

# FIRST LOVE IS THE GOSPEL OF SONSHIP

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Peter Hay, prepared for communion word focus, 5 July 2020

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## Introduction

I will begin this morning by focusing our attention on Chapter 1 of *The Steps of Salvation* Part 8. I will begin with something of a dogmatic statement and then take my time to explain it, so that we get our understanding clear about 'the gospel of sonship.'

## The covenant purpose of God – the gospel of sonship

So, there is *only one gospel* through which a person can be saved and can receive eternal life. This is *the gospel of sonship*.

Now, obviously, the term 'gospel of sonship' is not used in the Scriptures. We use it because it conveys *the covenant purpose of God* which is communicated through the Scriptures.

## The covenant purpose of God – sons of God in fellowship with Him

That covenant purpose is for the sons and daughters of men to be *born* and *brought to glory as sons of God* who live in *fellowship* with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and with one another.

So, in being dogmatic and saying that no-one can be saved without the gospel of sonship, we are not saying that no-one can be saved without hearing the doctrine that belongs to Restoration Fellowships Incorporated and associated churches.

Rather, 'the gospel of sonship' is a term that we have coined to *communicate* the focal point of God's *purpose* for us - which is His Everlasting Covenant.

This covenant is the amazing desire of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for us to be *in Their image and likeness as the sons of God* who live in fellowship with Them.

Now, we know that the *purpose* of God for us is *sonship* – that we be sons of God.

Jesus made this point patently clear and, of course, it is very straightforward to demonstrate from the Scriptures.

## Sons are born of the nature of the Father

John recounted the amazing conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus. Jesus didn't identify Nicodemus simply as being a teacher, a theologian or someone who was familiar with the Scriptures. He called him '*the teacher of Israel*'.

So He was speaking with someone whom He respected, and acknowledged as being well-read and committed to the Scriptures.

But then He said to Nicodemus, 'You need to put *that* aside and hear what the Scriptures actually teach us.'

Jesus said, 'Most assuredly I say to you [Jesus was being emphatic here; '*most assuredly*.' If you want assurance, *most* assurance, listen to this point.], "Unless one is *born* again, He cannot see the kingdom of God".' Joh 3:3.

The word 'born', as we know, refers to the child of a father. So, when Jesus said, 'Unless one is born again,' He was referring to the children of the one from whom they were born.

These are the sons of God.

And, unless one is born again, they cannot even *see* the kingdom. We cannot even see what it looks like. We can know a great deal about the Bible and about the 'attributes', if you like, of God, but we cannot *see* it unless we are *born of God's own nature*.

Obviously, Nicodemus was quite challenged or confronted by this point, asking, in effect, 'Well, how does that happen? Do I need to go into my mother's womb again?'

This is the difference between seeing things by the Spirit and seeing things by the flesh, isn't it?

## Born of God, of water and of the Spirit

Jesus said, '[No], most assuredly [again, being emphatic] I say to you, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot *enter* the kingdom of God".' Joh 3:5.

So, there are three elements here.

We must be *born of God*, and then we must be *born of water* and of *the Spirit* to enter the kingdom of God.

## **Born of God's life and joined to His fellowship**

John also recorded, 'Behold [Be illuminated to. So, someone who is able to 'behold' needs to be born, don't they?] what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God.' 1Jn 3:1.

John also noted, 'That which we have seen and heard, we declare to you [the proclamation of the gospel] that you also may have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.' 1Jn 1:3.

Do you see that this is not a Creator-creature gap that is infinitely apart?

This is the desire of God for us to be born of His life and to be joined right at the heart of His very fellowship. This is the gospel of sonship.

## **One gospel of His Everlasting Covenant**

Now, this is the entire focus of the Scriptures.

Paul and the other apostles used several different terms to describe the message through which God brings His covenant purpose to pass. There are many instances of these, and it is amazing to see the different phrases that these writers used to describe the message through which God's Everlasting Covenant purpose is coming to pass.

So, for example, there is 'the gospel of the grace of God', 'the gospel of God', 'the gospel of His Son', 'the gospel of peace', 'my gospel (Paul's words)', 'the gospel of Christ', 'the gospel of the glory of Christ', 'the word', 'the word of God', 'the word of the Lord', 'the cross', 'the word of the gospel', 'the word of reconciliation', 'the word of truth', and so on.

There are actually many more than that, but the point is that we are not talking 'gospels' as being 'doctrine packages'.

We are saying that there is one gospel; and it is the word of God's Everlasting Covenant, which is the desire for the sons of men to be born of God and to be brought to glory as a multitude of sons who live in fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and with one another.

And the means, or the message, through which that is being proclaimed, has many different designations.

## **The power of the Father for salvation – the capacity in His word to fulfil His covenant purpose**

I love the point that Paul wrote at the beginning of his letter to the Romans.

'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.' Rom 1:16.

Remember that the gospel of Christ is simply a designation of the same message through which God's covenant purpose is coming to pass.

And Paul said, 'I am not ashamed of it.'

So, we need to know what that gospel is, and to not be ashamed of the gospel that proclaims our sonship.

And why was Paul not ashamed?

He said, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God the Father to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first, and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith".' Rom 1:16-17.

'The power of the Father for salvation' is the capacity in His word to birth us as His sons.

So, this power is not a power over evil or a power to strengthen our 'goodness'.

The power of God unto salvation is for His covenant purpose to come to pass in our lives.

And what is this covenant purpose?

It is that you and I are born and established as sons of God.

And we can trust the word and believe the word as it is coming, because it is granting us faith to believe, to walk in the word and in the way that the Father has prepared for us, in Christ.

## **The gospel of sonship is not theology or adherence to God or to principles of living**

Now, the gospel of sonship is not merely a theology - and I am going to keep emphasising this point.

And I will be even more pedantic about it to say that the gospel of sonship is actually first love itself.

Let us consider this point regarding theology.

The gospel of sonship is the word of God's covenant purpose. So, to be sons of God is not merely a description of a person who 'believes in God'.

Now, there are numerous designations that are applied to people who identify as being Christians; for example, 'born again', 'believer', 'a follower of Jesus', 'a disciple', and many more.

However, 'a son of God' is not merely a synonym for 'a believer'.

Sons of God are not merely 'adherents' to a Christian lifestyle or to a set of life principles.

Sonship is not just 'positive faith' that 'overcomes evil' or has 'good moral principles'.

Neither is sonship something that we receive only in the new heavens and earth. It is not that we just live a good Christian life now and that, in the new heavens and earth, sonship is a reward that we receive then.

### **Now we are the sons of God, being changed from glory to glory**

In fact, the glory of our sonship in the new heavens and earth - because it is true that we are sons of God in the new heavens and earth - depends upon the extent to which we have matured as sons of God in this age.

We see that the way in which we live and walk in obedience to the word of the Father, which we are not to be ashamed of because in it is the power for salvation, we are *being changed into the sons whom the Father has predestined us to be*; and that the glory of our sonship that is obtained here and now is what we will have forever in the new heavens and earth.

And we know that because the Scriptures tell us, 'Beloved, *now* we are the [sons] of God.' 1Jn 3:2.

Now we are the sons of God - not in the future; not in the new heavens and earth. Now we are the sons of God.

'And it has not yet been revealed what we shall be.' 1Jn 3:2.

So, he said that you are a son of God *now*, but that you have *not grown up yet*.

It is like saying to a little child, 'You *are* a person now, but how you are going to be fully functioning and expressing as you get older is not know yet. You have to *grow up into it*.'

'Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. We know that when He is revealed [when Jesus

comes again to the earth], we shall be *like Him* for we shall see Him as He is.' 1Jn 3:2.

Now, there are many people who think, 'Yes, I completely believe that. And I am happy to be identified as a believer. And, when Jesus comes, I am going to be changed immediately into His likeness.'

But Paul explained that we are to *change from glory to glory* into that image.

### **Having an unveiled face; seeing clearly**

'But we all, with unveiled face.' 2Co 3:18.

Now, a *veiled* face has a covering over it. So, thinking about something covering your face, when your face is covered, you cannot see the light that is shining. You can't *see* clearly.

Now, the things that 'veil our face' are all of the other ideas that we have about God's purpose for us and about what it means to be a Christian.

It is about what is a 'good' life; what it means to avoid evil. This sounds a little like living according to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, doesn't it?

Rather, Paul was saying we are to have an '*unveiled face*'.

Hence, there are things that need to be removed from our perspective so that we can see clearly a light that has an impact on our lives.

### **Being changed from glory to glory - maturing as a son of God**

He said, 'That we all, with unveiled face [that happens as we turn to the Lord - the veil is taken away], beholding as in a mirror [last week we considered the nature of the mirror being the petals of a lampstand flower, shining the one-Spirit life of Christ.] the glory of the Lord, are *being transformed* into the same image from glory to glory.' 2Co 3:18.

So, we are looking into Christ's face, receiving from His face the glory of sonship from the Father, and are *being transformed* into that same image, from one degree of glory to another.

So, beloved, you are *now* a son of God.

And, as we *continue* to receive that word that is coming from His face, we are being changed from glory to glory into the son of God whom the Father predestined us to be in Christ.

So, when He appears, 'in the twinkling of an eye' means that we will *immediately* be the very person whom the Lord has made us to be, in Christ - which we have *grown up into*. 1Co 15:52.

We do not go from nothing to everything in a moment. Rather, we are *growing up into the fullness of the stature of Christ*.

And the extent to which we grow up is the extent of the glory that we obtain as an inheritance for the new heavens and the earth.

### **Sons of God are born of His divine nature**

Now, we know that we are sons of God, recognising that sonship is not just an idea; not just an association; not just a belief system.

Rather, we know that we are sons of God because we are *born of His divine nature*.

Do you *rejoice* in that this morning? Rejoice in knowing that when you are born of God, you have *received the very nature of God Himself*.

We are growing up as sons of God inasmuch as Christ is a son of God.

That is an amazing point, isn't it? It is amazing that, to the same extent that Jesus Himself is the Son of God and the Son of Man, we who are sons of men are becoming sons of God in the same way that Jesus is a son of God.

That is why, when we see Him, *we will be like Him*. That is brilliant, isn't it!

### **The rejection of the sonship purpose of God**

Now, there are many people who identify as being Christians, who do not believe that we are, *literally*, sons of God.

They believe in all sorts of different understandings of what sonship might be. And some fundamental theologies are built on the rejection of the truth that we are to be born as sons of God.

In his book, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, the prominent theologian John Calvin argued that a person who claims that they have been born as a son of God [they have obtained the divine nature] is not in their right mind.

So, Calvin supposed that is insane to think that we who are created can be born of the very life of God, who has no beginning and no end, who is the Creator.

He reasoned that the gap between the Creator and the creature is infinite. And, while mankind is deemed to be superior to the animals, because they were created in God's image, Calvin considered man's identification as a son of God to be an allegory, a picture, of his relationship with his Creator.

So, he was saying that sonship is not literal; that we are not born literally as a son of God. It is simply a way of describing the relationship between God the Father and His creation. He used a picture where the Father is like the sun, and we are all like flowers of the field that require the sunshine from the sun to have our growth and existence.

Now, we are those who have been delivered from that fleshly, veiled perspective. And our desire, particularly the desire of those of us who have been called and set aside to proclaim the gospel of God's grace, is to say that that's not what God predestined for you.

You are *not* just like the flower of the field. In fact, the Scriptures say that the flower of the field is *burned*.

Truly, we are to be *born of the very nature of God Himself*. And we can rejoice and give thanks for our sonship in God.

### **The call of the Spirit to be a son of God**

Here is another key point that is important for us to note.

The *call* to sonship, the call to be a son of God, which comes by the word, and its implication for our lives, is what the Spirit is saying to all the churches.

And, in fact, all of the problems in all the churches is because of the rejection of the gospel of sonship.

How do we know this? How do we know that this is what the Spirit saying to the churches?

In this regard, we read, 'The *Spirit Himself* bears witness with our Spirit *that we are children of God* [ i.e. that we are sons of God].' Rom 8:16.

So, we are to hear what the *Spirit* is saying to the churches in relation to all of its detail and implications. And He is speaking in relation to *affirming* to us that we are the sons of God.

He is addressing us, calling us to sonship and to everything that that means for us in terms of the culture of our lives, individually, as families, and as communities of believers that are identified as *lampstands*.

‘The Spirit bears witness with our Spirit that we *are* children of God and, if children [or, ‘sons’], then *heirs*, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ [It is amazing, isn’t it? We are joint heirs of Christ’s inheritance.], if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.’ Rom 8:16-17.

If we don’t bear witness to that, and we don’t understand that that is true, and that it is not true in us, then we are *not able to hear* what the Spirit is saying to the churches. We do not have ‘an ear to hear’.

So, I implore us to give our ear to what the Spirit is saying.

And what is He saying?

He is *calling us to sonship*.

### **The gospel of sonship is first love**

Now, having established that the gospel of sonship is not merely theology, and that it is actually God’s covenant purpose, I want to go even stronger on the point that the gospel of sonship is *first love* itself.

I will read a passage and then explain what I mean. ‘To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, “These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands”.’ Rev 2:1.

In this letter, Jesus is seen as coming, and has identified Himself, as the One who is among all seven lampstands - He is addressing *everyone* on this point.

While He wrote specifically to Ephesus, He is coming as the One who is among all seven lampstands, and He has seven stars in His right hand.

He is saying, ‘This is the message that should be in the mouth of those stars who are in My hand.’

Unfortunately, after commending the church of Ephesus for all of their good activities, He had to say, ‘I have this against you, that you have left your first love.’ Rev 2:4.

### **First love is the divine nature, the life and nature of God, in us; the gospel of sonship**

Now, what is ‘first love’?

He has come; He is speaking to the churches; and He is saying, ‘I have this against you, you have left your first love.’

Let me start by saying what first love is *not*.

First love is *not* merely an emotion. It is not just the affection that we may have toward others in the body of Christ.

That would be a secondary implication, because we *are* to have the affection of Christ for one another. But that is not, in the first instance, first love. It is not simply an emotion.

Neither is it just a committed connection with other believers where we ‘get over’ our differences, because we are committed to being together. That is not first love.

This is the key point.

First love is *the divine nature*; it is the *life and nature of God Himself*.

We know this because the apostle John said that *God is love*.

So, first love is the divine nature of God Himself. It is the life and nature of God.

Now, in the light of this reality that first love is the nature and life of God, we understand that first love is the gospel of God.

*The gospel of sonship is first love.*

### **God’s word is the gospel of sonship**

This is where we need to get past the idea that a gospel is a doctrine or a theology.

Immediately, this will ‘jar’ with people and they will say, ‘How can what is written down or proclaimed be the divine nature of God?’

However, it is quite simple and straightforward.

In fact, the apostle John, who knew the contents of the letter to Ephesus, being part of the presbytery of Ephesus, opened his Gospel in this way.

‘In the beginning was [Was it God? No. In the beginning was] the Word.

‘And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ Joh 1:1.

Do you see that the 'word' is the gospel of sonship? It is the *purpose* of God for all of us to become sons of God and to have fellowship with Him.

And He is called 'the Word'. 'He was in the beginning with God.' Joh 1:2.

### **Abiding in the Word, not a doctrine**

This is the Word in whom we are to *abide* as those who are *born* of the Word.

We see that the gospel of sonship is not simply a doctrine that we are to learn and to which we are to remain loyal.

We know, therefore, that the Ephesian presbytery in having fallen from first love, had done so because they had turned from the gospel of sonship, and had begun to teach and advance understandings of the Scriptures other than the gospel of sonship.

### **Becoming sons of God, joined to His fellowship, by the gospel of sonship**

Do you see the point? The gospel of sonship is first love.

It is not only the communication of the reality that we are to be sons of God.

It is, primarily, *the means by which we become the sons of God* and by which we are *joined to the fellowship of Yahweh Himself*.

So, if you have turned from first love, it means that you have turned from the gospel of sonship.

### **Illuminated to see first love, the gospel of sonship**

So, in considering this point further, let us return to a Scripture that we read earlier.

'Behold what manner of love.' 1Jn 3:1.

Now, when we see the word 'behold' in the Scriptures, it is calling us to look and to *see* something, isn't it?

And to look and see means to be *illuminated*. This is a *spiritual* capacity. It is not an intellectual capacity.

The word of His grace is coming, enabling us to *see* something. What are we to see?

'Behold what manner of *love*.'

So, the gospel of sonship is *first love*. First love is the divine nature, and we are being *illuminated* to

see 'what manner of love the Father has *bestowed* on us that we should be *called* sons of God'.

How does He bestow it on us? It is by His *word*.

*The gospel of sonship* is bringing this *purpose* to pass in our lives.

### **To know Him is to have eternal life**

'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God [a son of God] and *knows* God.' 1Jn 4:7.

This does not mean to merely know 'about' Him.

'Everyone who loves is born of God and *knows Him*.' This is a personal relationship with God Himself.

John went on to say that to know God is to *have eternal life*, but not in the future; it is the assurance of eternal life *right now*. 1Jn 5:20. It is the same assurance that you are a son of God.

This was how he finished his letter. This was the highpoint, or the concluding point. We can see John delighting in this point.

He had set out his message and was now at the highpoint, saying, in effect, 'If there is anything I can leave you with, I leave you with this.'

'And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding.' 1Jn 5:20.

Are you receiving an understanding of your sonship today?

When understanding is received, it becomes the *culture of your life*.

'We *know* that the Son of God has come and [made sonship our culture], that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.' 1Jn 5:20.

John was declaring that we can have this *now*.

Our hearts are being assured *now*, as we receive this message and turn again – because we are to turn again *every time* we hear the word – to receive the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in our hearts.

### **Do not draw back to other 'gospels', which dull the heart and veil the eyes**

Then, having made this sparkling point, John finished with this 'downer': 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.' 1Jn 5:21.

Why did he finish there?

It was because he had finished with the highpoint of the gospel of sonship.

‘You are a son and you have a fellowship *personally* with God, as a member of the body of Christ, and with every other son and daughter of God.’

This is the gospel of sonship!

Having finished with this high point, he then entreated, ‘Be careful not to draw back from that truth.’

‘Little children, keep yourselves from idols.’ John was not specifically referring to bowing down to wooden crafted things or gold crafted things or chasing after money or the like.

Of course, we are not to do those things, and these can become idolatry.

However, the idol that John was referring to here is *another gospel* – a gospel *other than* what he had proclaimed.

We know this because the book of Jeremiah declares, ‘Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For this is Your rightful due.’

The Lord was speaking to all the wise people in the world; we could even say to the ‘wise ones’ in the church, as well.

‘For among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like You. But they are altogether dull-hearted.’ Jer 10:7-8.

Now, when Jeremiah said ‘dull-hearted’, he meant that the lamp of their spirit was *not able to receive the light*.

And why was that? Why was their heart dull?

It was because it was *covered* – covered with the *veil* that stops it from receiving the very *light of life*.

‘They are altogether dull-hearted and foolish; [Why? It is because] a wooden idol is *a worthless doctrine*.’ Jer 10:8.

Can I emphasise the point that John was declaring? This is the gospel of your salvation – the power to become the son of God whom you were predestined to be, even before the foundation of the world, in Christ.

He was saying, ‘Walk in *this word!*’

### **Keep seeking and walking in the word of sonship through repentance and faith**

And *foundational* to walking in this word is *repentance and faith*.

We actually have to *keep seeking* this word.

It is very easy to draw back to a ‘worthless doctrine’ because we look for *another way* to live. We think that there is an easier way or a better ‘good’ to follow.

To pursue this other way is to give ear to Satan, who says that we can have the ‘good’ of our *own understanding*.

However, if we pursue the good of our own understanding, then we are no different from the dull-hearted and foolish.

Understanding has nothing to do with *intellect*. The Lord is saying that the wisest, cleverest people on the earth cannot even get close to this understanding.

It is not received by means of our brain – understanding is received into *our heart*.

### **The joy of sonship – a son of God now**

The book of Revelation reveals the situation where the Ephesian presbytery had fallen from the gospel of sonship.

They were beginning to teach *worthless doctrines* – many theologies and understandings and misappropriations of the Scripture that were taking away the *joy* of salvation from those who heard the word.

The joy of your salvation is not just ‘You can be a better person’. The joy of your salvation is not just ‘saying the sinner’s prayer’, hoping that you are going to ‘get into heaven’.

Rather, the joy of your salvation is that *you are a son of God now*; that you are walking *with Him* each day as a member of His body.

### **Recovery to first love – remembering the word and culture of sonship**

Now, the Lord Jesus, by the Spirit – the same Spirit who is affirming to us our sonship – said to the Ephesian presbytery that they needed to *return to first love*.

Remember that first love is the gospel of sonship, which has a living understanding, or *culture*, that

demonstrates that this is *the word by which we live*, and is the word that *we are becoming*.

Jesus exhorted the Ephesian presbytery that in order to return to first love, they needed to *remember* from where they had fallen.

Then they needed to *repent*.

And then they needed to do the *first work*.  
Rev 2:4-5.

How do we recover to first love?

### **Remembering that we are birthed by the gospel of sonship**

Let us begin with 'remembering'.

To 'remember' is to bring to mind or to our awareness something that we have *previously known*.

Now, there are some people who have lived by a Christian philosophy, and are not actually *born*.

If that is true for you, you *can be born as a son* of God today.

If you will hear His voice, *don't harden your heart* and dismiss the gospel of sonship on the basis of a lot of doctrinal philosophies.

But, there will be some who *were* born; and that life has been *diminished*, because you have been a little child who has *turned to idols*.

You have to *remember* what it was to be birthed.

This is what the Lord is saying, because we are *only* birthed by the gospel that *proclaims our sonship*.

In order to *remember first love*, from which they had fallen, the Ephesian presbyters needed to remember *the word and culture of sonship*.

So, the question is, *how* do we remember? Do we sit down, close our eyes and think really hard about the past?

No! Jesus explained to us how to remember.

### **Asking for the bread of His word**

The Gospel of Matthew recorded that Jesus said to *ask*!

'Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.'  
Mat 7:7-8.

There is *an initiative* that needs to be taken to obtain the gospel of sonship.

And the reason that we do *not* ask is because we are *comfortable with our theologies*.

'Asking' is our *petition* of the Father *for His word*.

Can you see that we are to ask the Lord for His *word*?

Jesus said that we are actually to pray this way *every day*. He said, 'When you go into the secret place, pray to your Father this way: "Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done ... give us this day our daily bread".'  
Mat 6:9-11. Luk 11:2-3.

The 'bread' is the *word from heaven*. And He was saying that *we have to ask for it*.

So, 'asking' is our petition of the Father for His word. It is not asking for a theology; it is not asking for doctrine; it is not asking for power to live a good life.

*It is asking for the word of truth that defines our sonship*.

And whom are we asking? We are asking God the Father Himself.

Jesus instructed us to do this. 'Go into the secret place and ask the Father.'  
Mat 6:6.

### **Knocking on the door – receiving the word committed to the presbytery**

What about 'knocking on the door'? Mat 7:7. 'Knocking on the door' means *coming to Christ who is the Door*.

So, we are to *ask* the Father. And what does the Father do?

He directs us to Christ. We are to *knock* on the Door, who is Christ.

How do we do that?

*We come to those who are the face of Christ to us*.

This means coming to those *to whom the word from the beginning has been committed*.

This is to come to the *presbytery*.

That is where the door is!

We knock on the door by *receiving the word* that is proclaimed by His ascension gift messengers. Remember that they have received grace *from Christ*.

Then we *continue* in the *fellowship* of the word with them.

So, when we 'knock on the door', we are *hearing* the word.

Those who *receive* the word *join the fellowship*, or *come through the door* – that is their entry into that fellowship.

This is what John said, isn't it?

'This word which we proclaim to you – we do so, so that you will *have fellowship with us*, and our fellowship is *with the Father and His Son*.' 1Jn 1:3.

### **The word - living bread of sonship, not the stone of legal requirements**

It is interesting, in relation to 'seeking' and 'knocking', that John wrote 'the Father and His Son'.

We will continue in the passage in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus exhorted us to ask, seek and knock. Mat 7:7-8.

He said that if we do ask, seek and knock, there will be an answer.

But we are to be prepared to receive the answer *that the Father and Son give us*, because it will not be according to what we naturally think it will be.

Jesus continued, 'Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?'

'If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!'

'Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.' Mat 7:9-12.

This is amazing, isn't it? Jesus was saying, 'You have to ask; you have to knock. And when He gives you the answer, it will not be a *stone*, and it will not be a *serpent*. It is going to be *bread*.'

Then He said, 'This is the Law and the Prophets.'

Why is that amazing?

It is because He said, also, that the Law and the Prophets hang on the command *to love the Lord our God*. Mat 22:37-40.

He said that the *word* that is proclaimed to you *enables you to fulfil that law upon which all the Law and the Prophets hang*.

Now, the gospel of sonship from the Father, which is declared by the Son, is not the *stone* of a *legal standard of righteousness* that needs to be satisfied by His children.

You can see what Jesus was saying – if we ask for *the word*, He is not going to give us *a standard* that we need to try to attain to!

This is what He was saying in relation to 'a stone'.

### **Continually asking the Father for the bread from heaven**

A person who is asking for the *bread of heaven*, does not want the *stone of a religious doctrine* by which to live.

That is why they are asking for the *gospel*!

And the Father *sets them in the fellowship of Christ* so that they can partake of the bread from heaven, who is Christ. Joh 6:51.

Can you see that 'asking' is not only for those who have been loyal to a traditional doctrine?

*Asking* is what *every son* of God does, every time that they come before the Father. We are to continue to ask.

When we cease from asking for the word of our sonship, we are preferencing a *stone* over the *living bread* which comes down from heaven.

If we cease from asking, which we are to continue to do, then we are saying, '*We have what we need, and we are going to live by that standard*.'

No! We are to live by *a living word*, that *proceeds* from the mouth of God. Mat 4:4.

### **The Father's word of sonship from the tree of life or the lie of the serpent of old**

Now, what about the serpent?

'If he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?' Mat 7:10.

In this statement, Jesus was saying that *the word of sonship* is not the food that belongs to the realm of the *angels*.

Remember that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life were both in the garden of Eden.

The tree of life was food *to sustain Adam and Eve in fellowship with Yahweh*. The food from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was food for the angels.

When Adam and Eve ate of that tree, they did so *believing the lie of Satan*, whom the Scripture calls a 'serpent'.

When the Lord gives to us the food that we ask for, He does not give us *the food that the serpent promised* to us.

In this regard, He does not give women in the church the capacity to craft the culture of their house in their *own* image.

And He does not give to men the capacity, through the food, to take dominion over their environment and their life, as if they can now become like the cherubs.

This is what Jesus meant when He said that the Father is not going to give us a serpent.

We live by the food that is put forward by 'the serpent of old' when we believe that the desires and motivations of our *own* heart are the way that lead to life.

We could call this 'the gospel of good and evil'. This is the *food of serpents*.

On the other hand, the gospel of sonship is the *fruit of the tree of life*, that enables us to mature as sons of God in the fellowship of Christ.

### **Restored to the gospel of sonship – restored to first love**

This is beautiful, isn't it?

In His letter to the Ephesians in the book of Revelation, Jesus addressed them for *having fallen from first love*. Rev 2:4-5.

As we have discussed, first love is not merely an emotion; neither is it a 'committed collective'.

To have fallen from first love is to have fallen from *the gospel of sonship*.

He says that if we will be *restored*, He will give us the right to *eat from the tree of life*. Rev 2:7.

If we will turn again to the gospel, He will say, 'You can *eat* of that gospel.' And even more than this, 'You can *become part* of it.'

When we eat this fruit, we partake of the body and blood of Jesus by receiving, believing and

obeying the word of the cross as it is proclaimed by Christ's messengers.

As we do so, we become *part* of the tree of life, so that the word and testimony that we proclaim is *the fruit of the tree of life to others*.

### **When we repent, we are able to receive the light of the word of truth and be changed**

We have considered what it is to 'remember' first love. 'Remembering' involves *asking* and *knocking*.

We will now consider, from Jesus' letter to the Ephesian church, 'repenting' and 'doing the first works'. Rev 2:5.

The Ephesian presbyters needed to repent from the *alternative gospels* that they had ministered in the church, so that they could *receive the word of truth as true food* from the Father.

'Repentance' literally means 'to turn'.

The apostle Paul said that when one *turns* to the Lord, the veil of all these *other* understandings, which unavoidably affect our ability to receive the word of truth, is taken away. When we repent, we are actually *able to receive that light*. 2Co 3:16.

We do not receive the full statement of it. We receive only the light for *our next step as a son* of God.

And, as we receive that light, we are changing from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory, step by step. 2Co 3:18.

### **First works – to participate by faith in the fellowship of the present truth word**

The apostle Paul said that a person who is hearing and receiving this word is enabled with the faith of the Son of God Himself. Rom 10:17.

We are not talking about our *own capacity* to believe. As we give our ear to hear what the Spirit is saying, the *word is granting to us faith*, and that faith enables us to believe.

And the evidence of believing is, firstly, *speaking*.

That is, having received the same spirit of faith as Christ, *I believed, and therefore I spoke*. 2Co 4:13.

The 'first works' for the Ephesian presbytery, as those who were to turn and receive that word, were to *participate* by faith in the *fellowship of the word of present truth* that was being ministered to them by Christ through the apostle John.

John was laying this word down to them, and they needed to *hear* it; they needed to *see* it; they needed to *look upon Christ* and *mourn*; and then they needed to *continue to break it open and minister it* according to their own sanctification.

In this fellowship, they could *hear* what Christ was saying to His church, receive *illumination*, *turn* and look into the face of Christ, and *rightly divide the word* by the capacity of the Spirit of God.

Once established in this fellowship and engaged in these works, they would then be able to *proclaim* the word of life that is *from the beginning*.

This is the *word of sonship* through which the hearers could be then *born as sons* whom the Father had named them to be.

### **Turning away from alternatives to the gospel of sonship**

To be restored to first love, to the gospel of sonship, we must also *recognise* and *turn from* the religious philosophies and doctrinal traditions that we have believed and taught in the church as alternatives to the gospel of sonship.

This is a vital point.

I am not saying that we, as a fellowship, know what the gospel of sonship is, and that everyone else has 'defunct gospels'; and that we all simply need to 'cohere 'around our understanding!

I am saying that the gospel of sonship is *the purpose of God* proclaimed in the Scriptures, and that we are *being restored* to that, through *repentance*.

We have to accept that many of the things that we have understood, and I can personally testify to this, have been based on, and imbued with, an intellect or a philosophy or a theology or a theory or an ideology, that has *affected our ability to see the truth*.

### **Continuing in repentance and faith**

We are not saying that we have attained the gospel of sonship. We are saying that we are rejoicing that we know, and *the Spirit is restoring to us*, the gospel of sonship, as we *continue to repent*.

There are things that we are having to put off and, as we do that, the light is shining brightly.

*Our initiative of faith is to continue to ask; to continue to seek; to continue to knock.*

And when we realise that what we have understood has been affected by our *natural understanding* or by *past understandings*, we easily repent.

### **Grace to rejoice, turn and respond in faith**

Do you see that this is *grace coming to the humble*?

We are not saying that we are more humble than anyone else! We are simply realising that we have not *been* what the gospel of sonship is.

And we are *rejoicing* that the Lord is calling us to *be* that gospel.

We are *turning* each time that the word comes.

And we are *letting go easily* of things that we *formerly* understood, to walk in *what the word is calling us to today*.

Paul said to us, 'Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart.' Heb 3:15.

*We harden our heart when we remain loyal to the traditions of the past.*

So, in recent years, and with much grief, we have come to realise that our gospel was not the gospel of sonship.

### **Understanding the new birth so that we can mature as sons of God**

Now, we have always understood that we are supposed to be sons of God. You would have to not read the Bible to not understand that!

But what we did *not* know was *how* a person became a son of God.

Was it just by believing with your head? Were there some activities that you needed to *do*? What should your life 'look like' if you are born as a son of God? Should you be overcoming all evil? Should you be having a healthy life?

All of these 'factors' can feed into what it means to be born of God.

So, it is confronting to realise that we actually did not really know *how* a person is born of God.

But that does not mean that we were not born.

It simply means that we *stay little*, doesn't it?

This is what Paul was saying in relation to the Hebrews. 'I want to tell you so much more about Melchizedek, about your priestly activity; but you are *still carnal*, just *mere babes*.' Heb 5:10-14.

We want to walk in the way so that we are *moving from milk to meat*, and are *growing up* and eating and walking in the way of *mature sonship*.

We have recognised the need to be born again; but we did not understand *how* a person is born again. This truth eluded us.

We have had *veils over our eyes* in relation to this, even though we were committed, working hard, desiring to see the truth.

### **Knowing the assurance of sonship**

And we could not let go of those *theologies* or those *histories* that give us *some certainty*.

But our 'assurance' is not in those things!

Our assurance is *the assurance of sonship*. It is the assurance of *the Holy Spirit bearing witness* with our spirit, that we are sons of God. Rom 8:16.

That is the only assurance we need, isn't it?

So, the truth eluded us because of our loyalty to other doctrines and ideologies that were not the gospel of sonship.

They have been a veil over our eyes.

### **Applying ourselves to understanding what the Spirit is saying regarding our sonship**

However, as we have turned to the Lord and have *applied* ourselves to understanding, the Lord has been restoring to us the gospel of sonship.

To 'apply ourselves to understanding' is to *talk about it*, to actually *spend time* to understand what it means to be a son of God; how we are born again.

This involves labour. To search these things out is actually the labour that belongs to *our kingship*, to *our name*, to *our sonship*.

These are *precious jewels* that the Lord wants us to *search out*, and that He wants to *grant to us* as the glory of *our inheritance* as sons.

As we have turned to the Lord and have applied ourselves to understanding what the Spirit is saying to the churches, the Lord has been restoring the gospel of sonship to us.

We do not yet see 'the whole lot'. We know that there are many things that we still *see dimly*; but we are rejoicing that we are *beginning to see*.

And we have the *testimony* of that. We do not make any judgements about others or other doctrines.

But we *can bear witness to the reality* that we are *sons of God now*.

### **Born to both see and to enter the kingdom – three birthing actions**

We now understand that there are *three necessary birthing actions* that must take place in our life in order for us to be established in the kingdom of heaven.

We must be born *from above* to see the kingdom of heaven; born of *water and of the Spirit* to enter the kingdom.

We are born to see the kingdom when the *seed* of the *word* from the Father has germinated in our heart, and we are *illuminated* to see our *calling* as a son of God.

We are born of water and of the Spirit to enter the kingdom when, through *baptism* and *communion*, we are *joined to* and have *ongoing fellowship in Christ's offering and sufferings* as members of His body.

Baptism and communion are *ongoing* and *concurrent* realities of our Christian pilgrimage.