

Greater Treasure

A meditation on the Christian gospel

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Introduction

'By faith Moses ... choosing rather to suffer affliction ... esteeming the *reproach* of Christ greater riches than the *treasures* in Egypt ... looked to the reward.' Heb 11:24-26.

Above all else, the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that there are greater treasures in suffering reproach with Christ, than in all that the world has to offer. The richest treasure of all is found in precious fellowship with Christ, where the purging effect of His sufferings delivers the soul of man from the corrupting leaven of self-interest and from the power of death itself. This is what Paul meant when he said, 'That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death'. Phil 3:10.

This is also what the writer of the book of Hebrews was urging when he said, 'Let us go out to Him, outside the camp, *bearing His reproach*'. Heb 13:13. At the very heart of the Christian faith is the call to 'go out' and join Christ in bearing His reproach. This is how we *obtain testimony* that God has given us eternal life. 1 John 5:10,11.

The richness of the gospel is that Christ's suffering – particularly in sharing His reproach – enables us to purge the leaven of corruption so

that we can lay hold of incorruption, of Christ's incorruptible life, here and now. This is what Paul meant when He spoke of knowing 'the power of His resurrection', and of attaining, by some means, the out-resurrection (Gr. *exanastasis*). Phil 3:10,11. How do we deal with the leaven of corruption, through participation in the cross of Christ? This is the heartland of all gospel meditation, and is the central theme of this study.

Keeping the feast

Paul says that 'Christ our *Passover* has been sacrificed for us', and then calls us to 'keep the feast'. 1 Cor 5:6-8. The feast to which he is referring is the feast of 'unleavened bread'. What then does it mean to 'keep' this feast? First, we find deliverance through the blood of the Passover Lamb, and then we are joined to His sufferings whereby we purge out leaven. This is our commitment in the celebrating of the bread and wine. The 'feast' that we keep is principally to do with the unleavened bread, which was also called 'the bread of affliction' because the seven-day period reminded Israel of the affliction from which they were being delivered. Deut 16:3.

Purge out leaven

This is what is behind Paul's statement, 'Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore *purge out* the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us *keep the feast*, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the *unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*.' 1 Cor 5:6-8.

Love is not puffed up

We lay hold of the *treasure* of eternal life when we humbly deal with corruption within ourselves, and demonstrate Christ's incorruptible life. 'Love suffers long ... does not parade itself, is not puffed up [cf. leaven] ... is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.' 1 Cor 13:4-7.

The reproach of Christ transferred to us

When we sum up the Christian gospel, we can say, very simply, that in Christ's death, He has transferred *our condition* to Himself, and transferred *His righteousness* to us. We have referred to this engagement with God in Christ as the 'adoptive transfer'. Enlarging upon this, we would say that just as our death has been transferred into Him, so too His death has been transferred to us, so as to swallow up our death. So, then, the cup of His sufferings is apportioned to us. When we suffer, justly or unjustly, our relationship with Christ through faith is such that these sufferings are not *our* death, but *His*. He has embraced all our sufferings in Himself, and now asks us to share in *His* sufferings, to fill up our portion, for His sake and for the sake of His body. Col 1:24.

Blessed when we suffer reproach

This is truly amazing, and gladdens the heart of every Christian. This is why the apostles say that we are blessed when we suffer reproach. 1 Peter 4:14. We learn how to be joyful when we are reproached, and set our hearts upon the greatest treasure of all. So then, as we keep the feast of His Passover, we guard against any 'leaven' that can cause the bread to be puffed up. We are to carefully purge out leaven, and not be discouraged when the leaven of reactive responses is found in our hearts. Rather, we need to relax in humility and find rest in the process of purging. We should allow a 'Spirit of glory and of God' to rest upon us. 1 Peter 4:14. Then we will not be surprised, disappointed or anxious about our faults. We will find rest in Christ, and rejoice as we obtain testimony, and as our true testimony is raised up by Christ.

It's important to find this kind of joy, relief and even good humour, and to allow God to raise our testimony, not lift up our own testimony. Remember what Jesus said, 'If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true'. John 5:31.

PART 1

The Christian response to reproach

'If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.' 1 Peter 4:14.

It is fundamental to our sharing in Christ's sufferings, that when the 'zeal' of His house consumes us, then indeed 'the reproaches of those who reproach [Christ] have fallen on [us]'. Psa 69:9. Like Moses who embraced the *reproach* of Egypt, and like Paul who took 'pleasure ... in *reproaches* ... for Christ's sake', we too must make a choice to be '*reproached* for the name of Christ' whereupon *we* are blessed, and '*He* is glorified'. 1 Peter 4:14.

If Moses, in his time, esteemed the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than the *entire treasure* of Egypt, would we not do likewise? Heb 11:26. Indeed, the real treasure is that reproach and humiliation

lead to repentance, and that reproach is part of the mechanism by which God *breaks the heart*, making way for those who are broken and contrite of heart to dwell with Him. 'Reproach has *broken my heart*, and I am full of heaviness.' Psa 69:20.

The book of Jeremiah records that, 'Surely, after my turning, I *repented*; and after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, because I bore the *reproach* of my youth'. Jer 31:19.

We must see the rebuke of reproach as a tailor-made suffering that holds us to repentance, and to the 'Feast of Unleavened Bread', ie to the aspect of His suffering that is transferred from Him, to us, for our sake, that we might effectively purge out leaven. Suffering in this aspect, then, becomes an entirely proactive dimension, and typifies our vital and proactive fellowship in Christ's work.

Christ our Overseer

Furthermore, because we are decisively joining the sufferings of Christ, which were on *our* account, we are assured that Christ, the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, is walking through our humiliation, chastening and repentance *with* us, all the while purging corruption, and bringing us back from the death of sin *with* Himself.

Precisely because He is our Shepherd and Overseer, we know that we are not the victims of anything whatsoever. We are called to walk with Christ from the first communion (the last supper) to Gethsemane, to the halls of Caiaphas, Herod and Pilate, and all the way to the finished work. However, the Overseer of our souls is directing and overseeing this pathway. As His sufferings become ours, He is purging us so that we may be fully cleansed of all corruption.

In the background to these meditations, we know this to be essential to the matter of laying hold of the *sure mercies of David*. They were so called because David *learned* Christ, by the Spirit of Christ, to the extent that he perceived and apprehended the promise of being thoroughly redeemed from corruption, able then to inherit the *incorruption* of the new creation, in the power of His resurrection.

The seat of the scornful

As Peter says, at the points of reproach, on 'their part He is blasphemed', while on our part, 'He is glorified'. 1 Peter 4:14. Psalm one aptly describes the alternative position and pathway of the wicked. 'Blessed is the man who *walks not* in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the *seat of the scornful*.' Psa 1:1. Observe the progression that is stated here. The wicked progress from the 'counsel' to the 'path' and then to the 'seat' of the scornful.

The scorner – the debater

The profile of the 'scorner' is well developed in the book of Proverbs. The scoffer cannot be corrected so as to forsake foolishness. Prov 9:6,7. So he does not walk in the 'way of understanding', in the 'knowledge of the Holy One' – whose way is the way of offering. Prov 9:6,10.

Failure to join the fellowship of offering, in the cross, only ever leads to argumentation and debate, whereas a wise man allows reproach to break his heart and to open a process whereby he gains an understanding of the Holy One.

So, when 'a scoffer seeks wisdom', he 'does not find it, but knowledge is easy to him who understands'. Prov 14:6.

'If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, and if you scoff, you will bear it alone.' Prov 9:12. This verse indicates that when a man could be wise and thus benefit himself, his scoffing will likewise mean that he alone bears the fruit of his argumentation.

Paul has this in mind when he discusses the wisdom of the cross and its fellowship of offering: 'Where is the wise man? Where is the *scribe*? Where is the *debater* of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?' 1 Cor 1:20 NASU.

The blindness of the scribes and Pharisees gives clear warning as to the condition into which religion can fall. 'How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge. Turn at my rebuke; surely I will *pour out My spirit* on you; I will make My words known to you.' Prov 1:22,23. So we delight in the kind of rebuke that leads to being filled with His Spirit, and with an understanding of His way.

Christian response versus scornful response

Clearly, then, our responses at various points of rebuke and reproach become critical, for it is there that we show ourselves believers or scorners.

The scorner has avoided and rejected the reproach of Christ, and now scorns Christ and those who choose the way of reproach. The scorner, in fact, becomes the *source* of reproach, just as we read: 'Cast out the scoffer, and contention will *leave*; yes, strife and reproach will *cease*'. Prov 22:10. Reproach is the mode of the scorner. This mode, which is fundamental to the spirit of the world, is typified in the various mechanisms and devices of the popular media.

As an illustration, consider the popular news media, where the mode of the 'scorner' works like so. Ideas, actions, decisions, achievements, individuals or groups are portrayed, either in a praiseworthy or critical light, so as to canvass public opinion. Media transmissions are used to cast up waves of speculation upon which the community will rise or fall in support or opposition. This speculation then leads to the confirming or condemning of an idea, person or group. The suggestion is thus made that unpopular or non-aligned alternatives should be identified, targeted and discriminated against. Frequently, a further aim is that this speculation might *mobilise* the community, and that a particular cause will draw empowerment from public opinion and outrage. In some cases, those who are motivating this process are hoping to push their cause into the legal arena, where action can be taken to expose the guilty, or bring reproach to innocent victims, just as it was with Christ.

Our response to reproach

We read in the book of Proverbs: 'For *my* mouth will speak *truth*; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are with righteousness; *nothing crooked* or perverse is in them. They are all plain to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge.' Prov 8:7-9. The key to blessing, when reproached, is to maintain the silence of the Lamb, and to guard our lips so as not to speak in a reactive or perverse way. 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a *lamb* before its shearer is *silent*, so He opened not His

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mouth. In His humiliation His *justice was taken away.*' Acts 8:32-33. So it for us also. When we are reproached, our justice is taken away.

Recalling the verse from Psalm one, we know that we are blessed if we accept reproach, and refuse the 'counsel of the ungodly', the 'path of sinners' and the 'seat of the scornful'. So then, whether we simply speak the truth, as appropriate, or whether we are silent (Christ demonstrated both of these responses), believers rest their case entirely within the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. As Jesus said, if we bear witness of ourselves, our testimony is not true, for 'surely He [is the One who] scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble'. John 5:31; Prov 3:34.

So we should heed what Jesus said in His beatitude sermon, 'Blessed are you when they ... say all kinds of *evil* against you', and 'Woe to you when all men *speak well* of you'. Matt 5:11; Luke 6:26.

PART 2

Keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Suffering wrongfully quickly highlights whether our responses are Christian or not. 1 Peter 2:19. So reproach becomes a blessing to us as believers, because it exposes the leaven of malice and wickedness that can so easily rise *up* within our hearts. Furthermore, the bearing of reproach leads us *into* the cross, where we find a mechanism for the *purging* of leaven. This subject is extensive, but important if we are to *guard our koiononia* so that it is a true participation in the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Keeping the feast

The whole matter of 'keeping the feast', 1 Cor 5:8, of finding *full participation* in Christ, is strongly conveyed in the elements of the feasts of Israel: first in the Feast of Passover, involving the Lamb, the unleavened bread and the sheaf of firstfruits, then the Feast of

Pentecost with its emphasis on *leavened* bread (our sinful condition) and the 7th month Feast of Tabernacles, depicting the goal of completion in Christ (focused in the Day of Atonement).

A three-day journey

Passover is the first and foremost feast in which we are to participate. The story of the first 'Passover', involving the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, began when Moses said to Pharaoh, 'We will go *three days' journey* into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He will command us'. Ex 8:27.

Straightaway, the symbolic theme of the 'three days and three nights' of Christ's Passover comes to mind. The journey to meet God in the offering of Christ is represented by the 'three days'. Let us express it this way. We must all go a three-day journey to sacrifice to the Lord, here and now, just as Moses indicated to Pharaoh. In his prophetic statement, Moses was echoing the fact that we must participate in a three-day, three-aspect feast, if we are to join the sacrifice of Christ and 'keep the feast'. 1 Cor 5:8.

Of course, in the Old Testament story, Moses and Israel were not permitted to make this three-day journey. Ex 8:32. When God *did* deliver them on the occasion of that first Passover, they then embarked upon a forty-year journey to reach the promised land. In time, they were instructed to add the 'feast of firstfruits' to the elements of the Passover feast, so that the Passover lamb on the 14th day, was followed by a sabbath on the 15th which inaugurated the seven days of unleavened bread. This was followed by the waving of the sheaf of barley firstfruits on the 16th of the month of Nisan. Lev 23:4-14. This is significant when we examine Christ's fulfilment of this feast, and examine our 'keeping' of this feast.

All the way to firstfruits

In *our* 'three-day journey' to participate fully in Christ, we must embrace the message of unleavened bread. Furthermore, we must continue all the way to the aspect of the 'sheaf of firstfruits', which is expressive of Christ's work in including us in the collective sheaf (we could say, 'the body of Christ') of which He is the first of the firstfruits. A central theme in this whole meditation is that we must understand

'unleavened bread' if we are to arrive at 'firstfruits'. In other words, we will not attain a genuine inclusion in Christ (who is the Sheaf of firstfruits) with a genuine incorporation *within His body* (the body that shows forth His death, *and in which the 'finished' work is realised*), if we do not apprehend the meaning of unleavened bread. This is the main practical implication of our study.

A single event from Passover to Pentecost

In pursuing this practical goal, let us see that we are to engage ourselves in the festal program from Passover to Pentecost, as if this is all a *single* event, with one *central* theme: the matter of *unleavened and leavened bread*, in relation to firstfruits. This is the key to proceeding to the Feast of Tabernacles, where the Day of Atonement indicates our completion in Christ.

So, our participation in the elements of bread and wine is the focal point in keeping the feast, with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. We are to purge out the old leaven of malice and wickedness.

This could seem straightforward, except that we must battle with leaven for the whole of our lives, for the whole seven-day passage of life. Leaven, as the symbol indicates, is miniscule in dimension, but all-pervasive in effect. A little leaven leavens the whole lump, we are told. 1 Cor 5:6. In other words, even the smallest element of malice makes us *guilty of malice*. Furthermore, permitting leaven to remain will lead to a condition of being totally *puffed up*, as we read in Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

So we must undertake the whole three-day journey that will bring us to full participation in Christ as the Firstfruits. Then, once established in Him, with an understanding of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we must proceed to the message of Pentecost, which carries the firstfruits message further, and also raises the subject of the *leaven that must be purged*. Unlike the first feast, Pentecost was celebrated with *leavened* bread. Here, two *leavened* loaves, called the 'bread of firstfruits', were waved on the day called the 'day of firstfruits', fifty days from Passover. Lev 23:20; Num 28:26.

Overview of the feasts

If we take a very preliminary view of the feasts, of their fulfilment by Christ, and of our inclusion in these feasts, it would appear this way:

Passover – Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

Unleavened bread – We are to keep the feast, Paul says, and to do so with unleavened bread. Participating *in* the feast becomes vital to our fellowship with Christ, and the process of removing all leaven from our lives, across the whole span of our lives, is implied by the *seven* days of unleavened bread (note the use of the number 'seven' to indicate a complete process, across the whole span of life).

Sheaf of firstfruits – Christ fulfilled this aspect by the waving (offering) and resurrection of His body, making a clear pathway for our inclusion in His body, as His 'brethren', and for His body to be commissioned in the power of the Holy Spirit. John 20:21.

Pentecost – Christ's sending of the promised Holy Spirit on the New Testament day of Pentecost, highlighted what the waving of the bread of firstfruits (two wave loaves), as part of the original feast, really signified. Clearly, the waving of these loaves *containing leaven* (unlike the earlier Feast of Unleavened Bread), signified the ongoing sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit by which we are to proceed to the third and final feast.

Tabernacles – Genuine participation in the elements of the earlier feasts was to lead us onwards to the final feast – the one that signifies the goal and fullness of our participation, in the seventh month.

Three aspects of leaven

When Paul introduces the subject of leaven, in his address to the Corinthian church, he does so by raising *three specific faults* which he describes as having a leavening effect.

The first is the carnal tendency to be 'puffed up on behalf of one against the other', where ones are seeking empowerment, distinction and glory over others, forgetting that whatever they have has been received and not earned. 1 Cor 4:6,7.

The second is the kind of puffing up that occurs when ones cease to imitate the way of fatherhood, and behave as originators without reference to those who are 'coming' to them. 1 Cor 4:16-19. In this case, the strength of their 'word' is not matched by the genuine power of the kingdom. 'Now some are puffed up, as though I were *not coming to you.*' 1 Cor 4:18. The implication here is that the 'puffed up' Corinthian church has assumed autonomy as a local church, presuming the capacity to be self-sustaining, and is losing connection to Christ through His administration. The church at Corinth is beginning to behave as if there is no presbytery – no one '*coming to us*' in respect of a process for salvation. Without the oil flowing through lampstand administration, the church has become vulnerable to more serious leaven. So Paul speaks of testing 'the power' of those who are puffed up, implying that they have lost their supply of oil. 1 Cor 4:19.

Paul's third concern is with the leaven of immorality, accompanied by a failure to mourn for genuine deliverance from the leavening effect of sin. 1 Cor 5:2.

As we know, leaven has a 'puffing up' effect, where its effect is to enlarge those matters that cause the bread of our participation to be 'leavened' by malice and wickedness, rather than by an unleavened expression of sincerity and truth. The emphasis of 1 Corinthians chapters four and five is to guard the true seed (and bread) of predestination and identity from the corrupting effect of leaven.

Paul goes further to describe the various kinds of corrupting leaven – covetousness, extortion, idolatry – to which a church can become vulnerable once the connection to effective administration is placed in jeopardy. And these are purely internal issues, not the result of external pressure. He then highlights that we ought not to keep company with anyone who is leavened in this way. 'For what have I to do with judging those outside? Not at all. Ought not you judge those who are inside but those outside God judges. Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person.' 1 Cor 5:12,13 NASU. Paul's discourse proceeds to the question of 'going to law' with an issue toward a brother. And so, the scope of our deliberation becomes quite broad.

Dealing with leaven

So to make some practical application: What kinds of leaven must be exposed and purged? First of all, we can all deal with the leaven of self-justification. We must deal with the pressure to justify ourselves; that is, to be 'puffed up' on behalf of one another. We should also cease to act as if no one is 'coming to us', as if there is no authority for process in our collective living. It is particularly important to identify the leaven of autonomy, for we *do* need an eldership, a 'seven-five' *angelos*, that is walking through the churches.

We must be prepared to ask ourselves, 'What is our own particular leaven, or propensity *for* leaven?' We need our brethren to help us identify *and* deal with these matters. As Jesus taught, if our witness is our *own* witness, then our witness is not true. John 5:31. Our unleavened attitude must be attested to by others.

All leaven purged at Passover

The Scriptures (and supportive commentaries) regarding the Passover feast make it clear that all leaven was sought and removed prior to the commencement of the feast. Ex 12:15. Accordingly, with all leaven removed, the Feast of *Unleavened* Bread could properly commence on the 15th of Nisan, and was to proceed for a total of seven days where, in the antitype, the number seven symbolises the full length of our lives.

The seven-day unleavened feast began with a high day (sabbath of *rest*) on the 15th Nisan, signifying that we were to join ourselves to a purging process that had been established – on the previous day, so to speak. So the type, and its fulfilment, are clear. Christ died somewhere shortly after 3.00 pm on the 14th Nisan. So, with the Jewish day concluding by 6.00 pm, we see that before the end of that day, the Holy One had 'finished' the work of removing leaven. He had returned from the death of sin, and was now ready to be waved and received by the Father. Indeed, He was not left in Sheol and was not suffered 'to see corruption'. Psa 16:10: Acts 2:27.

The sheaf of firstfruits

Now our attention turns to the matter of the 'sheaf of firstfruits' which, in the type, was waved on the 16th of Nisan, 'the day after the sabbath' which commenced the seven days of unleavened bread. Lev 23:11. When and how did Christ fulfil the waving of the sheaf of firstfruits?

Remember now that the journey to participation in His offering is a three-day event. This is important because the 'sheaf of firstfruits' is not fulfilled in one single action by Christ, but in the three-day waving that progressively reveals the pathway of our inclusion in Him, in the sheaf of firstfruits. This is an amazing picture.

The reference to the 'lifting up' of Christ is entirely to do with His being 'waved', just as wave offerings were lifted above the heads of the priests, and is not merely a reference to being lifted up on a cross. John 3:14; 8:28; 12:34. This explains the Scripture, 'If I be lifted up ... I will draw all people to Myself'. John 12:32. Further, the meaning of the sheaf is clear. It depicts our inclusion in Him, as He is lifted up, or waved. This explains why Paul, in the midst of urging us to purge leaven, says, 'For you are truly unleavened'. 1 Cor 5:7. He acknowledges that we are positioned in Him, as sons, in the sheaf, because He is our Passover. We are raised with and into Him. Christ is 'the Firstfruits, and afterward', we are those who are 'Christ's at His coming'. 1 Cor 15:23. So Christ our Passover is the one unleavened Bread in which we share, and in whom we find inclusion in the sheaf. And because this is so, we must therefore purge out leaven. This is how Paul builds His teaching toward understanding the 'bread which we break' – the communion. 1 Cor 10:16.

The three-day operation

In the shadow, we should remember that the Jewish days that were numbered 14th, 15th etc, actually began at sunset (ie around 6.00 pm) on the evening of the previous day. So the 14th Nisan began with the twilight that closed the 13th. So then, the days of Christ's three-day operation were not simply the three 'dates' – 14th, 15th, 16th. The first full day of Christ's death had not passed until after 3.00 pm on the 15th. This is crucial to the calculation that sees Him having risen from

the dead early on Sunday morning – over three full days after His death. Equally, the Passover day on which Christ was crucified, in fulfilment of the shadow, began on the previous evening, when He was sharing the communion with the disciples and saying, ‘This is My body’. It’s significant that He offered them the Passover at the close of the *old* dispensation, and *became* the Passover of the *New* Covenant, all on the same day.

In relating the shadow to Christ’s fulfilment, there are three important points to note, and these relate to:

- a) the unleavened bread eaten with the Passover lamb
- b) the unleavened bread that was prepared for the Feast of Unleavened Bread
- c) the preparation of grain for the sheaf of firstfruits.

Drawing supportive detail from commentators, what emerges is like so:

a) The unleavened bread eaten with the Passover could be of any grain, and it did not involve special preparation. It was not of the new harvest, ie of the new barley harvest, which was about to feature in the Feast of Firstfruits. In this regard, Christ fulfilled the former dispensation, sharing the Passover meal with His disciples ‘with desire’, as the Lamb without spot. He was already unleavened, but the Passover day would yet see Him become sin and endure a fiery process as the Unleavened Bread of the new harvest, a bread which we would be urged to share by ‘keeping the feast’.

b) The unleavened bread being prepared for the feast starting on the 15th day, after Passover, required a *specific* preparation. Matt 27:62. We see that Christ, though He was ‘unleavened’ and without sin, became sin for our sake, and was examined on the 14th day (commencing with Gethsemane). He was searched with fire during the darkness of exclusion. Satan, as we know, could find ‘nothing’ in Him. John 14:30. And so the ‘sure mercies’ prevailed and the Lamb ‘without spot’, was received for the sake of our inclusion. Acts 13:34; Heb 9:14; 1 Peter 1:19. With His work ‘finished’, He had Himself become the Unleavened Bread in which we were included, just as Paul says, ‘For you truly are unleavened’. 1 Cor 5:7.

c) The firstfruits sheaf of the new harvest becomes important because it marks out a *new* dispensation, for there could be no eating of the harvest until the sheaf of firstfruits had been waved. Furthermore, the details of the preparation of the sheaf become important, because although it was waved on the 16th, we note that it would have been marked out late on the 14th, and harvested on the 15th, the day of unleavened bread, in the twilight. The sheaf would need to have been handed to the high priest somewhere at the commencement of the 16th, ready to be offered *on* the 16th, probably the next morning¹. Then the waving on the 16th was to be accompanied with a lamb as a burnt offering, along with its regulation grain and drink offerings. Lev 23:11-13. The helpful point here is that Christ's 'waving' as the Firstfruits commenced with His lifting on the 14th, and was clearly visible at His waving 'into Your hands' late that day, at the very time when the grain of the new harvest was being marked out for harvesting as the sheaf to be waved on the 16th day.²

As we highlighted earlier, the harmony of the Scriptures is that the operation of God is seen to be a three-day, three-event Passover feast, involving the *Lamb*, the *unleavened bread* and the sheaf of *firstfruits*. Our central thread is clear. We must a) proceed from our inclusion in His death in order to b) purge leaven, and c) find expression as a kind of firstfruits in Christ. This is the simple and practical point to which we are reaching. We will not 'make it' to firstfruits unless we journey with Him in the feast of unleavened bread.

1. It is thought that this sheaf was quite large, and that overnight, it may have been even ground into flour and baked into a cake. In any case, the sheaf, in one form or other, was waved on the 16th, together with the offering of a lamb.

2. Our discussion here is to show that Christ's fulfilment of the 'waving' overlapped from the 14th, across the 16th day (the actual day of waving in the shadow) to the third day of His burial, which actually concluded at 3.00 pm on the 17th, Saturday. Then Christ would have risen at some time during the night, which was now Sunday, the first day of the week. This was the finale of His being waved as the Firstfruits. The point of confusion as to the length of the 3 days and 3 nights is resolved if we remember that His three days' burial were not the three 'dates' (the 14th, 15th, and 16th), but rather three full days, commencing at 3.00 pm late on the 14th, approaching the 6.00 pm commencement of the 15th. Then the timing of His resurrection accords with the 1st day of the week.

Justified in Him – our names waved before the Father

With the seven-fold sprinkling and purging work now 'finished', the 'Firstborn', who was also to be the 'Firstfruits', now began to be waved. And not just Him, but *we with Him*. We, who *are* leavened, were all drawn *in* Him, lifted up *by* Him, and carried *with* Him in the pathway of His knowledge by which He justified many. Isa 53:11. The waving of the *sheaf* of firstfruits was now under way – not just the presentation of the one 'Seed', or head of grain, but a sheaf that included us in the outworking of the feast. We were justified in Him, and our names were waved before the Father. Following the sequence of the symbols and of the Passover days – the 14th, 15th and 16th (Lamb, sabbath, waving of sheaf) – we can say that as a result of His justifying work, we were to see ourselves drawn and lifted up into Him, and we were then to *rest* in hope (the 15th, the high day that commenced the seven days of unleavened bread) and we were to observe the process by which His resurrection would complete the waving of the sheaf of firstfruits. With the 16th falling during His burial (the day of waving) we were to enter into the finished work by baptism into His burial, in the faith of resurrection. Thus we were to embark upon the entire seven-day feast (baptised into a whole-of-life exercise) for the complete outworking of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Firstfruits – resurrection life

Then we were to focus on the power of His resurrection that is represented in the events of the day of resurrection. We know that Christ rose early on the weekly sabbath – the first day of the week – fulfilling the prophetic theme of the three days and three nights that He was to be in the grave. It was on this day that He was fully waved as the sheaf, not just as a single Seed, but as the Sheaf of 'firstfruits of them that sleep' – including all of us. 1 Cor 15:20,23.

Importantly, the outcome of the whole feast is resurrection; that is, life from the dead. This is our focus as we keep the feast. This is what Paul meant when he said he was seeking to attain '*exanastasis*'. Phil 3:11. Where and how do we lay hold of this resurrection life? We lay hold of a quota of resurrection life at every point where we 'keep the feast', purging out all leaven and partaking of the Passover meal – Christ's

body which was broken and the cup of the New Covenant in His blood. When we purge what is leavened, or corruptible, we partake of *His unleavened* life, which is incorruptible, and so attain an element of *exanastasis*.

Understanding firstfruits

The matter of Christ being 'waved' as the Sheaf of the firstfruits has three primary points of focus:

- a) His 'lifting up' and cry of 'into Your hands' marks His acceptance by the Father, showing that His work is finished, that His body can now rest for three days and nights, then to be raised as the firstfruits of immortality
- b) Christ Himself is physically raised with the body of immortality
- c) we all, as members of Christ's body, of the Firstborn-Firstfruit church, are shown to be joined to Him by the events of the resurrection day – starting with the discourse with Mary where He speaks of ascending to 'My Father and your Father', followed by the communion with the Emmaus disciples, and the commissioning of the disciples.³

So, in fact, the 'sheaf of firstfruits' aspect of the Passover feast extends across the whole three-day operation, and thoroughly designates our full participation in Him, in the body of Christ, the Firstfruits from the dead.

What we find is that the events of the resurrection day *do* confirm our inclusion *in* Him, in the 'Sheaf of firstfruits'. He says to Mary, 'Don't cling to me for I have not yet *ascended*', but later in the day, He breaks bread with the Emmaus disciples, then appears to the disciples, urging them to 'handle Me and see'. Luke 24:39. Furthermore, He proclaims

3. Commentaries support that Luke 24:33-39 and John 20:19-23 are records of the same event, establishing that on the resurrection day, Jesus does bid them touch His wounds, while having earlier asked Mary not to cling to Him, and that He does commission them as members of His body. Thus our inclusion in Him, in the sheaf of firstfruits, is confirmed on the resurrection day.

peace, and commissions the disciples, by the Holy Spirit, showing that they are confirmed as members of His body, in the sheaf of firstfruits. John 20:17; Luke 24:33-39; John 21:17-23.

Don't cling to Me – I am not yet 'waved'

When Mary clings to Christ, He says: 'Don't [touch] cling to Me, I have not yet ascended' (in other words, 'I have not yet been *waved*'). He is really saying: 'I cannot yet join you to Me, and Myself to you, for I must be waved before the Father, in My physical, resurrected, immortal body'. Then, as that resurrection day continues, we *do* see Him joined to the disciples, and they are joined to Him also. He draws near to the Emmaus disciples and makes Himself known in the breaking of bread. Luke 24:18-31. On that same evening, He now urges the gathered disciples to *touch* His wounds, and believe. Luke 24:39.

So we see that Christ initially restrained Mary, but obviously did 'wave' His body before the Father, before He then came again, revealing Himself to Cleopas and his fellow-disciple on the Emmaus Road. Then 'on the same day at the evening', He connected the disciples and many others (representing the whole firstfruits church) to Him and with Him, as the firstfruits from the dead. Luke 24:33; John 20:19.

Joined to Him in the seven days of unleavened bread

Hence, the Emmaus dialogue and communion on that first resurrection day become quite prophetic, for here Christ begins immediately to join disciples to Himself, in the breaking of bread, by opening their understanding. Luke 24:18ff. In this first 'communion' as the risen Head, He is joining disciples to Himself as the Sheaf, as the Firstfruits of what could now become *unleavened* through participation in the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In the same action, He was linking everything back to 14th Nisan – to *His* Feast – inaugurated at the last supper, for this was now a disciples' feast, with power to join us all in the *one* Feast.

The principle is clear. The Passover is His, and then He joins us to Himself in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and He does so across the period spanning number 'seven'; that is, for the *whole of life*. We begin by participating in the Lamb from the early hours of 14th Nisan – that

is, late on the 13th, once the evening meal – the last supper – saw the ‘cup of blessing’ and then the Gethsemane ‘cup’ extended to us all. Then we are planted in His burial, by baptism, and so offered participation and commission as a fruit of His resurrection.

He proclaims peace, peace to them

It’s the resurrection day, the first day of the week. The doors are shut and He appears to them and stands in their midst. He is among them as the Shepherd of the sheep. His first statement is to proclaim, ‘Peace be with you’. John 20:21. He shows them His hands. They may touch Him and cling to Him now. ‘A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.’ Luke 24:39. It is finished. Peace through His blood has been achieved. The disciples are now justified. He has been crucified for their offences and raised because of their justification. Rom 4:25. He has spoken with the Father and been waved before Him in immortal flesh. He is nail-marked, but incorruptible, having no corruption of any kind. Now the disciples are ‘glad’ for they have seen ‘the Lord’ in His lordship. John 20:20. Now the mortal members of His body may be joined to the immortal Head, in the same Spirit, through the power of the Holy Spirit, which He is about to breathe upon them. This will be the second aspect of peace.

Peace, peace! With the first peace – ‘Peace be with you’ – having been expressed, they are at peace with Him in their union by His blood. Now, as a second element of peace, He will commission them to be active members of His body on earth. ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you’. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”.’ John 20:21-23.

Receiving the firstfruits of the Spirit

The disciples receive the firstfruits of the Spirit, the *zoe*-life by which they can be born again. Now they can be sent in the same Spirit of Christ, to activate and retain a process for the forgiveness of sin.⁴

Peace, peace. There is peace as He is revealed to them, and also peace as they are commissioned to the task. They find peace as one body together with Him, with all divisions removed. Then they find peace as they are commissioned, empowered and sent to oversee the process of 'unleavened bread'.

Christ has '*zoe-fied*' His disciples, and they are born again. They are born from above as He breathes on them. They receive the firstfruits of the Spirit. He gives them power and authority to forgive and retain sin, to bind and loose. John 20:23.

Firstfruits – Pentecost

Of course, the firstfruits theme finds its conclusion in the Feast of Weeks (called 'Pentecost' in the New Testament) where the two leavened loaves, called 'the bread of firstfruits', are waved before the Lord. Lev 23:15-20. In the New Testament fulfilment of this feast, Christ baptises His disciples with the Holy Spirit, and gives them power from on high to go out as witnesses. Acts 1:5,8. And so the picture of our full participation in 'the feast' becomes clear – not to forget the third feast, Tabernacles, where the elements of Passover and Pentecost are fully appropriated.

Passover and Pentecost appropriated – the Day of Atonement

The 'time of the end' (involving the Day of Atonement) will see the establishment of the eschatology of the elements of Passover and Pentecost. While we do not know the day or the hour of those events, we *do* know the days and hours of the Feast of Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, since we are clearly given the 'first day of the week'

4. The 'commission' to 'make disciples' etc may have been expressed in this gathering, but was certainly confirmed in the following days, as Matthew and Mark record.

as a marker from which we can track forward and back. And, certainly, in the context of the fellowship of the body of Christ, we can fully embrace the elements of Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits and Pentecost, where we can pursue the celebration of unleavened bread. At the same time, we can accept the truth of Pentecost, viz. that we must be able to deal with that which is leavened, or 'puffed up'. Although we are immature, 'Corinthian' congregations, we *are* able to deal with leaven. We do not have to have divisions that reduce us to nothing. We can be gathered and kept, and can feast, here and now.

In this regard, we note what Daniel says about the 'time of the end'.

'Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall *corrupt with flattery*; but the people who *know their God* shall be *strong*, and carry out great exploits.

'And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; yet for many days they shall *fall by sword and flame*, by captivity and plundering.

'Now when they fall, they shall be aided with a little help; but many shall join with them *by intrigue*. And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, *purify* them, and make them white, until the *time of the end*; because it is still for the appointed time.' Dan 11:32-35.

Daniel is saying that right until the 'time of the end', we will be challenged by the corruption of flattery (vs 32), by sword and flame (vs 33), by intrigue (vs 34) – and all of this so that we can be purified and made white. Expressing this in 'feast' language, we can say that for the whole of our life's span, for the *seven* days of unleavened bread (mentioned earlier), indeed for the *whole of the church age* from Pentecost to the Feast of Tabernacles, there is a continual need for purifying. As Daniel says, the 'time of the end' is yet for an appointed time.

PART 3

Separated from the world

It is in Jesus' interaction with His own brothers that we find the best illustration of the attitude of separation from the world that must typify our responses also. Note the account in the book of John chapter seven. 'His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also *may see the works* that You are doing".' John 7:3. Here, His own brothers urge Him to go to Judea to be known more openly, and not in secret.

The sword in the house of Mary

Christ's answer was to invoke a sword of sanctification in His own household, showing a clear separation from His brothers, and from the stance they were adopting. In the setting of the interaction, they were really asking Him to justify Himself, and to demonstrate that He and His disciples were a valid healing community, a part of the *status quo* of

the Jewish society. Jesus' reply was to testify that He was *not* part of this popular ethos of 'the world' and its evil deeds. John 7:7.

He replied, 'My time has not yet come, but *your time* is always ready. The *world* cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come.' John 7:6-9.

Clearly, He was identifying the attitude which is 'of the world', which is *not hated* and which always has a 'time' of relevancy.

As the account in John chapter seven proceeds, Jesus does indeed go to the temple, but He proclaims the same challenge, as if we are all to hear and acknowledge this same crucial point of separation: 'My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks *from himself* seeks his *own glory*; but He who seeks the glory of the *One who sent Him* is true, and *no unrighteousness is in Him*.' John 7:16-18.

These are amazing words, in this context of grappling with an unleavened attitude. We could say that the matter first raised by His brothers is now proclaimed to the whole nation, from the temple. Would He reveal *Himself*, so that others would believe? No, indeed. The only righteousness was in revealing the One who sent Him.

Thus He challenged brothers and disciples alike. Who and what are you of? Are you of the world? Are you of God? Everyone is put 'on the spot', so to speak. If the world doesn't hate us, do we really believe?

Hated by the world

There's a strong point here. The world does not hate that which belongs to it. In fact, Jesus went further. He said that the world *cannot* hate you, 'but it hates Me because I testify that its works are evil'. He was saying, in effect, 'You can all go up to the feast, but I am not going yet'. The feast referred to here is the Feast of Tabernacles. So there are amazing implications here, if we are focusing on proceeding to the Feast of Tabernacles.

Certainly, we could relate this to ourselves and say that Christ is among us, just as He was amidst His brothers, and other hearers as

well – particularly on this issue of self-justification. Are we proceeding to keep a feast that He is not ready to keep? Are we advancing ahead of the issues that He is addressing among us? Have we properly understood the implications of the two feasts that bring us to the Feast of Tabernacles, or have these feasts become monuments to legal observances? Let us link the psalmist's words to this discussion: 'Blessed [‘happy’ NLT] are the people who know the joyful sound [‘the joy of the feasts, notably the Day of Atonement’ JFB]’. Psa 89:15. In other words, joyful are those who appreciate the spiritual blessings symbolised by the feasts.

Note how the account concludes in relation to His own brothers. They urged Him to go to Judea, but we read, ‘When He had said these things to them, He remained in *Galilee*’. John 7:9.

Puffed up one way or another

And there's another lesson here as well, from the same account. When He did go up to the feast, we read that ‘there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, “He is good”; others said, “No, on the *contrary*, He deceives the people”’. John 7:12.

So what is happening here? There is a division where some were ‘puffed up’ toward one opinion, and some toward other. In both cases, the issue was the same, as the account highlights. All were speaking on their own account, seeking their own glory. ‘He who speaks from himself [from his own resources] seeks his own glory.’ John 7:18.

Observe, then, what we are to learn about the issue of leaven – of becoming ‘puffed up’ and bearing witness of ourselves. Righteousness is only manifested as we walk in the *Father's* predestination. Only someone seeking the glory of the One who *sent* Him is true, with no unrighteousness within him. The one who projects, justifies or vindicates himself is puffed up and lawless. We have made this point from the story of Cain, whose unrighteousness showed itself as lawlessness. He forfeited his predestination as the firstborn by failing to walk in offering, laying his life down to reveal another and become his brother's keeper.

No connection to the source of truth

Jesus went further still in His discourse with the Pharisees, recorded in the book of John chapter eight. 'Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.' John 8:43. And in the ultimate blow to their presumption of righteousness, He said, 'You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.' John 8:44.

So the issue for them, as for us, is a question of *source*. Who or what were they of? The world cannot stand in the truth because there is no connection to the source of truth. Only He is 'the way, the truth and the life'. John 14:6. Those who are not connected to the truth, can *only* speak from their *own* resources, and so they cannot do other than speak a *lie*. And working backwards, if what is presented is a lie, then the root and source are false also. This is Christ's challenge.

Speaking in our own name

If Christ, in the way of the world, had spoken in His *own* name, the world would have received Him. 'I have come in My *Father's name*, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his *own name*, him you will receive.' John 5:43. In that case, He would not have spoken in the Father's name and would not have revealed the Father to us. Instead, He did what was righteous, *revealing* the One who *sent* Him, and so established a witness that became pivotal for all of us.

If we apply this principle to the pressure that comes on us, either to speak for ourselves, or to speak for the collective 'name' of the church fellowship, we can see the point. The moment when we speak from ourselves, *for* ourselves, we invalidate ourselves. This is why the leaven of self-justification is such an important issue.

Peter's commendation takes up the same point. 'It is commendable', he says, 'if because of *conscience* toward God one endures grief and suffers *wrongfully*'. 1 Peter 2:19. What we are learning here is that there is a strong sense of conscience toward God whereby we are being impressed to suffer wrongfully, as a commendable response.

The blood that speaks

The reason for this is that the blood of Christ speaks. 'You have come ... to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that *speaks* better things than that of Abel.' Heb 12:24. 'The blood of Christ speaking better things than that of Abel' is not merely a reference to His mercy triumphing over vengeance. Heb 12:24. Rather, the blood of Christ is the *whole* message of God.

His blood speaks in such a way, and to such a degree, that we must say nothing *other than* what His blood is saying, and we can *add nothing to* what His blood is saying. There is nothing *more* to say than what the silent 'drip' of the blood of Lamb says to us. In whatever measure, or to whatever degree, we ourselves may be resisting to the point of 'bloodshed', or expending life as participants in His cup, we are only filling up and filling out the *voice of the blood of Christ*, and are not adding anything to it. Heb 12:4; Col 1:24. So then, if we dare not *add* to it, then we dare not protest as if to justify, defend or speak *for* the blood, and we dare not *reconstruct* what His blood is saying by seeking to turn wrong into right. This is what Peter is commending to us, as a matter of conscience toward God. We cannot seek to voice something that the blood has not already said. This is to be our point of conscience.

In fact, the real depth and strength of the matter is this. When the cut of reproach breaks the heart, then the justice or injustice of that cut and the sound of the blood being spilt, is all that needs to be heard, for again, nothing can be added to the voice of the blood of Christ. So we embrace reproach, and other elements of His suffering, simply because it allows His blood to be effective as we believe.

True justice – the healing of the cross

When *His* death is shown forth, transferred from Him to us, then His cross is genuinely active. 1 Cor 11:26. This enables us to be a healing community, where reproach leads to healing, as an entirely different course for justice. 'By His wounds we are healed', as Peter says. 1 Peter 2:24. It is only in the operation of His blood, where our sufferings are joined to His blood which 'speaks', that healing is operative. If it were to be our *own* blood that was speaking, then the sound could only be of self-justification.

Part of this exercise, in reality, is that there is no justice to be found from the spilling of our blood, because we are certainly capable of those actions for which we are reproached, even if we not guilty. Peter's challenge is that we are never entirely without fault, for we are all sheep who have gone astray, even though we have *returned* to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. 1 Peter 2:25. As James observes, 'Whoever shall keep the whole law, but stumble in one point' is 'guilty of all'. Jas 2:9. If we do not accept this, we are deceiving ourselves. Further, it is not by self righteousness, or proclaimed innocence, that we are validated to serve and minister to others. We are priests who are encompassed by infirmity, both ours as well as that of others. Accordingly, we are offering for ourselves, as taught in the book of Hebrews, so that we may have compassion on the ignorant.

The danger of self-justification

This saves us from being our own judge, and forbids us being so. For while we *may* be able to disprove accusations against us, if our motive in doing so is our own self-justification, then we will have departed from Christ in these very actions. The absolute basis of the gospel is that there is no action or work that demonstrates that we are righteous. 'There is *none* righteous, no, not one.' Rom 3:10. 'If we say that we have *no* sin, we deceive ourselves.' 1 John 1:8. As Christians, we believe implicitly in the process of receiving *His* vindication, *His* righteousness, and if we undermine this tenet by selfish protest, or self-justifying pursuit, then we breach the fundamental truth of the Christian faith. So, then, we simply proceed to *live out* His righteousness, always exercising faith toward it, while seeking repentance and cleansing where we fail. 1 John 1:9; 2:29.

To stop proceeding in this humble, faithful manner, right through to completion in Christ, as the Scriptures urge, is to withdraw to a mode of self-justification that can place our salvation in jeopardy. Col 4:12; Heb 13:21. The real test of this proposition, as Peter highlights, is when we do good and still *suffer*. 'What credit is it if when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But *when you do good and suffer*, if you take it patiently, this is *commendable* before God. For to this you were *called* ... that you should follow His steps: Who committed no sin, nor

was deceit [leaven] found in His mouth ... [and] did not *revile* in *return*.' 1 Peter 2:20-23.

What happens when we suffer wrongfully? This is the pivot point of the Christian faith. We must continue to rest ourselves in His justification, and not pursue our own righteousness. Christ has *called* us to suffer wrongfully, and has left us an example that we should follow in His steps. 1 Peter 2:21. So if we prove our case for our *own* justice, according to *our* judgement, then we really *are* reviling in return! 1 Peter 2:23. In that case, we are failing to forgive those who trespass against us, and we are closing the door to their mercy and healing. Therefore, we must take extreme care to do as Christ has done and, when we suffer, to not threaten in response, but to commit ourselves to the One who judges righteously. 1 Peter 2:23.

Recalling our earlier discussion on the blood that speaks, remember, there is only one blood that justifies, and that's His. If my hurt, pain and bloodshed do not belong to His sufferings, through faith, then they avail for nothing. So to justify myself in the midst of hurt, is to put *my* blood in the place of *His*, and is also to cut off my accuser from the blood of Christ that is working for his salvation.

Christ bore all our sins in His body, on Calvary's 'tree', and so purged all our leaven. So, then, threats and reproaches against us actually become a ministry to us, in the sense that we receive the 'stripes' of accusation as belonging to Christ's stripes, which then purge us of our leaven and heal us. 1 Peter 2:24.

Brought back from the dead by returning to the Shepherd

It is here that Peter raises the same thought as in the book of Hebrews. 'That we having *died* to sins, might *live* for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed. For you ... have returned to the *Shepherd* and Overseer.' 1 Peter 2:24,25. Note what the book of Hebrews says about the 'God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the *dead*, that Great *Shepherd* of the sheep, through the *blood*'. Heb 13:20.

Our Shepherd and Overseer is *watching over* our souls. He is overseeing our lives in the world and amidst our Christian brethren, and cautioning us to maintain ourselves in first love. He is shepherding us into the fellowship of the body, lest we be like sheep going astray. And

we could easily go astray if we were to become faithless in the midst of trial. We should not think the fiery trial to be 'strange'. Rather let us partake of Christ's sufferings so that when His glory is revealed, we may be glad with exceeding joy.

Let us beware that our mouths do not rob us of the greater treasure. Like Moses, when we are reproached, let us have respect for the reward. Heb 11:26 AV. If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him glorify God. 1 Peter 4:16. Such an attitude will appear to be impudent, and can even arouse a greater will to break the Christian spirit, just as it has been through the ages. However, we are 'not in any way *terrified* by [our] adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to [us] of salvation, and that from God'. Phil 1:28.

Returning to the first works – purging out leaven

In all these matters we are continuing to heed the admonition which established us a church, over thirty years ago. We are returning to first love, and to the first works – which include the first works of 14th Nisan, viz. purging out the old leaven in a fellowship of the cross. Then we follow on to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. These are the 'first works' in which the Ephesian church failed, and to which it was recalled. 'Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and *do the first works*, or else I will come to you quickly and *remove your lampstand* from its place – unless you repent.' Rev 2:5. Note the warning about the removal of the lampstand. So too for us, the 'first works' involve keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for only in keeping this feast are we established as a lampstand church – one which does not have its lampstand removed.

So it is important that we should all face our individual issues, as well as seeking out leaven in the collective arena. There are enemies from without and within. This will be the way of our future, all the way to the time of the end (the Feast of Tabernacles), as Daniel says: 'And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time'. Dan 11:33.

Helped with a little help

In the lead-up to this prophecy concerning the time of the end, Daniel speaks of those of Antichrist who 'enter peaceably ... [but] devise ... plans against the strongholds, but only for a time ... speak lies ... and forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation [replacing Calvary with idolatry] ... and those who do *wickedly against the covenant*, he shall *corrupt with flattery* ... now when they fall, they shall be *aided with a little help*.' Dan 11:24-34.

This passage is timely and instructive, for the wickedness referred to, late in the passage, is the wickedness which is against the communion *covenant*. And corruption with flattery is precisely the leaven that we must purge. Then the promise follows, 'The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits'. Dan 11:32.

So it is Daniel's message that is echoed down through history by Peter, James and John. And, as Daniel says, when we fall, we shall be 'helped with a little help'. Dan 11:34. We who have this hope, looking toward the 'time of the end', will be refined, purified and made white, *until* the time of the end. Dan 11:35. This is where we are positioned, presently, for as Daniel says, 'It is yet for an appointed time'. Dan 11:35.

PART 4

The church as a healing community

In this final section, we need to reflect on what the church really is, and on its role as a discreet community. The church offers personal and family healing in a way that is quite different from the world's exercise of law for the pursuit of justice. Outside of the church, in the public arena at large, medical advice, social counselling and legal support are among the only avenues that can offer help. Our exercise in the gospel is to give clear *respect* to these medical, social and legal institutions, realising that as Christian friends and workers we cannot give that kind of help, but that we *can* offer the personal healing, forgiveness and recovery that are available in Christ.

This is the role for which the church is highly valued in the community. Of course, on the negative side, the church can also be discounted for its apparent ineffectiveness. Nevertheless, the strong claim that the Christian church can, and should retain, is that the

power of Christ can bring genuine and lasting healing and resolution, whereas the social and legal arms can only offer financial and legal options, to whatever degree they are applicable. As we know, legal processes and settlements can require the law's own precepts, but cannot offer the deep personal resolution that is often needed.

Consider the example of a situation where there is abuse against a person, within a family, or within the community. The moral and 'legal' option for the victim is to pursue retribution and 'justice' by making a police report which will follow through to a legal charge and an eventual court ruling, etc. If, in addition (or 'instead', as the case may warrant) the victim chooses to obtain Christian support toward forgiveness, healing and full recovery, in a discreet setting, the Christian community is acting within its mandate, and not acting illegally (provided care is taken to respect and fulfil matters of legal process).

The community, and indeed the government with its constitution, supports and endorses this role of the church, and also promotes this role, for the overall health of the community.

Interface with community and government

Situations arise where church workers must, and do, take great care to refer matters to the public arena *first* of all – as in the cases where medical, psychiatric, welfare and legal advice should be sought in conjunction with any Christian support given. In fact, in a great many situations, church workers will refer matters for medical or legal advice, *before* any Christian dialogue takes place – particularly where matters 'cross a line', so to speak, and take on social or legal implications.

Of course, the public community keenly relies on the church, as well, to provide a specific kind of support. However, in reality, life itself can be 'unfair', and institutions – both secular and religious – can be blamed for unresolved situations, since neither is capable of delivering the kind of outcomes that some individuals may desire.

The ethic of Christ is that where we commit fully to His will in our lives, then we are able to accept *all* sufferings – both just and unjust – as being part of His sovereign hand toward our salvation. Not all

individuals embrace this biblical faith, and so they risk becoming unresolved and bitter when outcomes do not conform with their expectations. This occurs equally in the community, where individuals commit to the social and legal structure, but may not be content with the outcome that is delivered.

It has become commonplace, particularly in the western countries, to employ the media as a means of making a public statement and of swaying public opinion. All institutions, from the government to the schools and churches, are finding themselves under media scrutiny, for better and for worse, exposing the indefensible as well as the defenceless in the community.

As the media gain more community support, as well as legal endorsement, we are moving into an era where disaffected and antagonistic individuals are able to employ the media to discredit institutions, including the church, and may even seek to manipulate the legal process by gaining public support for a cause. We are now living in an atmosphere where unresolved individuals are able to impute fault to institutions, based on hearsay, or on their own say-so. Such media motivators are entirely 'lawless', as the Scripture highlights, and are able to accuse and defame in ways that can be reported without breaching laws of defamation. Such individuals are neither subject to the law of Christ, nor to the code of law in society that is empowered by God for the protection of all.

Our aim, then, as a church fellowship with a legitimate role in the community, is to maintain complete *accord with the law*, and to maintain complete discretion in our interactions with individuals who themselves are members of families and communities, with their own moral, ethical, financial and legal responsibilities. This is a harmony that exercises us quite extensively, and which is crucial to our remaining viable as a genuine healing community. Simply, we must be careful that our only offer, in the Christian faith, is the personal and collective salvation that the gospel offers.

The church is not a medical, social, welfare or legal-aid body. Consequently, we must uphold, guard, and refer to the relevant agencies in our helping of individuals with various needs. For example, we can *discuss* the salvation of Christ with a drug addict, but only in

careful support of, and compliance with, the medical-cum-counselling program to which the wider community will doubtless obligate that individual, for his and others' safety.

It is for this reason that we do not offer 'counselling' in the legal sense, other than in the area of preparing people for marriage, where those who are licensed as celebrants are required to fulfil the civic guidelines. Our interactions on all other matters of personal need, relational, moral, ethical and financial etc, are entirely based on sharing a common Christian faith, supported by the Scriptures, and these interactions are purely as individuals to individuals, and not as church 'officers'. The only 'church officers', as such, are those who hold positions in the constituted legal body, and these constitutional and financial obligations are openly scrutinised by the relevant government bodies.

Discretion and privacy

Because we have no platform for justice other than our role as a healing community, we find ourselves having to urge individuals to their social and legal obligations, while also maintaining the discretion and privacy that belong to those who are seeking Christian help. For example, if someone shares in confidence that he has committed an illegal act, he may be offered Christian support in the pursuit of his moral responsibility, but he cannot be shielded from his moral duty. If the individual is seeking discreet assistance in matters that do *not* have social and legal implications, then the individual should expect discretion from the Christian helpers.

At present, the legal status of constitutionally approved churches is that they are supported in offering this kind of personal help, while they are also expected to be transparent on all the matters that affect the community. In other words, it is accepted that the churches will act discreetly on matters that will *not* benefit by public exposure, while it is expected that, like schools and other constituted institutions, they will not conceal matters of public responsibility and liability.

This is a balance and harmony that we take very seriously, and to which we give constant and extensive attention. We totally accept our

biblical responsibility to the community and its 'ministers' who are appointed by God for our protection. Rom 13:6. We equally accept that the victims of abusive and unjust situations (of many different kinds) cannot necessarily find any resolution in public exposure and legal action. In that case, these ones seek a venue to confide and confess, where they are given the right of privacy and discretion, and where they can unburden, receive support, make necessary apologies and restitution, and so find healing in the cross of Christ.

Conclusion

Finally, we are well aware that the practice of the Christian gospel will be reproached, for one reason or another. When this occurs, as it was for Christ, we are not free to 'go to Judea' and popularise ourselves by speaking up in our own defence, or by advertising the genuine fruit of our Christian work. John 7:3. As Jesus said, 'Wisdom is justified by all her children'. Luke 7:35. In other words, the proof stands on its own, and doesn't need defending. In fact, there is a danger that if we become defensive, or give substance to things that have no substance, we become leavened and show ourselves to have the same malice as those who are showing malice toward us.

Instead, we need to accept what Daniel prophesied about the times in which we live, that flattery and intrigue, sword and flame, deception and corruption, would befall us, all as part of a purifying process. We take care therefore to endure to the end, and not cast away our confidence. If we allow this process to work in us, our hearts will not be 'failing for fear'. Luke 21:26. Instead, we can lift up the hands that hang down and strengthen our knees, and our careful repentance will bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness as we believe. Heb 12:12.

Let us 'go out' to Christ, accepting His reproach wherever it may fall upon us and, in a joyous Christian spirit, obtain a testimony that we are laying hold of *His* life, not defending our own. To gain Christ is greater riches than all the treasure of Egypt.