to fulfil all righteousness, so we could live out this life of righteousness, just like He did. This is what we are to be imitating. A life of righteousness to receive the crown of righteousness. This is what Paul was fighting for, and he fought a good fight of righteousness.

Because Jesus has defeated past, present and future sin and iniquity, our sin and iniquity doesn't stop us from living out this life of righteousness. Jesus washed our slate clean and broke the power of our sinful nature so we can live this life out now, today, tomorrow and forever. It's His grace that empowers and enables this life of righteousness.

The Fight for Righteousness

This is the fight that Paul was in. It was a fight to live out a life of righteousness in Christ. This is the fight that we are all to be in. Jesus has won the battle for righteousness it's just whether we know what's been won and whether we are living in the victory of this. No matter what the flesh, the world and the enemy may throw at us, when we are in this life of righteousness, this life within us is greater than the trials and tribulations. This life of righteousness is a life of power.

2 Corinthians 4:7-10 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

This is exactly what I am talking about. We have His glory in us so that the demonstration of the life we live is of God's power and not our own. Afflicted but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed.

Did we capture all of this? This is a life of righteousness being lived out in the face of much opposition. There is a fight, but the battle has been won, and when this becomes our reality, we live in accuracy to this. Do you believe this life is for you? Do you believe you can come into this life and live this life out?

What keeps us from this life of righteousness and being able to live it out, is a lack of revelation of Christ and because of this lack of revelation, we have wrong mindsets, that continue to keep us small

and incapable of living out lives of righteousness. Here is another example of a life of righteousness expressed.

1 Peter 2:18-25 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favour, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favour with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

1 Peter 4:12-14 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

When we are in Christ, the enemy and our flesh cannot stop us coming into this life even though they may try. The power of Christ is so much greater than the flesh or the enemy, and although Satan may try and throw everything but the kitchen sink at us and tempt us in every way possible, we have the ability through Christ in us to resist and stand firm.

The battle is over, but the fight for living a life of righteousness is on, and if we keep the faith as Paul did, we will find ourselves living out this life, while we are here on earth. We will not get taken out by our flesh or the schemes of the enemy. We have to ask ourselves, are we in this fight for righteousness?

Jesus taught us to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. We see Him also teach us that blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Why are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness satisfied? Because they have discovered and entered into the life Jesus died for them to discover, as we looked at in 1 Peter 2:24.

If we are not seekers first of His kingdom and righteousness, then how are we ever going to live out a life of righteousness. We will be tossed to and fro like a small boat that finds itself being pounded by the waves of the sea, being torn apart by the pressure and force of the natural forces. Added to these natural forces, the flesh, we have a spiritual adversary who is the best in his kingdom at deception and sleight of hand.

Invited to Live Out a Life of Righteousness

The battle is won but the fight is for a life of righteousness demonstrated and lived out.

Paul is fully aware of the spiritual fight that exists between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light for this life of righteousness, and his life had been laid down to take up his spiritual arms in this fight. It was Paul who wrote these powerful words below to Timothy, as a demonstration of the life he was living out.

2 Timothy 2:3-4 Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

Paul is inviting Timothy into this same fight. Timothy heard the call and responded. How many of us, firstly, are even aware that there is a spiritual fight going on between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light for a life of righteousness? Secondly, how many of us are actually enlisted as soldiers in this fight?

Many followers would agree in principle that there is a fight going on, but whether the many are actively involved and fighting the good fight in alignment to God is another thing. There are other followers who think it is their role to defeat the enemy, not knowing that the enemy has been defeated, and they too are unable to live this life of righteousness out, because when they are squeezed or tested by pressure, what comes forth is their flesh, rather than the fruit of the Spirit. The sad thing is most of these people have no reality of this and continue to live as they always have, never recognising their lack. They tend to blame the enemy or others for what they are going through, and so stay in this victim state their whole life.

This is what Psalm 127:2 states when it says it is vain to eat the bread of painful labours and Colossians 2:23 says that certain practises have the appearance of wisdom, but it is just self-made religion, self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, which are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Do you consider yourself to be a soldier of Jesus Christ? As a soldier of Jesus are we suffering hardship with Him, to see His kingdom expressed in and through the church to the world, or are we in fact entangled in the affairs of everyday life? The very thing we are counselled not to be in. If we are entangled in human affairs, then how can we be pleasing to the one who enlisted us as a soldier? Can I suggest we won't? Maybe this is why Paul took the time to teach on marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, and give his wise council in this area. Paul knew that getting married could divide our focus and attention if we are not wholeheartedly devoted to Christ.

Jesus also taught on getting entangled in everyday life in Matthew 13 in relation to the message of the seed. He said that there are people who hear the word but because of pressure, the worries of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth, the word gets choked and becomes unfruitful. I wonder if this is us?

These people spend so much of their time being consumed with themselves and living for self, that they never enter into the good fight that Jesus has enlisted us for. The hardships that these people face can all be self-inflicted, because of what they give their attention to.

1 John 5:4-5 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world—our faith. Who is the

this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is not some casual half-hearted belief, where we acknowledge with our mouth, we believe, but our hearts are disconnected. This belief, is a living convictional belief that changes our lives and has us living an overcoming life, being empowered by the Spirit of Truth. This is also not some faith where we hope Jesus is going to come through for us, but it is a faith that sees in the realm of the Spirit and acts in accordance to what it sees. The one who has faith and believes, is the one who overcomes and possesses what Jesus won at Calvary.

Paul knew this victorious life in Christ even though, in the physical, he was on many occasions very harshly treated by his fellow countrymen. The overcoming life is not about our life in Christ all going well, but whether we can withstand and overcome the trials and tribulations that come our way, and not be taken out by them. Many in the early church considered it an honour to be persecuted for fighting the good fight of faith in Christ.

Acts 5:40-42 They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

These men were motivated by the most powerful substance known to mankind – LOVE. The receiving of the Father's love through the power of the Holy Spirit, is the reason these men fought this type of fight and considered it worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus.

The love of God is all consuming and once infected with it, a person and a people group no longer walk in the fear of loss, because perfect love casts out all fear. These men knew that it was through this Spiritual battle of fighting the good fight of faith, that an eternal life in Christ was realised.

1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

The eternal life is a now life. The eternal realm and eternity are

very different realities. Eternity is to speak of something in the future, but the eternal realm is something that is to be operating within us now, it is the very life of Christ Himself. This is the life of righteousness. This is why the bible says to know Jesus is eternal life, and that those who hate their brother, do not have eternal life abiding within them.

Jesus loved and gave His life for all people. If His eternal life is operating within us, how can we hate not only a brother but anyone? This is why Paul said that he fought the good fight of faith. It is through this fight of faith that this eternal life is formed and produced in us.

"I have finished the course; I have kept the faith..."

Knowing The Race That Is Set Before Us

These two statements go hand in hand with one another. To have finished the course that God had set out for Paul, the course of righteousness, he had to have kept the faith. This is no different for us. For the church to finish the course that God has mapped out for us, we too, must keep the faith. Not any faith, but biblical faith. We will look at this kind of faith after we have looked at finishing the course.

Romans 14 teaches us that the kingdom of God has nothing to do with eating or drinking, (meaning the natural) but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. It goes on to say that whatever is not from faith is sin. Sin means to miss the mark. To miss the standard that one was created to hit. Jesus died for our sin and iniquity and the power of it, so we can live to this new standard by faith in Jesus.

Paul said he no longer lives but the life he now lives he lives by faith in Jesus Christ. When we live by faith in Jesus Christ we are now able to hit the mark. We no longer find ourselves missing the mark but hitting the mark, because of our faith in Him. He enables and empowers us to live to this new standard of living called righteousness. A life of righteousness lived out by faith in Him.

It is critical we capture this reality and know the course we have been called to run in.

To finish the course one must know the course they are on. Paul

was fully aware of what God's will was for the church and the role God had graced him for within this course. Paul shares this with us in the epistles he wrote. I love the confidence that Paul has in making this absolute statement about finishing. Notice he doesn't say I am nearing the end of the course but that I have finished the course.

All athletes who compete in a race, know exactly the prize they are competing for and know exactly what needs to be done to win that prize. For an athlete to give up or stop running in the race they are in, is to give up the opportunity of receiving the prize.

Paul himself said in 1 Corinthians 9, that he disciplined his body and made it his slave, so that after he preached to others, he himself would not be disqualified from receiving the crown of righteousness.

If the apostle Paul could be disqualified for not finishing the race and missing out on the crown of righteousness, then we can be too.

What is so encouraging is that Paul knew he had done all that God had asked of him and he said that anyone else who finishes their race, will also receive the same crown.

Do we know what God's will for the church is, and as the body of Christ are we living our lives in accordance to His will? Have we discovered how our very lives fit into and align with His will or purpose for His church? How can we finish the course that God has set out for His church if we, His people, don't know what His course is for us?

When I say, for us, I mean as a body first and as an individual second.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfector of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus had a joy for the race that was set before Him. He knew the Father's will for the church, hence He laid His life down and played His part to see it established. Jesus said "I am here to do the will of the one who sent Me". Paul also knew the will of the Father for the church and the part he was to play in the Father's will. Romans 12:2

teaches that if our minds are being renewed, then we will not only know the will of God, but we will be proving it, by the demonstration of our lives.

Hebrews 10:36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

If one does not know God's will for His Body, then how can one finish the course that God has laid out for them? Our life is not our own as a follower of Jesus. Gone are the days where we are living for ourselves and looking for this individualistic will of God for me. Yes, the body is made up of individuals, but individuals who live for something far greater than themselves. As individuals we are now living for the body and to see the body become the perfect bride. This is the life we are to be imitating. Ask yourself if this is you?

If one does not know God's will, then how can they prove it to be good and perfect? One cannot, so they are running some other course than the one Jesus and Paul finished.

When Jesus said, "It is finished," we need to know what was finished. Everything that Jesus accomplished at Calvary was in alignment to the course we are to be running. We are not to all be running different courses, even though how God outworks things in our lives may be different. The call on John the Baptist was different to the call on the apostle Paul and the call on the apostle Paul was different to the call on the apostle John and yet they were all running in an alignment to the same course, that had already been set before them.

God may give us all different assignments while we are here on the earth and they may appear to be completely opposite to one another, but they are all interconnected, because they are all connected to the race that is set before us. The race that Jesus, Paul, John, Abraham, Moses, etc. ran, is the same race we are all running. This is why the great cloud of witnesses are cheering us on until we all come in and finish the race set before us, otherwise they cannot be made perfect.

We live in a world today where followers of Jesus say "I don't need to be part of a church to be a follower of Jesus". The problem with this mindset and belief system is that followers of Jesus are not really following Jesus, unless they are connected and part of a body, because

Jesus is all about His church, His body, being built by Himself.

The church is the body of Christ, and the body, the church, is made up of individual followers. God's will and purpose is for His church, His people, so if we are not an active part of His body, the church, then how can we accomplish His will? We can't. So we end up living for this individualistic purpose in His name, which isn't rewarded on judgement day. The reward that we receive as individuals is because our labour is connected to the macro will of God, the building of His body, the church and not my own personal plan or purpose.

1 Corinthians 3:6-9 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

I am not saying we're not saved by His grace if we carry this lone ranger mindset, but we must realise we're not following Christ to the measure He has called us to. If we are truly following Jesus, He will lead us into being a committed part of His body, His family, because this is part of His will for us and we will learn to be interdependent on one another, so we all finish our course well and together.

We must also realise that just because we attend services or gatherings on a particular day, does not mean we are part of the body. We can be physically present but not present at all with what God is doing in and through a people. Our physical attendance only has relevance, if it is united and connected into the heartbeat and life source of what God is doing in that body.

Unfortunately, there are too many followers of Jesus who are sitting on the sidelines thinking their attendance is what it means to be part of a body, when in fact it doesn't.

"I have kept the faith..."

Faith Gives Us a Reference Point for What Is in Fact in Front of Us To keep the faith, we must have a biblical understanding of what faith actually is according to His living word.

2 Corinthians 4:13 But having the same Spirit of faith according to what is written, I believed, therefore I spoke, we also believe, therefore we also speak.

Hebrews teaches us that God is the author and perfector of faith. The scripture doesn't say of our faith, but faith. God is the author and perfector of biblical faith. God as the author, wrote down for us what faith is and He is perfecting us towards this faith. We must position ourselves to come into the living reality of this faith in Christ. We looked at this in previous chapters.

If God is doing this perfecting work of righteousness, then we will have incredible sight to see the finish. It's this sight that enables us to finish the course. Faith sees the race that is set before us.

Faith manifests the future in the present. Faith gives us a reference point for what's in front and not behind. Jesus was always foretelling His disciples what was going to happen. Faith is the currency of the kingdom of God, so just like money is the currency of the world that enables us to purchase goods and services, faith is the currency of the Kingdom of God, that enables us to access all the resource in His kingdom.

Faith Empowers Us to Live Righteousness Out

Biblical faith enables us to access resource from the Kingdom of God now, which births an eternal life within us and through us. Jesus said to the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15 and the Roman centurion in Matthew 8, that they had great faith. They had a powerful ability to see what was accessible in the kingdom of God and they acted in accordance to it.

Great Faith has nothing to do with physical genealogies or bloodlines, laws or rules, nationality, colour, culture, what gender you are, political views, or our fleshly struggles. The woman and the Roman centurion, who are Gentiles, tapped into a Spiritual dimension, the Kingdom, which they were not supposed to be able to tap into... or were they?

Romans 4:13-17 is a powerful passage of truth which we must all contend with God for, until we come into the reality of it.

Romans 4:13-17 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.

For this reason, it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (as it is written, "A father of many nations have I made you") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

The woman and the centurion knew of the reality above and operated from it. They knew the ability to operate from faith had nothing to do with the physical limitations and everything to do with a limitless spiritual dimension. This is the faith that Paul fought for and it was this faith that would have him seeing and receiving the future promises of God for his life. This is the faith that will see us imitating Paul, as he imitated Jesus.

"In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will reward to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing."

Future Inheritance Now

Paul could see the future reality now. Look at his words. He knows there is a crown for living a life of righteousness to be gained and he knows he has gained it. What confidence he has in Christ and then he makes this profound statement as well. He says not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing.

Is this our reality as well? Have we arrived at the place Paul has, where we are so confident of the life we have lived in Christ, that we can say we can't wait for His appearing?

1 John 2:28 Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

Why would one shrink back from Him in shame at His coming? It is because this one has not come into the abiding life in Christ, which brings with it a confidence in Christ. We are ultimately afraid of what His coming is bringing, and we see through the lens of fear and loss, instead of the anticipation of the reward He comes with, knowing it is for us.

Paul uses the words "will reward me on that day". The day he is referring to, is the judgement day of Christ for the church, when we will all stand before Christ and be judged for the lives we have lived. The fire of God will go through us all and we will be rewarded for our faithfulness and obedience to Christ, with a crown of righteousness. Some will suffer loss on this day and unfortunately miss out on this reward, because they have failed to live out this life of righteousness. The good news is that this doesn't have to be the case.

We can have an absolute confidence and assurance that on this day, we will receive our reward because of the love we have known and the life of righteousness through faithfulness and obedience we have lived out.

1 John 4:17-18 By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

The key to this confidence in Christ is knowing and receiving the love of the Father. To have His love being perfected within us, casts out all fear. So to not have this love being perfected within us, causes us to fear and shrink back from His appearing, because we believe He will punish us. Faith enables us to see with clarity and precision so we are found in the posture of love.

We sense shame and ultimately don't want Him to return, because we are in fear of the consequence this all brings. This is incredibly sad as the Father desires us to know Him because He is love, and He casts out all our fear. He desires us to long for His appearance and to receive the crown of righteousness that He desires to give to all those who have loved His appearing, and lived a life of righteousness.

It's not too late for any of us. We can start this reality right now, today. It's as simple as receiving His forgiveness for our pride, repenting from this posture and walking in a brand new direction; the direction of the Spirit. Jesus gave His life that we might live out this life of righteousness and receive the crown of righteousness.

1 Peter 2:21-24 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

This is the good fight that Paul fought for himself and the church, and this is the fight we are to be imitating.

10 I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH HIM WHO STRENGTHENS ME

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

This would have to be one of the most commonly used verses in the bible and yet I wonder how many of us are actually truly in the life of what Paul is saying. What words get emphasised here determines how we actually approach the reality of what is being said. When I have listened to many people quote this, the focus tends to be given to the "I can do" rather than the "Him who strengthens me".

Ask yourself this very question. When you say these words, where do you put the emphasis? Depending on where you put the emphasis, will determine how you approach this truth. It can be the difference between coming into an abundance of life in Christ or burning out in Christ and being left frustrated and disillusioned. This is the position we can find because our emphasis is all wrong and, as in the previous chapter, this doesn't need to be the case.

When considering the context for this passage, we see that Paul is not talking about what we do for Christ, but more about being content with what we do or don't have in Christ. Paul says he knows

how to get along and be content in whatever circumstances he finds himself in because he has learnt the secret of this. Whether it be with humble means or whether it be in prosperity, whether being filled or going hungry or having abundance or suffering need, he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him. Do we have our own personalised reference for God's strength constantly operating within us?

Paul is saying it is the power or the strength of Christ that lives within him, that enables and empowers him to live this way. It's the strength of Christ that has him demonstrating a life of righteousness and it is the strength of Christ operating in us, that also has us living a life of righteousness. Too many of us focus on being right or wrong, making sure we don't fall into error, rather than concentrating on living righteously.

Whose Strength Is It?

I can do all things through *Him who strengthens me*. The Him who strengthens me is where we are to put the emphasis in this verse of truth.

It is not our strength, power or capabilities that has us living like this, but His eternal strength. Our strength is nothing compared to His strength and we must surrender our strength to Christ, if we are to experience this reality and dimension of life in Christ. Man's wisdom and strength must surrender to our Creator and be put to death, never to be seen again. Only then can we receive His strength in us.

We must realise that we bring nothing to the party except our weakness and vulnerability. We come humbly before the lover of our soul and we lay our strength down and receive His strength. For many in the body of Christ, I believe, this is a road still to be travelled. It is a road that still awaits the footsteps of God's people.

God's Rest Is a Posture of Strength

One aspect of God's strength is His Sabbath rest we are to live and operate from.

Hebrews 4:10 teaches us that the one who has "entered His rest, has himself also rested from his works." What a powerful truth and promise. Do we notice the order of proceedings here? Those who have entered the Father's rest, rest from their own works. It's not those who rest from their works who enter into His rest, but those who enter into His rest, rest from their own works. The order is very important. Again, how can one truly learn from Jesus, unless they have entered His rest, ceasing from their own works?

What does it mean to enter His rest? Jesus teaches us to come to Him so He can give us rest. This rest is rest for our soul. Our mind, will and emotions are to be defined by the rest that Jesus gives us. Have we discovered this rest yet through our relationship with Christ, so we are truly able to do things His righteous way? Have we entered into this new way of living, which has caused us to rest from our works?

The word enter is very significant. It's a bit like entering into the kingdom. We move towards Christ and through His power we enter into this dimension of rest within us. It is a powerful work of the Holy Spirit and it is something that happens in us and not to us.

We are changed on the inside and now find ourselves with a substance in us which we draw and live from. This raises the next question around what it means to rest from our own works. It means we are no longer trying to change ourselves or anyone else. We are no longer trying to come to know God and His ways through our human learning, mindsets and methods. We are no longer operating from the ways of the flesh or man. We have ceased from striving through our human strength and effort and we enter into this brand new posture and position in Christ, that is still active, but a completely different way of being and living. It's called Sabbath rest and it is from this position that all things are accomplished in, and through Him. This is the position Paul was in, in Christ.

Let's take a closer look at this passage in Hebrews 4, so we can wrestle with God for the reality that exists for us.

Hebrews 4:1-12 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; and again in this passage, "They shall not enter My rest." Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore, let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and Spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Diligent to Enter His Rest

If we haven't yet, today is the day to enter into this believer's rest. Not tomorrow but today. Verse 8 says that Joshua would not have spoken of another day, if he had given them rest. Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land and yet he spoke of another day. This is the rest that Christ would come with and in coming to Christ we would receive this rest within us, which is the new promised land. We must be diligent in our pursuit of this rest as the scriptures teach. The promised land in our context is not a physical land, but is our entire being – abiding in Christ. His desire is to see us all living in the fullness of His glory, because we are literally receiving His life within us, through the power of the Spirit of Truth. God is in fact our rest and if Christ is being formed within us, we will in fact live from this

Spiritual dimension while on the earth. It's fully possible to live out our lives from this rest every day.

Once again it is from this place that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. This is our reality because it's not me doing it, but Christ doing it through me.

Deuteronomy 12:8-10 "You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you. When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security.

Until we have let go of self, which causes us to do whatever we perceive as right in our own eyes, we will not come into this rest that Moses is speaking of, because we are still trying to enter into it through our own way. We are still trying to accomplish things through our own strength. Living from rest is part of our inheritance that is in Christ and it is available for us now, today. This is why the author of Hebrews stresses for us not to harden our hearts as the Israelites did, because in so doing we also fail to enter into God's rest, just as they did.

His Power Operating Within Us

We see Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:8 imploring God three times that the thorn in his flesh might leave him, but God's response is eye opening. God's answer to Paul is that His grace or power is sufficient for him, to overcome this trial or affliction, because God's power is perfected in weakness. As we come to the end of our strength to try and live this life out, we find a new power born within us and it is from this place we now live.

2 Corinthians 12:9 Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

How many of us try to hide our weaknesses rather than boast about them? How many of us spend more time sharing about our strengths and how right we have got everything? How many of us are more than comfortable sharing with others our absolute failures, through multiple attempts, to bring ourselves into life and giving

testimony of how wrong we got it? The only people who can do this from a true place of biblical humility are those who have been prepared to leave the place they know and pursue a greater revelation of God, in this case, an eternal rest. This very step of obedience to the Father's word, has caused the power of God to dwell within them, through the process of surrender and weakness. The very process that is an abomination to the flesh.

The word dwell means to take possession of or live in the very thing one owns. We are all to have God's power dwelling in us. The scriptures refer to us being God's own possession and Christ living in us is the hope of glory. The formation of the life of Christ within us, is in fact the power of God, as the bible says, Christ is the power and wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 1:24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Let's take a look at 1 Peter 4:11, Ephesians 6:10, Psalm 110:3 and Psalm 105:4 and ask ourselves, what do we see?

1 Peter 4:11 ... whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

Psalm 110:3 Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power...

Psalm 105:4 Seek the Lord and His strength; Seek His face continually.

There is a very clear pattern that emerges from these passages. It's God's power or strength operating in and through us that must be in place if we are to live the lives he calls us to live. Without His strength operating in and through us, we will never finish the race He has mapped out for us as His church.

It is from this position of God's strength operating within us that we now approach the part of the scripture that says *I* can do all things. **Luke 18:27** "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."

What a powerful statement. Nothing is outside of the realm of possibility in God and as we operate from this new position in Christ, we start asking and believing for so much more in Him, in relation to seeing His kingdom established in and through the lives of the church and upon the earth.

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Jesus also said that we would do greater things than He. This means so much more than just praying for the sick. Because Christ's power or strength is now dwelling within us, there is nothing we can't go through or accomplish in His name, because we have entered into this new found reality.

Paul said he strived according to the power of God which mightily works within him. Notice the word "works". This power is working at all times in and through Paul, and it is this that enables and empowers him to be used by God to accomplish God's purposes. We still have to realise it is not us achieving these things, but the power of God operating in and through us. We are the vehicle or the vessel that God is using to bring His life into the lives of those who live upon the earth.

What His Power Enables

What are the things that the church of Jesus Christ is able to do, now that this new found strength is operating within them? Let me list some of the things the church can now accomplish through Christ's strength, in accordance to His teachings or instructions.

• We are fully capable of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, with the love He loves us with.

Ephesians 6:24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.

 We are fully capable of loving our neighbour with the love the Father loves us with.

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one

another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

 We are able to lay our lives down for our brothers and sisters in Christ, to see God's will established in their lives.

1 John 3:16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

 We are wholeheartedly surrendered to the Father and lay our lives down to see His will established in the church and through the world.

Matthew 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

 We will proclaim the kingdom message and signs and wonders will be accomplished through us, in His name.

Luke 9:1-2 And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing.

We will be found eating and drinking His living word.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

• We will be found in prayer and have a passion for prayer.

Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

This is to be the church's reality and this is a vision worth living for. This is how Paul lived and we are to imitate Paul's life. The things I list are all outcomes of God's strength operating in and through us as His people. This is the church that the world is longing to see on planet earth and needs to see. A church that is being built by Jesus Himself will find themselves living like this to the measure they are in His strength.

The fruit of the Spirit, that is being formed and grown through

God's strength within the church, becomes the very substance with which the church lives her life from. God's strength being present in the lives of God's church, not only has them accomplishing powerful works for God, but greater than this, we have the eternal life within us which Christ promises.

All this is accomplished through the power of the Spirit.

Operating from Our Own Initiative

There is a catch to "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me", and we must be fully aware of this. It is fully possible to be operating out of His gifting and calling which are irrevocable, and still be doing it from our own initiative. The key to walking in complete alignment with God is to make sure we are living our lives in accordance to His way.

It was Jesus Himself who said He did nothing from His own initiative, nor did He speak on His own initiative.

John 5:30 "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

John 12:49 For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak.

These are not just nice words spoken by Jesus, but the reality that Jesus lived His life from and it is to be ours as well. If we fail to do this, we will ultimately not experience the life we were called to. Jesus said He did not seek His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him, so right here is our example as well. It's not enough to do things for Jesus they must be done in the way of Jesus. This, I believe, is where many go astray and we run the risk of hearing "away from Me as I never knew you".

Jesus says in Matthew 7:21 it is those who do the will of the Father who will enter the kingdom of heaven and not just people who say, "Lord, Lord" and do things in the name of Jesus. This is to act as a wakeup call for us and also a plumb line for the lives we are to live. There is a way that everything happens in God and we must know

the way, Jesus. It's upon the revelation of Jesus that we will discover the way of the Father.

The way is a person, not a process or a formula or a method. Too many leaders and followers are fixed on methods and formulas of change, rather than on the person who brings about eternal transformation. The way to life is through the person, Jesus.

Peter knew that Jesus was the Messiah because the Father revealed this to Peter, but what Peter didn't have yet was a revelation of the way of God. Hence when Jesus taught him that He must go to Jerusalem to die and rise again after three days, Peter stood up and rebuked Jesus for His words. From Peter's perspective this was not the way, but as we know, unless the kernel of wheat fell to the floor, how could any one of us experience the life that is contained in the Christ.

All of our ways must fall to the floor if we are to come into the fullness of life that Jesus died for us to experience. Anything less than this and we will sabotage this full position.

We see Jesus then rebuking Peter for this demonic mindset and ordering Peter to get behind Him. In other words, "Foolish man, get out of My way. Your mind is set on your own selfish interests, rather than God's." I wonder how many of us also have our minds set on our own interests rather than God's when it comes to the ways of God.

We have to understand and realise we can be justified by Christ's blood, washed of our iniquity and sin and yet still operate under a false way. The thief in John 10:10 is a false teacher and not Satan, as is commonly taught. It is fully possible for us to be this false teacher, who teach a false way. A big part of this teaching in John 10 is about Jesus being the door to abundant life and yet the thief, the false teacher, comes to rob people of this life, because they teach another way.

2 Corinthians 11:4 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different Spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.

The reality is many have no understanding that this is what they are actually doing and this is not their intention, but it is still happening. We are so fortunate that God's immense love is covering this reality, while we all grow and mature into the way of God. We must not take this lightly though and we must come to this place of Godly repentance for our way and not His, otherwise as mentioned, we run the risk of hearing, "Away from Me." This is not a heaven or hell reality, but an eternal reward one. Only those who flow in this complete alignment to God's way will receive their eternal reward.

There are many things we can accomplish, look at the tower of Babel for instance, but it's not about what we can do, but what God does in and through us. It's only the work that He accomplishes through His strength that is able to withstand His fire going through it and does not get burned up. These are the eternal works that God performs in and through surrendered vessels. Unless the Lord builds His house, no matter how good it looks to the temporal eye, it is all done in vain and is worthless, holding no eternal value. All things that are accomplished in His strength must also be accomplished in His way, otherwise they are futile works of man.

Can I suggest we go back and read under the sub heading "What His Power Enables", and ask ourselves how much of this reality are we living out and able to do, because of His power or strength operating in and through us. This will be an accurate indicator for us of where our relationship with Jesus is currently at.

11 I ENDURE ALL THINGS FOR THE SAKE OF THOSE CHOSEN

2 Timothy 2:10 For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.

God's Incorruptible Love in Us

Paul's love for and devotion to God's people was nothing short of breathtaking. He was prepared to go through all the things he went through for the sake of the church to come into the fullness of life in Christ. The Father's love, that he received and had operating within him, also had him in love with his fellow Israelites, men who wanted him dead and yet he tells us he would have been prepared to be accursed and separated from Christ, for the sake of his brethren.

Romans 9:3-5 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is

the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

These words sound very similar to the demonstration of Christ's life, that while we were all still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly. Paul has the heart of Christ for all people, and this is the heart we are to have and imitate.

Romans 5:6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Paul demonstrated his love for the church and all his fellow Israelites who had not yet accepted Christ, by the laying down of his life to see God's will established in and through them. He was committed to preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, the Jews and the kings of this earth, even though it would cost him his very life.

Paul had no idea who was predestined to be chosen unto salvation, so he lived his life as if everyone was, hoping, enduring, believing and bearing all things, that all would come to know his Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We are to follow this example.

Paul's life was given as an offering so that the many could come into abundant life in Christ. He was prepared to live a life that many could neither fathom nor live out. Graced by God to fulfil a role he was willing to lay down his own goals and desires to achieve it.

1 Corinthians 4:9-16 For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honour. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now. I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore, I exhort you, be imitators of me.

A Father's Heart

Paul truly was a father of the faith. He was an apostolic father to all those who would allow him to be this in their lives. This is the key to our relationship as well. Allowing Paul and other apostles to be our father, so we can come into the life that they are calling us into.

1 Corinthians 9:1-2 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

As he says there are countless tutors in Christ, but not too many Fathers who are willing to give their lives to see others transformed through the power of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, this is a sad reality in the body of Christ today. There are many followers queuing up to be the next leader or the next history maker, but I wonder how many people are queuing up to be fathers to the masses? Fathers who will stand in the gap and lay their lives down, for those who are chosen to be His. Not that we are all called to be apostles, but the body of Christ suffers today for the lack of true fathers.

God looks for fathers who cover, fathers who guide, fathers who protect, fathers who serve, fathers who discipline, fathers who lay their very lives down for others, and fathers who, in love, share truth, no matter the cost to themselves. Paul was a father of the faith and he modelled his life on Christ's, so that we could all receive and come into the life that he gave his life for. Like Christ he endured so much for us and I have to wonder, if we actually even appreciate and value the enormity of what he went through for us. Like Christ, Paul was a forerunner for the things in God that we are to be freely receiving and experiencing. Are we hungry and going after all that Paul declared for us, partaking of what Paul brings to us through the Word? Are we coming into the reality of this unshakeable kingdom life within us?

If we have no desire for this, then what do you think this says about how much we appreciate and value just what Paul did for us? The reality is, not a lot, and this is a very sad truth. For those who are not interested, the man endured much for nothing. If this is our

reality, then are we any different from those who didn't listen and take on board his teaching and treated Paul with contempt?

2 Timothy 4:6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

In my personal opinion, to not seek after the reality of truth that Paul wrote about and declares through his letters, is nothing short of criminal and a reality that brings great sadness to God's heart.

Paul said in Galatians that he was in labour again until Jesus Christ was formed in the church.

Galatians 4:19-20 My children, with whom I am again in labour until Christ is formed in you— but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Don't you love the words "my children?" This once again reiterates Paul's father heart for the church and how he saw himself. He genuinely saw himself as a father to all those who would receive him as a father, and as a father, he was posturing and in labour again for the church, until Christ had been formed in her.

He goes on to say how perplexed he is about those children who are going back under the law, after having come out from under the law. As a true father he is wrestling with this reality for those he loves and wishes he could be with them and not have to use the tone in his letter that he is using. Just as a father longs for his child to listen to wisdom and make right decisions and choices, so too Paul longs to see us all receiving wisdom and living from it

Paul hasn't lived the life he has lived and gone through what he has gone through just to see the church go back into bondage. He longs to see the church come into the full message of salvation that is in Christ Jesus and he strove according to the power of Christ that was operating within him, to present every man complete in Christ. Colossians 1:24-29 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the

past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose, also I labour, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

These five verses clearly reveal Paul's heart and purpose for all those who are in Christ. The challenge for all of us who are followers of Jesus is in modelling this same life. We are all called to suffer for Christ's sake in the advancement of the kingdom of God and we are all called to play the part that we have been entrusted with.

1 Peter 2:21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps. 1 Peter 4:12-14 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

As we know salvation is the process of seeing a person and a people transformed into the literal likeness of the Son. To see Christ like followers brought to the fullness of God within them. The mature church who lives this mature position out. This is the heart posture of Paul and it is also to be the heart posture we imitate.

This is what Paul means when he says "and with it eternal glory" from the last part of this passage in 2 Timothy;

2 Timothy 2:10 For this reason, I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and with it eternal glory*.

God's Glory in The Church

It's through the process of salvation that God's eternal glory is formed within us. Jesus says to His disciples in John 17, that He gave them His

glory. Man not only fell out of glory when we partook of the knowledge of the tree of good and evil, but we also fell from having God's glory within us so God is and has been restoring His eternal glory back into the church. When I use the word church, I mean God's people.

Ephesians 3:21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

This glory is not for one generation but for all the generations to know and experience within them. Paul teaches and declares to the Corinthians this glory in 2 Corinthians 3 and 4. He talks about the Corinthians being a letter that other people will read and they are a letter written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. This is written on their hearts and not on tablets of stone.

He goes on to share how the ministry of death that was engraved on stones had a glory, but compared to the glory of the Spirit, this previous glory shrinks in comparison. He later describes how we have gone from one glory to a completely different glory. We are now in the glory of the Spirit and this glory is to manifest itself in and through us. Paul describes the producing of an eternal weight of glory, far beyond all comparison being birthed in us.

Paul endured all things that the church of Jesus Christ would know this glory and live from it. He describes the trials and the tribulations for Christ as momentary light affliction and this momentary light affliction is producing in us this eternal weight of glory.

An eternal weight of glory is to be known, experienced and to be operating in the church. We are to live our lives from this posture and have it define our lives. We may be afflicted in every way but we will not be crushed. We may be perplexed but not despairing. We may be persecuted but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed. This is all possible because of the glory that is operating within us. We are the vessels that have this treasure operating within them, because of the power of God which we know.

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.

This once again is the life we are called to imitate.

Paul lived his life and gave his life for the sake of the church, that we as the church would come into this glory and have it fully formed in us. Nothing can compare to having this glory within us. This glory defines everything about our lives.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

Because of this glory being formed within us we are able to see into the unseen realm. We are able to see the promises in God's kingdom for the church and receive them through revelation, which causes us to be able to be the demonstration of God upon the earth. We are no longer found looking at the things which are seen, the temporal, but our gaze is held by the unseen realm, the eternal.

Can we say we have come into this dimension yet? Have we become a seeker of God to this degree, where He is revealing to us the mysteries of the kingdom, because this is for us to know and be stewards of?

Matthew 13:11 Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted."

1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Have our eyes come to see and our ears come to hear, the things that once weren't in our hearts, but now are, because of our pursuit of love, God Himself?

1 Corinthians 2:9-10 but just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

This dimension is for all of God's people to know and live from, hence Paul endured all things for the sake of the church and the message of the gospel of the kingdom of God.

As we model this example, we become examples for people to follow, so others can experience this kingdom life. Paul gave his life

for us that we would all come to experience and know this reality within us. As we come into this truth, we too will find ourselves imitating this life as well.

12 THE RIGHTEOUS WRESTLE BETWEEN GOING OR STAYING

Philippians 1:21-26 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

The Win-Win Reality

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

This is not a win-lose reality, but a win-win reality. Paul is saying that the only life to live, is the life that is in Christ and as I live this life I find life. He goes on to say, to die is gain. I believe there are two parts to this "die is gain" statement.

The first one is to physically die and to be with Christ. Paul says he has a desire to depart and be with Christ. This is not a position of loss or a false humility position, this is his true heart position. He is wholeheartedly in love with Christ and his greatest delight is to be with the one who has his heart. He longs to be with the most important person he has met – Jesus Christ.

The second position of gain through our death is the incredible life in Christ we discover as we die to our old life, denying one's self and selfish ways. This is where Jesus births His Life within us, as we release the control of our lives over to Him and we allow Him to truly build us through the power of His revealed Word.

We may see the life that is associated with the first part of this verse, but where is the gain in dying? How can this be true? This is the beauty of the kingdom and its upside down paradoxes to the earth's ways. In Christ, physical death is promotion to be with Christ and death to our carnal fleshly life, with all its fleshly lusts. This is what Paul means when he says, "to die is gain".

Have we and are we experiencing this abundant life of the Spirit within and through us, because we have transitioned from living for us to living for Him and His will? The gain only comes through the death of our old man. The very man that many of us are still trying to hold onto and then wondering why we seem to be void of this powerful overcoming life within us.

Jesus' teaching is very clear. His words are Spirit and life and they do produce the life that He speaks of. Paul was in this life and was used by God to be a carrier and a communicator of this life to anyone who truly wanted it. This is the life we are to be imitators of.

"But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which to choose."

We now see Paul say if he is to continue on in the flesh, that this will also mean great gain for himself. Paul is fully aware of the life he has come into and the life he can still come into through living for Christ wholeheartedly. He finds himself torn between these two options of life. Option one is if he physically dies, this will be an incredible gain, as he will be with his Lord and Saviour, his Groom. Option two, if he stays here in his body, he can come into more and more of the eternal life that Jesus will birth through his surrender to Him.

He doesn't know which one to choose. Both options are gain to Paul. Do we find this choice bizarre, or do we relate to his choice? Can we say with all confidence I know exactly the dilemma he would be in?

How many of us can relate to what Paul is saying because of discovering the same reality of life, that is found in knowing Jesus Christ? Would you say this is a foreign concept to many in the body of Christ, one we may even consider impossible or unattainable while we're here on earth? This is exactly what our flesh and our adversary would have us all believe.

How can one see physical death as gain when one is still in fear of physically dying? Many followers and non-followers, live in fear of physical death, even though Jesus has defeated death and put it under His feet. Jesus died so we can be released from the power of death and live our lives on the earth in complete freedom to accomplish the Father's will. It is this revealed position operating within us that empowers us to live this reality out.

Paul had this revealed position in Christ, hence his life demonstrated this reality. No wonder the man was able to say, 'Imitate me as I imitate the Christ.'

Acts 2:24 But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

1 Corinthians 15:54-57 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

A Heart of Immense Love

The next verse signals to us another example of Paul's heart for the church and his desire to see all of the church become complete in Christ.

'But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.' Colossians 1:28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

For Paul to remain on and not go and be with Christ, was necessary for the church's sake. He says he is hard pressed on both sides. He desires to be with Christ and leave this earth and yet at the same time his intense love for the church, to see her be made complete in Christ, weighs upon his heart. It's a case of love and his love for God's people, is stronger than what is best for himself. Paul truly embodied all the scriptures of loving his brother as Christ loved him.

1 John 3:16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Receiving from Paul's Life

I wonder if the church of Philippi, to whom he wrote this letter took advantage of Paul's life and ministry? I wonder if we as the Church today are taking advantage of Paul's life and ministry, in order to come into the full stature of Christ? Are we receiving the Word of Christ which Paul declared through His letters, which changes and transforms us into the very image of the Son? Are we seeing what Paul saw and laying down our lives for the upward call in Christ, just as he did? For him to remain on in the flesh was more necessary for their sake and ours. This is to be the life we imitate.

My hope is that we are taking full advantage of Paul's incredible love for us and his willingness to stay and continue pressing into Christ for more, rather than being completely unaware of what he gave his life for. This would be a crime for us and a very sad reality to be living from.

'Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.'

Paul is convinced of the fact that it is better for God's people if he stays, than to be with Christ, so that God's people can continue to grow and come into all that the Father has in mind for His people. Paul desires to see the church grow and become the mature body that the Father so desires. His hope is that the confidence that they see, that exists in him, is because of the Christ who lives within him.

He is saying, "My willingness to come to you again, rather than go, is because of the Christ within me and not my own personal strength. It is because of this, that I will remain and walk with you, encouraging you all into the eternal life that is discovered in Christ." When we too have this mature life of Christ operating within us, we can walk in the manner which Paul walked. We too become capable of living a selfless life and find ourselves not trying to live like this, but just being like this.

We find ourselves being able to truly be imitators of God and Paul, because of Christ's life operating in us to a full measure. This becomes our new nature and it is all part of us living as new creations.

In our own strength and ability this is impossible, but with our Heavenly Father's power operating in and through us, it becomes our natural mode of operation. I suggest to us all that this is the reason Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:11, that we are to serve God with the strength He provides.

1 Peter 4:11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

When we live our lives from this position in Christ, God is glorified through the Son living in us. It's a win-win situation. God receives the glory and we get to experience what it is like to have His power truly operating in and through us. Paul said weakness is the pathway to being strong in Christ. He taught that God's grace was sufficient for all things and that through this process, God's power starts to dwell within us, because we have entered into His rest, we have surrendered from our works and strength.

13 I PRESS ON TOWARDS THE GOAL OF THE PRIZE

Philippians 3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Have we ever read this and wondered what on earth Paul is referring to here? What prize is he talking about? I thought our salvation was a gift and now Paul talks about a prize. He even uses the word 'goal' in reference to the prize of this upward call that is discovered in Christ Jesus.

The Prize Awaits Us All

Our justified state in Christ is a gift and we receive this reality through God's grace, but there is also more than this that we are to discover and come into and Paul describes this as a 'prize of the upward call of God in Christ.'

The entire content of Philippians chapter 3 is incredibly powerful, as it is about Paul declaring to us the goal of life. Chapter 3 begins with Paul warning us to be aware of the false circumcision before leading us through the false security of his own past. What he now deems as essential to his relationship with Christ, and his pursuit of God's higher calling for the church, is found and discovered in our

true knowing of Jesus.

He declares that in comparison to knowing Jesus Christ in a true and real way, everything that he once considered gain is now a loss. He realises that righteousness is not found in the law but on the basis of faith in Christ. He goes on to say that he wants to know Him and the power of His resurrection and to have fellowship with His sufferings, being conformed to His death, in order that he may attain to the resurrection of the dead.

Being reconciled into a right relationship with the Father is awesome, but it is not the primary goal of our lives. If this was the case then Paul wouldn't have written about this upward call of God in Christ, that he is pursuing and pressing on in his relationship with God, to receive.

As followers of Jesus, how many goals do we set that are about our lives and what we want, rather than about God's goal for us as His people? Paul says here that he presses on toward the goal for the prize of an upward call of God that is found in Christ Jesus. This prize is not found in earthly or temporal things, but in Christ, the eternal. The bible clearly states that all things, that means everything, have been created by Him, through Him and for Him.

This is why Paul says that he presses on. He is pressing on to discover all of the things that are contained in the Christ for the church. He is not limiting it to people being reconciled to a right relationship with the Father, but he wants to know and experience the fullness of the inheritance that is for all the saints, who will press on to receive this inheritance.

The question we all need to ask ourselves is what is this upward call of God in Christ Jesus and what is required to discover it and live from this truth? This was the pursuit of Paul's life, because he was fully aware of the truth that Jesus spoke when He said that we, the church, have been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.

Granted to Know the Mysteries

Matthew 13:11-12 Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.

I think it would be fair to say that for many in the body of Christ, the mysteries that we have been granted to know and receive are still just that, mysteries. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:9, that, 'Eye has not seen and ear has not heard or not yet entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.'

In the very next verse he says these incredible jaw dropping words. For to us, God has revealed them, (them being all the things God has prepared for those who love Him) through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. Paul and the people Paul identifies as "us", are receiving the mysteries of the Kingdom that Jesus said we have been granted to know.

1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God

It doesn't get any better than this. It is these mysteries revealed in and to us, that create so much life within us, we live as overcomers, inheriting all that is for us now and in the future.

Let's continue to break this incredible passage of truth down piece by piece, so we can gain sight of what Paul is referring to.

Philippians 3:12-21 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of

whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Verse 12: Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Wow, really? How can you be in so much life and still say that you have not yet obtained what you are pressing on for and have not yet become perfect? What is it that Paul hasn't already obtained and how does it relate to becoming perfect? Paul is saying there is more to know, experience and come into in Christ, and that he has not yet come into the power of the resurrection that he desires. I find this amazing, considering the life the man was able to live out, from his current revelation of these two realities in Christ.

Philippians 3:10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

He desires to have fellowship with his Saviour's and Lord's sufferings, so he can be conformed to His death. These three things go towards our perfection or maturity in Christ. Paul is saying, "I have not yet become mature to the measure I desire."

Jesus taught His disciples that they were to become perfect like their Heavenly Father is perfect. It is no different for us today. In other words, we are to become mature sons of God, just like the Son, who was the ultimate example and demonstration of how a mature son lives. This is what Paul is referring to. How can we be ambassadors of God's kingdom if we are not mature? We won't be able to. All of creation waits for the sons of God to be revealed.

Paul's heart's desire and passion was to press on and receive as his own, all that Christ laid hold of him for.

'Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.'

The words 'forgetting what lies behind' are powerful and life changing. If our past still haunts us or we try to live in what was, as some would say, 'The good old days,' when God was doing this and that, we will get stuck and fail to reach forward to what lies ahead. I see this happening in the body of Christ today. Where people are unable to move forward into a greater revelation of Christ, because they are judging what they are hearing through an old filter. A wineskin that once was supple and fresh and able to receive the new wine, but now has become crusty, dry and brittle, and unable to receive the new wine.

Each revelation from the Father is to propel us forward into greater revelation of what is contained in the Son. We are to come into the posture of being discontentedly content. This means to be content with where we are at today, while always pressing on for more in Him.

The bible says we don't yet know as we ought to know, and this indicates to me, that there is much more for us all to come into in Christ, than what we currently have knowledge of.

1 Corinthians 8:2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know.

This requires us to have a teachable heart and an open mind, to receive manna we have not yet tasted. This requires us to trust in God and others and be vulnerable before God and others. It requires us to be humble of Spirit, and be prepared to come under others and receive from them. This can be very hard for some to do as they live in fear of the "what if".

The purpose of the revealed knowledge of Jesus we currently have, is to propel us into more of Him. This knowledge acts as a springboard, which creates a spring in our step to want more.

Don't Look Back

One of the major problems for the Israelites when Moses was leading them out of Egypt was that they were always looking over their shoulders and back to Egypt, thinking they were much better off there, than what they were in the wilderness. Lot's wife was exactly the same. She looked back over her shoulder and she became a pillar of salt. By looking behind us, we too can become frozen in the past and find ourselves unable to reach forward to what lies ahead in Christ. We fail to lay hold of what He has laid hold of us for.

We look for spiritual food from days gone by for today's fuel source, but find ourselves coming up empty. God warned the people not to store up todays manna for tomorrow, as tomorrow the food will be fresh and different, but did all of the people hear what He was saying? They listened, but did they hear?

If we don't turn our hearts and heads forward, we will find ourselves in a state of limbo and eventually become lukewarm and stagnant. This is not what the Father has for us as His children.

Paul says he is reaching forward to what lies ahead. He is pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. To reach forward one must position one's self in a forward position. Jesus was always moving forward toward the cross, because He knew the eternal sacrifice of His life, would create the way for His followers to enter into all that He had laid hold of them for.

May we all be found forgetting what lies behind us and be found reaching forward to what lies ahead. This pressing on requires a heart that isn't prepared to settle. A heart that's tenacious, seeking, determined, perseverant, disciplined, and at its core says "I will do whatever it takes till I receive all He has for me."

In Luke 14:25-26 Jesus noticed the large crowds going along with Him and He turned and spoke these powerful words. "If anyone comes after Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple".

This language is very defining and powerful. Jesus is clearly making His intentions known and setting the kingdom standard

of what following Him really means and looks like in action. Only those who truly love Jesus can receive these words of life and live them out. This is not a crowd mentality, heart or posture, but the heart and mindset of a true disciple.

Only those who are pressing in for more and laying hold of the more, find these words palatable and digestible. The "going along" mentality struggles with this reality and finds itself moving in the opposite direction to Christ. Unfortunately, many followers today are held in a form of fleshly bondage to these physical relationships with others, keeping them from being devoted in their relationship with Christ. As previously mentioned we may have only incorporated Jesus into our lives rather than wholeheartedly surrendering our lives to Him.

The Prize Is Revealed in Christ

This is what it means to seek His Kingdom and His righteousness as our first placed priority. The prize that Paul speaks of is connected to an upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Do we notice where the prize is? In Christ. The prize is contained in the person; hence we must receive ongoing revelation of Jesus Himself.

Colossians 2:2-3 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

No wonder Paul teaches us in Colossians to set our minds on the things above where Christ is seated, because this prize is in Christ and Christ is seated above. Once again the scriptures go to great lengths to share with us that there are promises for us to come into in Christ that are concealed and hidden.

Proverbs 25:2 It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.

Why is it God's glory to conceal a matter? Is He trying to conceal this from us or is He concealing things for us to discover? The latter is the truth. God conceals Himself and the greater dimension of truth

within Himself, in the hope that His children will go looking for a greater knowledge of Himself and His kingdom. This revelation ultimately creates a greater life within His children and empowers them to live a more abandoned life in Him, bringing Him glory.

Notice Proverbs uses the word 'kings' and not king. This is for all of us and not just for an individual who holds a title or a position of authority. In Christ we're all called to be kings who seek out the fullness of the Father, His plans and His purposes, all of which He longs to see established in this world in and through His church. Kings consider it an honour and a privilege to be able to and have the opportunity to pursue more of God, for they know it is God's heart to reveal what is concealed.

1 Corinthians 2:9-13 but just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the Spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

This is an incredibly powerful declaration of God's living Word for all those who have ears to hear and a heart to go after and seek out what Paul has heard, seen and speaks of. Let's take a closer look at verse 12.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.

God has given us His Spirit, so we can know all the things freely given to us by God. Now this is an incredible reality. Notice how we don't earn the things or study the things, trying to learn them. Just like we can't study or learn the Holy Spirit, but receive the Spirit. We receive the things He wants us to know. He gives them freely as we ask for them with a pure heart motive.

These promises received in us, create, form and establish within our inner most being His life, building a powerful and indestructible life in Christ. This is the life that may be afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed.

Just as this was Paul's living reality, it can also be ours, if we will commit our lives to seeking out all that is for us within Christ. If we imitate Paul as we are called to, we can know this reality. This is all part of coming into the prize Paul speaks of.

Having The Right Attitude

Philippians 3:15-21 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Notice the attitude we are to have because of the maturity we are in. As many as are mature, this is what the word perfect means. We are to have the attitude of pressing on towards the goal. If we don't have this attitude, God will reveal it to us if we seek Him earnestly with a pure heart.

Paul says while others are still coming into this revealed position, we are to keep living to the same standard to which we have attained. What is this standard that Paul speaks of? It is the standard of the high call in God. It's not an earthly call but a heavenly call. There is a standard of life that Jesus empowers us to come into, which enables us to demonstrate this life as an ambassador of the kingdom of God.

This is essential, as people need to see and witness an example of the real thing; people who are modelling this new created life. Jesus was the perfect example. Paul says, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ." Can we see the pattern that we are to follow and are we in fact following it?

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

Follow The Pattern

Patterns are there to be followed. Paul uses the word 'us' and not 'me'. More and more disciples were obviously coming into this life and Paul was very keen to make mention of this. We don't make up a new pattern, we are to follow the pattern that has already been established by Christ and those who are mature in Christ. Today in the body of Christ we see many trying to establish their own patterns and call this freedom in Christ.

The pattern to follow was established before the foundations of the earth and we must be able to hear and see it if we are to follow it. Failure to hear and see it, will have us creating our own pattern and this is not God's way. I suggest that this is the reason Paul shared this next verse as a warning to us.

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

In the first line one can hear Paul's heart for those who are living like this. Paul says, many walk like this and he weeps for them. He says, many are enemies of the cross of Christ. The challenge is we can be an enemy of the cross and never realise it. Although we have made a commitment to follow Christ and asked Him to forgive us of our sin and iniquity, all mindsets that are still of earth can set themselves up as an enemy of the cross.

This is what Paul means when he says, all those 'who set their minds on earthly things;' those who are fixed on the temporal and not the eternal, which is where the mind of Christ is anchored and found.

The Mind-set of Christ and the Anti-Christ Mind-set

Galatians shares how the flesh and the Spirit are in opposition to one another, and the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit. Just because we have prayed a prayer of reconciliation, doesn't mean this won't apply to us. Jesus came to bring us His mind on everything that is in Him. Do we have His mind when it comes to this prize Paul is speaking of? If we are applying our minds to this, we can find ourselves in opposition to the cross.

We can be rejecting, resisting, denying, deflecting, attacking or hiding from God's truth, while never really aware we are doing this. There are a multitude of passages in Proverbs that bring this to light, when it says, "there is a way that seems right to a man but its end is death", hence Paul saying their end is destruction, whose god, (little g), is their appetite.

Only when we set our minds on what's above can we live from the mind of Christ. A mind set on the earth only sees the temporal. A mind that only sees the temporal is a mind that is extremely limited and powerless, unable to cope when what it sees becomes all too much and over bearing. Jesus said, "In this life you will have many trials and tribulations, but do not fear for I have overcome this world." One who's mind is on the earth will get entangled in the trials and tribulations and more than likely be overcome by these very tests.

It's the ability to see the true life that we as the church are destined for, that empowers one to overcome everything that the flesh, the world and the enemy can throw at us. Paul said all these things were momentary light affliction and they were producing for us an "eternal weight of glory", far beyond all comparison.

We can only live like this if our mind is anchored and firmly fixed on the things above, the eternal realm, which is the unseen but seen realm. It is living from this place that gives our life the power to overcome all things we face. This is where the prize is discovered.

2 Corinthians 4:18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

14 I DO ALL THINGS FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

Living from Freedom

We can see Paul's heart for the people who are yet to discover the truth; the Truth being a person and not a set of facts, principles or even promises. The Truth has a name and His name is Jesus, and Paul's desire is that all would know Him.

Paul says, "Although I am a free man and I am free from all men, I make myself a slave to all, so that I may win more for Jesus Christ." This is what love does and what love can do, even when it doesn't know those it gives its life for. With the freedom of life that Christ has given to him, Paul is choosing to serve Jesus, by being a slave to all men, in the hope that man will receive salvation. It is essential that we understand that although Paul says he is a slave to all, he says

this from the posture and position of freedom in Christ.

With his freedom he is choosing to serve others and lay his life down for Christ and others, to see as many won to Christ as possible. This, once again, is the demonstration for all the church to follow and be imitators of. He is no longer a slave to sin but a slave to righteousness through his obedience. Paul totally grasps the reality and the understanding of what it means to be a bond servant of Jesus Christ.

There are four groups of people that Paul is laying his life down for.

- 1. To the Jew he became a Jew
- 2. To those under the law, under the law
- 3. To those without the law, as without law
- 4. To the weak he became weak

This pretty much covers all of mankind. In Acts 21 we see an example of Paul keeping the law in order to reach his fellow Jews with the gospel. The Jews of that area heard that Paul was teaching to forsake Moses teaching, telling people not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs.

Acts 21:21 and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

Paul would have been teaching that under the new covenant, circumcision of the flesh is nothing and that it is all about a circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit and not by the letter of the law. This was once a requirement, but it is no longer required.

Romans 2:28-29 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

The next part of this passage in Acts 21 is where we see Paul's love and devotion to God and people come to the fore. In verse 22 we see a question posed.

Acts 21:22 What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.

Whatever It Takes

This is the question that the leaders of this area pose in relation to what Paul shall do. Over the next few verses we see the solution the leaders of the area come up with in relation to this problem.

Acts 21:23-26 Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law. But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.

Is Paul turning his back on what he believes and what he teaches? Is he turning his back on the work of the Spirit and coming back under the law? Is he looking for the favour and acceptance of man, rather than the favour and acceptance of the Father? How can he teach the Galatians about the freedom Christ has brought them into and warn them about going back under the law, when he appears to be doing the same thing? What is happening here? Is the great apostle the greatest hypocrite?

If you were to only look through the eyes of the natural or the physical, this is the outcome you would probably come to. How many times do we look through the natural, the temporal, the physical lens and then make a judgement about the situation? Most often the judgement we make is a self-righteous judgement of condemnation on the person. Would we make this judgement about Paul here and about anyone else who lives from so much freedom in Christ, because it tests just how much of Christ we are in, as opposed to living from a religious spirit.

Is Paul going back under the law here by participating in this ceremonial practise? Yes, he is from a physical perspective, but not from a spiritual one, hence his own words in 1 Corinthians;

1 Corinthians 9:20 "To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;

Living from Flesh or Spirit

Can we hear the words that lead us to see Paul's position, which is Christ like? He is not under the law but his actions certainly look like he is under the law. How can he say he is not under the law and then follow through with the ceremonial washing which fulfils the law?

Certainly this must mean his actions are clear evidence that he is still under the law. As mentioned this is how the flesh views all of this, because it cannot hear or see the true reality being outworked here. We must be of the spirit to understand the posture Paul is living from, otherwise one will make a self-righteous judgment of condemnation upon Paul, which would be anti-Christ.

It's called being free in Christ, to live like Christ, so we can have the greatest impact for Christ. Yet this posture is persecuted by the very people it attempts to reach because of the lack of spiritual hearing, seeing and understanding. This posture of flesh only looks through the lens of the temporal and misses the point completely. In fact, it is operating from a completely different operating system than it is supposed to be operating from.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:23 that he does all things for the sake of the gospel, so that he may become a fellow partaker of it. It is for the gospel's sake and the advancement of the gospel that Paul keeps this ceremonial law or practise. The key words here are "he does all things for the sake of the Gospel".

We find another example of this in Acts 16:3, but this time it is in relation to Timothy. Paul wants to take Timothy on the journey he is about to undertake, but there is a slight problem. Timothy is uncircumcised, because although his mother is a Jew, his father was a Greek. This posed a problem because of the Jews in those parts, who Paul knew would not listen to someone who was uncircumcised. Paul then circumcised Timothy, to prevent any unnecessary obstacles to the message of the gospel.

Acts 16:3 Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

What makes this act of love even more powerful, is that it comes just after the letter was delivered to the church at Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, saying that circumcision was no longer a requirement.

The 'all things', are not done for anything other than the gospel. We are very good at doing all things, but for the advancement of the kingdom of self. When we attempt to do works from the motivation and strength of self, this is a false version of the eternal works. Unless we lose our lives for His sake - the gospel, we will ultimately use His name to do our works, and the consequence of this is to never receive or come into the life He promises us.

Matthew 10:39 He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

Love Is the Great Enabler

It is important, in fact it's essential, to understand the key motivation behind the way Paul lived his life, because if we are to imitate Paul like this, we need to know how Paul was able to live like this. The answer is very simple but profoundly deep – love.

1 Corinthians 9:21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but *under the law of Christ*, so that I might win those who are without law.

What does it mean to be under the law of Christ?

It means to be under the law of love.

Galatians 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfil the law of Christ.

Galatians 5:13-15 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

The main theme permeating through both of these passages is

love. To carry one another's burdens in a Christ like manner, requires us to know and have received the Father's love within us. Does this sound familiar regarding the four postures Paul was modelling, when he said he wanted to be all things to all men? In bearing a burden for a brother or sister and helping them to walk with the burden, one is fulfilling the law of Christ or the law of love.

It's important to know we can't fix the burden, nor are we called to, but rather to bear the burden with a fellow brother or sister in Christ. We are called to be compassionate and have empathy for the person and their situation, praying for them and walking with them, as God works things out with the person.

God knows the best way to win people to Christ is to be operating under the law of love. When I say love, I mean the Father's love and not our limited human love. When we love like the Father, whether it be a fellow believer or a non-believer, the grace that is released from us is all consuming and powerful. As we fulfil and live out the second part of the Great Commandment, to love one another and lay one's life down for one another, the manifestation of God's glory is released through us for all to experience.

All people are created to receive the Father's love and we have been chosen as His vessels to bring this love into the earth for mankind. This is where I want to pick up on Galatians 5:13, because there is a warning for us in relation to our freedom in Christ and how we are warned by Paul, not to turn our freedom into an opportunity for our flesh to manifest itself.

With the freedom we have been given in Christ comes much responsibility, and God looks to see how we act with the freedom we have been given. This freedom hasn't been given for us to keep it to ourselves and it most certainly has not been given so we can abuse or take advantage of others with our flesh. Freedom is not the opportunity to do what you want, but the opportunity to do what you were created for. God calls us to live free of hypocrisy and to be the demonstration of His life upon the earth.

Hypocrisy Is Not Love

Peter found himself living in a form of hypocrisy in Galatians 2:11-14, and was severely reprimanded by Paul in relation to this. Peter was freely eating with the Gentiles, intermingling with them and getting to know them, until a party of the circumcision came along, and his behaviour changed radically. The scriptures say he suddenly began to withdraw and become aloof to the Gentiles, because he was in fear of the Jews. This then caused other Jews, as well as Barnabas, to join him in this hypocrisy.

This is the complete opposite position to which Paul was living his life from and Paul made Peter fully aware of this fact. Peter was living from a place of fear rather than freedom, and living from fear is a fleshly position. This was not a loving position toward his fellow Gentile brothers, but this became an opportunity for his flesh to manifest itself.

God's grace has been poured out for the transformation of our lives, not so we can continue to live in sin or for ourselves. God's grace empowers us to walk out what truth calls us to. Grace that doesn't lead to transformation is demonic wisdom, painted up as the real deal.

We can all manipulate the sayings of Paul to get what we want from a situation, circumstance or relationship. The critical aspect of Paul's words are the last words where he says "I do all things for the sake of the gospel". We can paint things up to look like we do all things for the sake of the gospel externally, when in fact, we do all things for the sake of ourselves. The challenge is we may not even realise we are in this posture of deception. We genuinely believe we are doing all things in alignment to Him and His ways. How do we know if God allows us to do things He doesn't initiate? Through the development of a very close relationship with Him. God sees the true motive of our hearts and why we do what we do and He will hold us accountable to these things.

This is how we get people who say, "Lord, Lord, we did all these things in your name", and Jesus will say to them, "Away from Me for I never knew you". I am sure none of us want to be the people who hear

these words, when we stand in front of Him at our judgement seat.

Let us, as Paul did, with the freedom we have been given in Christ, choose to lay our lives down, and do all things for the sake of the gospel of the kingdom. This is what it means to imitate Paul as he imitates Christ.

15 I COUNT ALL THINGS LOSS IN VIEW OF KNOWING JESUS CHRIST

Philippians 3:8-9 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

'More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...'

All Things Are a Loss

All things are all things. What a powerful, powerful statement that Paul makes here. He is saying that nothing in his life compares to the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ. I wonder how much value we put on the simplicity of knowing Jesus. I wonder how many of us think this is way too simple and are searching for this "more than" life in works and function for Christ, rather than in Jesus Himself.

This is a very common reality in the body of Christ and it causes

mass burn out, disillusionment, frustration and leaves us sick, because our hope has been deferred.

I believe the statement from Paul, that he considers all things a loss compared to the surpassing value of knowing Jesus, is more powerful than many in the body of Christ realise. What stands right in front of us we may miss because we perceive it to be way too obvious. It's the same old story, that the grass is greener on the other side, when in fact grass is grass, and we need to look at the grass that we are currently standing on.

What Are Our "All Things"?

All things are all things. Think about the "all things" in your life right now. How long would your list be of all the things you hold dear to yourself? How precious and what value do you place on your "all things"? I imagine some of our all things would be our relationships, our wife or our husband, maybe our child or children, maybe it's a parent or a grandparent. For some it will be their possessions, their accomplishments, their achievements, the ability to make money and create wealth. Is it sports or our careers or ministry?

Whatever our "all things" are for us, and whatever they were for Paul, he is saying that he counts all of these things to be loss, in view of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ his Lord. The truth is, if we don't have this knowledge of Jesus, then the value of our "all things", will trump the value of our relationship with Him. The greater the true knowledge of Jesus Christ we are receiving through the revelation of the Spirit, the greater the value we put on knowing Jesus. This true knowing of Jesus trumps everything and all things.

What man values the most is what man will live his life by and for. The scriptures teach us that what man treasures is where his heart will be found. His heart, love, affection, adoration, commitment, passion and devotion, will all be engulfed in what man values the most.

We can look at the word loss and in our minds be led astray from what this all means. For us to value knowing Jesus more than our "all things", we must have vision. If we can't see what's in Christ, then how can we value Him more than the things we know, see, touch and hold, that are directly in front of us?

No wonder the Bible says how blessed is the man who believes, even though he has not seen. The man who believes even though he has not seen, has in fact seen, but it's not a seeing in the natural - it's a seeing through the lens of the spirit. This is why Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:18, that the eyes of our heart may be enlightened in the knowledge of God. Paul knew that knowledge, or the knowing of Jesus Christ, starts in the spirit, or the heart. He knew first hand that man requires revelation and ongoing revelations of Jesus Christ, directly from the Spirit, if he is to have any kind of knowledge that births Christ's literal life within us. No wonder David said he wanted truth in his inner most being, his spirit.

We see this reality outworked in Galatians 1:11-12 where Paul goes to great lengths to teach us where He receives His eternal abiding life from. He wants to make it very clear to us all that the gospel, the good news that He preached was not according to man. The gospel he received wasn't man's version of it, nor did he receive it from man or was taught it by man, but he received the gospel, the Word of God, through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Once again, I am not sure we grasp the magnitude of this reality. Many of us probably read this and go yeah, yeah, but how many of us actually know what Paul is declaring and the life changing, transformative position he is now in because of this? I think some of us probably think we are all in the same reality as Paul and life just continues as it always has. To think like this would be to our own detriment.

Paul was very much concerned that we would be led astray in our minds from the simplicity and purity of a devoted life in Christ. He compared the fall of man in the garden to the Corinthians being led astray from what the entire Gospel is really about. If we want to discover what the finish line is for the church, we must discover this truth in the Son. For by Him all things were created both in the heavens and the earth. All things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.

Did we hear that? Did we hear that? Did we hear that? Jesus asked Peter three times did he love Him and I ask us three times did we hear what we just read in the previous paragraph? I don't mean hear it in your mind or physical ears. Did you hear it in the place of understanding, your spirit? To not be able to hear what you just read, will have you continuing to live your life as per usual, rather than being apprehended and arrested by the Truth.

The Power of the Ask

Why do we think Paul prays that the Father will give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him? Why does Paul pray that the eyes of our heart may be enlightened? For what purposes? To not ask these questions nor pursue the reality to these questions, is to stay where you have always been and receive what you have always received.

If we live like this we will never come into the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ, so what we currently see and know, will always hold our value and attention. We won't be able to say life is but rubbish, compared to knowing Jesus, because we don't have a reference for what is in Jesus, that which trumps what we currently value. This is so serious and yet as mentioned, it doesn't grab our attention as it is supposed to.

Why do you think Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 7, that to stay single is really a better option than being married, if one can live like this? He says this is, "For our own benefit and not to put a restraint upon us, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure an undistracted devotion to the Lord."

1 Corinthians 7:35 This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

Relationship Above Function

How does one live a life that is purely devoted to the Lord and not be distracted by the things of the world and even the things that God has given us? The answer lies in the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ. We have been created for relationship well before we

have been created for function. Ask yourself if you agree with this statement. Then ask yourself if the evidence of your day to day life communicates something entirely different. Do our very lives communicate function first, relationship second? It's all about what we do for God as opposed to who we are becoming in God.

There is a person to become, along with works to do, but the becoming or being posture must define the doing posture and not the other way round. This is hurting us from ever knowing the surpassing value of knowing what is discovered in Jesus Christ, which forms an eternal life within us and also defines our function, and God desires for us to know Him in such a way, that our lives are completely transformed and the fullness of God reigns in us.

Ephesians 3:19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

The greater we know and are perfected and become love, the greater fullness of God reigns in and through us. Now tell me that this reality wouldn't have you saying like Paul, "everything is a loss compared to the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ".

'for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ and be found in Him'

Suffering The Loss of All Things

Paul suffered the loss of all things for the one he loved the most. Paul was wholeheartedly in love with Christ and had committed his entire life to live with and for Christ. As we have already looked at, Paul did not consider his life of any account dear to himself, so that he could finish the course that Christ had him on and that his entire life would bring glory to His Maker. We are to be imitators of this reality as well.

He was prepared to lay all things down so he could gain more of Christ. He suffered the loss of being married, having children, having a career, a home, of not living in much comfort and counted all things rubbish, so that he may gain Christ and be found in Him. He is not saying any of these things are wrong, but for him, he didn't want them to get in the way of gaining more of Christ. Paul knew the will of God and he knew his purpose in this will and he wasn't going

to allow anything to get in the way of this. He knew, if anything got in the way of God's will, he was putting his eternal inheritance at stake. This is exactly the same for us as well. If we let the things of God get in the way of our love for God Himself, we will ultimately be putting our own inheritance at stake.

Jesus warns us of this very thing where He says, in Matthew 10:37, that if we love another more than Him, we are not worthy of Him.

Knowing the Father's Love in Us

Only love can create this wholehearted devotion in someone's life. As the scriptures teach us, that a person might die for a good man, but for an evil man who would even think to die. The love that was in Christ and the Father, that had the Son come and die for us while we were all still sinners, is the same love that had been deposited and perfected in Paul, hence he was able to imitate God and love like God.

It is also fully possible for us all to live and love like this, laying our lives down and suffering the loss of all things for Him, when we too have this love being deposited and perfected in us, as 1 John 2:5-6 declares. We too must suffer the loss of all things and be found in Him, if we want this reality to be ours.

Paul knew that by gaining the fullest measure that is possible in Christ, he would gain a life that empowered and enabled him to live a life worthy of what he and the church has been called for. He knew he could demonstrate the impossible but possible life. He knew he would be able to demonstrate the reality to which truth calls us.

Paul suffered greatly at the hands of the Israelites and the Gentiles who beat him, stoned him, cursed at him, planned to kill him, and yet he still said although he was afflicted in every way he wasn't crushed. He said they were perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed. It was the very living reality or knowledge of Jesus Christ within Paul, that enabled and empowered him to write down the reality he and others were living out. Paul was fully able to demonstrate this wisdom because of the Jesus he knew, loved and was found in.

Now this is a vision worth laying one's life down for. I wonder how

many of us as the church see this vision in the spirit, and if we can't, are prepared to seek God until He opens our eyes in the knowledge of it. This is exactly what Christ has laid hold of the church for and we must pursue the Spirit to lay hold of it, otherwise our lives will come short of all He has called us to.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Ephesians 4:1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.

Paul said he was to be found in Christ. What does this mean, to be found in Christ? If a video was taken of our lives over a three to six-month period, where would we all be found? What would the evidence say about where we spend our time, energy, focus, priorities, resource, thinking and actions?

Would our very lives be the evidence of what we profess? Would our lives match our words or say the complete opposite to our words? This is something every one of us must truly face and allow the true reality to bring conviction to our hearts. Failure to allow this to happen, will have us justifying our behaviour and ultimately keeping us out of life in Christ.

True Fellowship

To be found in Christ means to be found in fellowship with the Father, the Son and the Spirit. To be found in Christ means to be growing in spiritual oneness with the triune God and have our lives hidden in Christ. We are identifying with Christ more and more, until we no longer identify with who we once were.

We are becoming so one with God that one can hardly distinguish the difference. We are not becoming God, but we are becoming so Christlike that as He is, so also we are to be in this world.

1 John 4:17 By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.

This was Jesus' prayer in John 17 for all His disciples. That all disciples, all around the world, past, present and future, would be one, as He and the Father are one. If we are found in Christ, then this will be the church's reality, as this is the promise from Jesus Himself and every promise in God is yes and amen.

If we look at the body of Christ today, do we see a church that is one with her Father, her Lord and Saviour, the Spirit and other followers? This is a question that every follower of Jesus must be prepared to ask and allow the truth to permeate their heart and mind. Are we as the church all found in Christ, which then leads to the outcome of spiritual oneness? What does the evidence say?

I believe today, God is arresting and apprehending our flesh and His Spirit is radically redefining all those who are truly hungry and thirsty for what God intended from the beginning – spiritual oneness or unity. This will only happen when we are found in Christ.

We may be in relationship with God and one another, but are we in fellowship with God and one another? John, in 1 John 1:3 invites us to have fellowship with him and the church he knows, as they have fellowship with the Father and the Son. Our relationship with God, His Son and one another, can stay at surface level and very shallow, or it can go to the depths of fellowship – spiritual oneness. The choice is ultimately all ours, and being found in Christ will lead us to this place of fellowship.

Our fellowship with one another is not based on how well we know one another relationally, but our connectedness to being in the Father. When we are all growing in our fellowship with the Father, we grow in fellowship with one another. It's this simple. All that comes from the knowing of Jesus Christ.

The Power of Fellowship

Only when we walk in the Light (Christ) as He is in the Light, do we have fellowship with one another. For us to have fellowship with one another we must walk in Christ. If we walk in darkness or the flesh, we don't have fellowship with Him, hence we don't have it with one another. Notice that fellowship or spiritual oneness has nothing to

do with knowing people, but our knowing of Christ. When we are in fellowship with Him, we will be in fellowship with one another and a lost world will know Jesus was sent for them.

Colossians 2:2-4 shares with us that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ Himself. It's this knowledge that sets the Church ablaze and on fire.

16 FAVOUR WITH GOD OR MAN

Galatians 1:10 For am I now seeking the favour of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

'For am I now seeking the favour of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men?'

To Seek the Favour of Man Is Dangerous

I wonder how many of us do this without even realising we do it. We subconsciously seek out the favour of our parents, our spouse or our children. We seek out the favour of our friends and those we know. We seek out the favour of our peers or those who are in leadership above or below us. Maybe we seek out the favour of those who follow us as we want to be liked by them.

No matter who it is or what it may be, to seek the favour of man and not God, is a recipe for disaster, heartache and hurt, to all who are involved. People who seek the favour of man as opposed to the favour of God, do it because they have not yet come into a knowledge of God, that has set them free from this posture. This posture is actually a posture of bondage, which we may not be aware of, one

that not only keeps our very selves in chains, but also all those whose favour we look for.

The word "seeking" is an active word and one that describes a pursuit of something. The scriptures teach us we are to search for God with all our heart and we will find Him.

Deuteronomy 4:29 But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.

Matthew 6:33 teaches us to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. Hebrews 11: 6 teaches us that God is a rewarder of all those who diligently seek Him. We are not taught to seek the favour of man and yet for many people this is exactly what we do. We seek to be affirmed, acknowledged, received, liked and accepted by man, and yet this is the very opposite to what Jesus teaches.

This is a very fragile way of living our lives as we are ultimately handing the power of our lives into the hands of others, instead of giving and entrusting our lives into the hands of our Creator. We see in John 2:24-25 that Jesus would not entrust Himself to man as He knew all men, and what was in all men.

The bible says Jesus grew in favour and stature with God and man, but He did not seek the favour of man. These are very different realities. One may grow in favour with man but one doesn't go seeking the favour of man. I have always found the order of Luke 2:52 very telling.

Luke 2:52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.

As Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, the natural outcome was to have favour with God and man. God first, man second. As we seek God first, things fall into place. It's when we seek man first that things fall apart.

Who or What Do We Truly Seek?

It's only when we truly discover God, His kingdom and righteousness, that we will be free from seeking the favour of man. Man is not the first place we go to for anything we need, God is. Many followers

would say, "Well yes of course God is the first place we go", but in reality, how many of us actually do? How many of us look to man for our edification, our teaching, our knowledge, our encouragement, our support, our comfort, our guidance and our provision? I think we like to think God is our first placed option, when in reality He becomes our second or may in fact not register at all.

Trying to please man is very draining, tiring and unsustainable. For the one person you please, the next person you upset. It's a never ending journey trying to keep everyone happy. If Christ was concerned about keeping everyone happy and striving to please man, then He wouldn't have been able to be obedient to His Father and His Father's truth.

He would have had to compromise Himself and His Father's truth to not offend people. Christ's intention was not to offend and neither is ours to be, but in speaking the Father's truth from a position of love, we will offend the flesh, just like Christ did.

Jesus offended the people so much in John 6 when He spoke about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, that many of His disciples walked away from Him and followed Him no more. These were disciples of Jesus. Those who said they wanted to be like Him, and yet He wasn't attempting or striving to please them, but was passionate about sharing His Father's truth with them.

What about the rich young ruler? Jesus wasn't striving to please him when he spoke the truth to him about who his god really was and what truly had his heart. Because Jesus loved the young man He spoke the truth to him in the hope that he would hear the truth and repent. Jesus was able to identify the true issue of the heart and called it out. This in turn saw the young man walk away from life instead of walking into life. Jesus was never striving to please man and neither must we. There is only one person we strive to please and this is our Heavenly Father.

'If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.'

Cut Free from Every Physical Relationship

Paul is saying that there is no way these two things can co-exist. You, fundamentally, cannot be a bondservant of Christ, if you are still striving to please man. The one will cancel out the other. One must be completely set apart from every physical relationship one has, if they are to be a bondservant of Christ. Just like the umbilical cord that produces life from the placenta must be cut away from the baby if the baby is to truly be free, so must the umbilical cord be cut from every human relationship that prevents us from becoming true bondservants of Christ, because we are still trying to please man and seek the affirmation of man.

For us all to truly be bondservants of Christ, we must be freed from one another through the power of the gospel and abide one hundred percent in the vine. This doesn't mean we don't value the physical relationships we have with people, but we have been freed from the unhealthy power of them, that would see us striving to please all of those we are in relationship with, ahead of Christ.

Jesus Is Our Example of a Bondservant

For us to grab the enormity of this reality, we must come to have a revealed knowledge of who and what a bondservant is. If we want to know who and what a bondservant is, we don't have to far to go, in looking at Jesus for our example.

Philippians 2:3-9 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason, also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.

There is a very specific attitude of being that bondservants have within them. It's an attitude that they carry within themselves and

it shapes who they are and how they live their lives. What is this attitude that was in Christ and is in His bondservants? Bondservants don't think of themselves first or regard themselves as more important than others, but they always put others ahead of themselves and regard others as more important than themselves. Bondservants don't look after their own personal interests but are more concerned for the interests of others.

This is the standard that bondservants live to and model. This is the attitude they have within them, as this was the attitude that was within Jesus Christ. A bondservant is to be like The Bondservant, nothing more nothing less. A disciple of Jesus is to be like Jesus and model the life Jesus modelled. This is the example Paul is for us.

If we have not yet fallen on the Rock and been broken into pieces, as scripture teaches us, we will not be able to live this reality out as we will not have the humility of mind to even think this is possible, never mind live this possibility out. To put others first and to think of others before we think of ourselves, is not natural and is opposite to what self wants to do. How can we live this out, unless selfish pride has fallen upon the Rock and been broken into pieces?

The scripture is very clear and absolute. Those who fall upon the Rock will be broken to pieces.

Luke 20:18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

Living as A Bondservant Is Fully Attainable

God promises us a reality here that many are still to receive, hence living as bondservants who do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, regarding others needs ahead of their own and considering others more important than themselves, seems to be unattainable and not a real reality one could know, and yet it is fully possible in Christ, as this is the attitude of being that was in Him, and as He was on this earth, we are to be.

The key phrases in this passage in Philippians are "emptied Himself" and "taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of man".

Remember who we are talking about here. We are talking about the Son of God, who was the exact representation of the Father. The One who all things have been created through and for, in which all things are held together. The Word who is God and was with God in the beginning, emptied Himself of His God attributes and took on another form, being made like us all, the son of man.

Why would Jesus become like us? To demonstrate to us as man, what is possible, when one is filled, empowered, led and in complete submission and surrender to one's Heavenly Father. Jesus became the model for us to imitate and follow as bondservants.

We see different men use this word, bondservants, at the start of their letters and all these men certainly modelled this reality as Christ did.

2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus. Revelation 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, James 1:1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Volunteer or Bondservant

This is the challenge for everyone in the body of Christ today, to truly live out the life of a bondservant. We tend to use the word volunteer in the body of Christ today to describe servants, and yet this isn't the word that really describes a servant of God. Why is this? The reason is that a bondservant and a volunteer are as different as an elephant and a mouse. A bondservant is someone who sees serving God and people as a lifestyle that never ends, as opposed to a volunteer who tends to see serving as an option and the giving up of a particular amount of time to achieve a task.

Being a bondservant is a lifestyle and a way of being. A bondservant knows it's an honour and a privilege to serve God and others, without any conditions, as opposed to a volunteer who can tend to see their volunteering as a favour to God and man.

We will all come to know if we carry the heart and attitude of a

bondservant or a volunteer, when we get treated like a slave. Our response to someone treating us like a slave will say so much about what posture we are living from. Slaves don't have any rights and a bondservant of Christ has also given up their rights. They consider themselves dead to self and in turn are able to love and serve in a manner, that volunteers can never attain to.

Luke 17:7-10 is a perfect example of this.

Luke 17:7-10 "Which of you, having a slave ploughing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done."

A bondservant is someone who has counted the cost already in their following and serving of Jesus and it isn't something that they struggle with, because it is a settled issue in their heart. They have done what Jesus said, when he taught people to count the cost before coming and following Him.

A volunteer carries the opposite heart posture. Cost is something they are always assessing and asking themselves if they are prepared to sacrifice their time, energy, skill, ability or resource, in the area of service. They are always considering themselves first and putting their needs ahead of the needs of others, and tend to agree to this act of service, if there is some form of benefit to themselves in the process. This benefit can even be the feel good factor they get from serving because, in essence, they are still serving self.

The bondservant posture has nothing to do with being a door mat for people or living in absolute poverty of physical things, but everything to do with knowing who one is in Christ. Paul said he had learnt to live with little and he had learnt to live with much. This posture has nothing to do with what you have or don't have, but everything to do with who you are and who you know.

There is a call that the bondservant hears and they respond to this call with an urgency and expectation, which ultimately will be rewarded in the future kingdom.

John 12:26 If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honour him.

The context for this is the example Jesus has given us of the losing of one's life to find the life we have been destined for. If Jesus never gave His life, then how could we ever find the life we have been called for? This life ends up with an incredible reward or prize for all those who have lived as bondservants.

The promise is this "and where I am, there My servant will be also". The question we have to ask ourselves is where is Jesus right now? He is sitting beside the Father. What is the inherited promise that Jesus gives to all those who overcome the flesh, the world and the adversary, by faith in Him?

Revelation 3:21-22 He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

For all those who live as bondservants the Father will honour them with this incredible prize, just as John 12:26 teaches. He honours them by giving them a place with the Son on the Son's throne. He allows the bondservant to sit with the Son, because these bondservants are His bride, and His bride will reign with Him in the millennial reign.

For us to receive this inheritance we must follow Christ in every aspect and serve Him alone, never looking for the favour of man. This is what will have us receiving this promise.

Revelation 22:3-4 There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.

I am not sure it gets any better than this. This is speaking of the bondservants' forever position in the Father. It is essential we grasp that this promise is rewarded to all those who truly serve Him and follow Him, where He is leading, and live out the commandments of God. A follower who is casual or uncommitted to Christ, even though loved by God, will not receive this reward from their Father. It is reserved for all those who live the life of a bondservant, which is the life we have all been called to live.

Matthew 22:14 For many are called, but few are chosen.