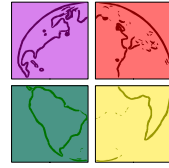


a house of prayer for all nations

New Life Church
Canterbury



University of Kent
Keynes College
Canterbury
Kent
CT2 7NP
01227 827 524

<http://newlifecanterbury.org> – office@newlifecanterbury.org

Receiving Equipping Releasing

Study guide for equipping weeks

Please note that this is meant to be a study guide, it is meant to be used alongside the Holy Bible, the standard by which everything must be measured. Also use other study guides and commentaries by renowned and godly men to aid you in your understanding. Most importantly and above all, seek the Holy Spirit and ask Him to grant you wisdom, discernment and revelation as you study God's word.

Care has been taken to present the following topics in a way that will equip a believer with certain fundamental truths. If you are unsure about anything contained in these notes please contact any member of the Leadership team.

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Salvation

Hebrew words translated as 'salvation'

Yashaah: Saved, deliverance, victory, prosperity.

Tshuah Tshuah: (teshooaw, teshooaw) Rescue, safety (personal, national or spiritual)

Yesha yesha: Liberty, deliverance, prosperity, safety, saving.

Greek words translated as 'salvation'

Soteria: rescue, safety (physically or morally), deliver health, serving

Soterion: (noun) e.g. Lord is my salvation, defender or defence, health

As you can see there are a number of Greek and Hebrew words translated as 'salvation' in the Bible.

All the words translated as salvation in the Bible collectively speak of the following: rescue, saving, deliverance, health, prosperity in life and spirit, defence and victory.

The name of Jesus embodies salvation – [Matthew 1:21] Jesus means The Lord Saves.

All the words translated above are packaged in the salvation we find in Jesus. In Him we have life eternal, healing, deliverance, safety, prosperity and freedom.

In this exploration of **Salvation** we will look at the words spoken by the angel of God to Mary in Matthew 1:21:

'You shall call his name Jesus for He will save this people from their sins'

Salvation can then be simply defined as being saved from **sin** and its consequences.

What is sin and why do we need saving?

Genesis chapter 1: In the beginning God created the universe and everything in it. He created man (and woman that is) in His own image and placed them in the Garden of Eden, the best habitation in all this creation. He gave them dominion over the earth and charged them with the task of managing His creation.

Genesis chapter 2: God gave them (man & woman) freedom of choice and free will. He only gave them a simple test, not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for in the day they did they will die.

God told them the consequences of disobeying His command and left it up to them to choose to obey Him or not. He had placed before them eternal life [Genesis 2:9 note God did not ask them not to eat from the tree of life Genesis 2:16] and prosperity (everything they ever needed and more was placed in the garden). The reason for their death would be because of their disobedience and that is why He did not explain why the tree kills.

Genesis chapter 3: Adam and Eve were tricked into disobeying God and therefore sin (disobedience to God's word) entered the world. So all who are born of Adam (natural birth) have this great tendency to sin (disobey God and live for themselves). The consequence of this sin is death (spiritual death) and it is rewarded by eternal fire (hell) in the day of judgement. Hell was not designed for humans, it was designed for the devil, which was an angel but along with his demons rebelled against God. (Remember sin is rebellion against God.)

But it is the place that all who remain in the fallen state of humans are headed because of Adam's sin and indeed their own. The only way to escape this fate is the rebirth or salvation found only in Jesus Christ. He saves mankind from death and eternity in hell.

Restoration of Man

God's plan for redemption (rescue)

God loved us so much He made a way for us to be reconciled to Him in Heaven. [John 3:16, Romans 6:23, Romans 5:8]

It has always been God's plan for us to enjoy an eternal life of joy, happiness and prosperity with Him but sin separated us from Him. God is Holy and cannot, and must not be expected to dwell with sin. Incidentally this is exactly what we expect Him to do if we wilfully sin as Christians.

To allow us to once again enjoy fellowship with Him, God needed to save us.

Hence salvation (rescue, saving, defending, healing).

Jesus is the one that makes salvation possible. By His death and resurrection He paid for our sins and raised all who will believe in Him into newness of life and spirit. [1 Peter 2:24, 1 Peter 3:18]

[Matthew 27: 32-50]

We must not belittle the suffering Jesus went through to bring us salvation. He had to carry the whole weight of sin of the world and the fellowship He had enjoyed with the Father came to an abrupt end when he hung on the cross.

[Isaiah 53:5]

It cost God His Son to bring us back into fellowship with Him and this salvation must not be trivialised.

There was no other way because He had said in Genesis that if you eat from the tree you would die so He had to keep His word. He is not like a man who can lie. He knew that if we died it would be final because only a sinless man could purchase salvation and we have all sinned, so Jesus had to die. This is how much God loves us. He could not go against His word so He made a way through Jesus.

[John 14:6]

The Steps of Salvation

- 1) **Justification.** Jesus has done the work. He said 'It is finished' when he died on the cross. He paid for everyone's sins when He died. It is a free gift because of God's grace. All we need to do is receive it.
[Romans 3:25-27, John 1:12, Ephesians 2:8]

To be saved we have to believe in Jesus Christ (faith).

We have to repent (turn away from ourselves and living for ourselves) and accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

So we must:

Repent – Acts 3:19

Believe (have faith in Jesus) what God has done for us through Jesus
[John 3:16]

Receive – Jesus as Lord and Saviour [John 1:12, Rev 3:20]

- 2) **Sanctification:** this is the process of renewal of the mind and soul that God takes us through once we have been saved (Justified).
[Philippians 2:12-13] "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out** your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure".

God is not asking us to **work for** our salvation for we are saved by grace through faith and not through our works. Justification is a Divine performance and we cannot work for it ourselves. Jesus is the author of this through His death and resurrection. We are to cooperate [**work**

out what we have already been given] with the Holy Spirit in the process of our sanctification (being purified for God's glory) with fear and trembling lest we grieve the Holy One given to us for this very purpose. I believe salvation here is referring to our sanctification by the Holy Spirit to make us fit for the purposes of a Great God. [John 16:1-14]

We are not to trivialise this part of our salvation for all that are truly [saved] justified should seek to live a [sanctified] life that Glorifies a God who gave so much to give us life in abundance. [Romans 12:1]

3) Glorification: [2 Corinthians 4:17] [Romans 8:17-18]

When Jesus comes back again we will be gloried with Him if we endure the trials we face on this earth because of our commitment to Him. We will rule with Him if indeed we endure. [Revelations 7:14-17] [Revelations 3:21]

These processes are depicted clearly in the following scriptures: [Romans 5:9-11] "much more then, having now been **justified** by His blood, we **shall be saved** from wrath through Him. ¹⁰ For if when we were enemies we were **reconciled** to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall **be saved** by His life. ¹¹ And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now **received the reconciliation**".

The Apostle Paul gives a wonderful and clear explanation of Salvation in his letter to the Romans. To gain further understanding of salvation, one must take time and study the book of Romans. Below are my notes on Romans [the part on salvation] that may help.

Paul opens Romans with a salutation and then begins to outline the power of the Gospel of Christ. He says men are without excuse in their sins because the glorious attributes of God are revealed in creation (v20). Because human beings disregard God and His righteous requirements, they have been given over to debased minds and sinfulness. This leads to despicable acts: sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; whisperers, backbiting, hating God, violence, pride, boasting, invention of evil things, disobedience to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful (v29-32).

He goes on in chapter 2 that all men are condemned; the Jew (with the law) and the gentile (without the law).

Paul explains that we cannot judge others as we ourselves are also sinners. If we judge another and then do as they do then we condemn ourselves. God is the righteous Judge and He judges with truth against those who practice lawlessness.

3. Justification: The Imputation of God's Righteousness through Christ [3:21–5:21]

A. The Description of Righteousness [3:21-31]

B. The Illustration of Righteousness [4:1-25]

C. The Blessings of Righteousness [5:1-11]

D. The Contrast of Righteousness and Condemnation [5:12-21]

Paul opens chapter 3 by explaining that all men are sinners and in need of God's Salvation. He explains that we can only be justified by faith because by the law no one will be justified in God's eyes [v20]:

- A. Our righteousness can only be found in Jesus Christ. He grants righteousness to all who will believe (Jews and gentiles alike). We all need salvation for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that **He might be just and the justifier** of the one who has faith in Jesus (v23-26). This justification is by faith and no one can boast. To the Jew He justifies by faith and to the gentile who is without the law He justifies through faith. This justification does not void the law but establishes it. [3:31 **Law** can have three different meanings in this passage, and the gospel fulfils all of those meanings. If *law* here refers to the Law of Moses, the Pentateuch, then the passage is referring to the way Jesus completely fulfilled the requirements of the law. If *law* is the entire Old Testament, then the gospel fulfils the promises of the coming of Christ and of the forgiveness of sins. If *law* is the moral law, then the gospel fulfils it because it is through Christ that people are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live in a way that pleases God]
- B. This chapter is pivotal in establishing that justification is by God's grace through faith alone. Verse 1 demonstrates that justification is a gift and cannot be earned by works. Verse 9 argues that since Abraham was justified before he was circumcised, circumcision is not a basis of justification. Verse 13 proves that since Abraham was justified hundreds of years before the Mosaic Law, then justification cannot be based on the Law. Verse 18 summarizes Paul's argument by concluding that Abraham was justified by his faith and not by his works. (Compare James 2 [James was taking aim at freeloaders, those who claimed to have no need for good deeds since they had faith. The reality is that if you have faith, works will naturally be a product. You cannot get rid of works just because they do not save you. You cannot sever the effect from the cause. Just as an apple tree will bear apples, so faith will produce good works]) Jesus was crucified for our sins and raised for our justification (v25)

- C.** The first 11 verses of this chapter describe the blessings and peace that comes from justification. Our salvation does not only save us from sin and death but it also grants us access into God's grace in which we stand (v2). Even in trials we can rejoice because we know that our troubles will produce perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. And we know hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us (v4-5). His death on the cross saves us from God's wrath. Paul explains that when we were sinners Christ died to save us so how much more now that we are saved will He keep us from the wrath of God (v9-11). Strong's 1347: The Greek noun for *justification* is derived from the Greek verb *dikaioo*, meaning "to acquit" or "to declare righteous" (used by Paul in 4:2, 5; 5:1). It is a legal term used of a favourable verdict in a trial. The word depicts a courtroom setting, with God presiding as the Judge, determining the faithfulness of each person to the Law. In the first section of Romans, Paul makes it clear that no one can withstand God's judgment (3:9). The Law was not given to justify sinners but to expose their sin. To remedy this deplorable situation, God sent His Son to die for our sins, in our place. When we believe in Jesus, God imputes His righteousness to us, and we are declared righteous before God. In this way, God demonstrates that He is a righteous Judge and the One who declares us righteous, our Justifier (3:26).
- D.** Through Adam sin and death entered the world and all were condemned but through Jesus Christ we are justified and made righteous. This justification was through grace. As sin abounded, grace abounded even more. This does not mean we have to continue sinning so that grace abounds Paul says. We are dead to sin as we are baptised into Christ's death and we are raised into newness with Him, therefore we cannot continue in sin (ch 6).

4. Sanctification: Righteousness Imparted and Demonstrated (6:1–8:39)

A. Sanctification and Sin (6:1-23)

B. Sanctification and the Law (7:1-25)

C. Sanctification and the Holy Spirit (8:1-39)

Paul in chapter 7 describes how the law brought out the sin that was already in man. The law is not sin but it brings out sin in us, because until the law was given sin was not accounted to man though it was in us through Adam. Paul identifies with the readers in that he also finds a struggle in himself; in that though he wills to do good, he finds another law in his flesh that does what is contrary to what he desires.

Paul tells us that there is no condemnation to those that in Christ Jesus because He frees us from the law of sin and death (8:1-3). Jesus condemned sin in the flesh and the righteous requirement of the law can only be obtained through walking in the Spirit (sanctification). Sanctification begins at

justification and continues throughout our lives. Sanctification is the process by which God makes us more and more like His son Jesus Christ. Sanctification means setting apart: a separation from sin unto holiness.

The law could not make us perfect and so God sent His to save and to begin the process of sanctification. This is continued by the Holy Spirit (v9). We have adoption through the Holy Spirit and He himself bears witness of this with our spirits (v15-17).

The process of sanctification can be challenging and we will go through suffering while we live in this earth but Paul reminds us that our glory that will be revealed in Christ Jesus far outweighs the suffering. The Holy Spirit helps us in this time of difficulty and at moments that we find it difficult to pray He intercedes on our behalf (v26-27). Paul reminds us that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified (v28-29). This process of sanctification in believers is one that God has already predestined to happen because whom God justifies He also will glorify. Justification and glorification sandwiches (solidifies) sanctification. In this whole process Paul wants us to be assured of God's love towards us (v35).

Household of God

When we are saved we become members of God's household.

[Ephesians 2:19-20] "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone"

God will lead us to the right Church that will nurture us and help us with our growth in the Lord Jesus Christ. We become part of His body once saved. This body is the Church, not just locally but globally.

In the Church we receive discipleship and we ourselves are able to use our spiritual gifts to help and build up others in the Church. [Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 12:7, Ephesians 4:11-12]

Through fellowship in the Church, God teaches us godly submission and Christ like love. The Church also provides us with safety and godly direction. Because the Church (the body properly assembled) is vital to our growth as Christians, it comes under a tremendous amount of attack and deception from the devil and his forces. Some Churches succumb to these attacks and deception.

As members of God's household we must pray that God keeps us humble and focused on Him. We must learn to submit to God if we are to withstand the enemy's attack and deception [James 4:7]

The Church is a community of believers who live their lives together. For the Church to reach more people and reconcile them to the Lord, it must keep the values of community central to its purposes [Acts 2:46-47].

Cell Groups

As the Church gets bigger, smaller clusters (cell groups) could be made to enable it to keep community central to its purpose. Cell groups provide the members of the Church with the opportunity to really play a role in the health, growth and wellbeing of others in the local Church.

In a cell group we have the opportunity to demonstrate our love for one another which is commandment our Lord Jesus gave us [Acts 2:46-47]

Freedom in Christ

Introduction

This piece is intended as an introduction to the subject of 'freedom in Christ'. It starts with the contention that there are at least two understandings of 'freedom': one concerns personal independence, and the other concerns *quality of life*. In Biblical terms, the first conception of 'freedom' is a myth: we can never be wholly independent. We must either be slaves to sin, or slaves to righteousness.

To be a slave to righteousness entails freedom – from sin, from fear, from worry, and so on. It is in every way the *best* standard of life. It is what God has called us to. In order to be a slave to righteousness, however, it is not sufficient that we 'do good deeds'. Rather, the *glory of God* must be central to our thinking – it must replace our pride in ourselves. As we learn to enjoy Him, and to revel in glorifying Him, we will find that all the freedoms will come as part and parcel of that submission to Him.

What is freedom?

Two ways in which we use the word:

- (1) 'Free Tibet!' – Freedom here refers to *autonomous government*. The speaker is saying that Tibet will not be 'free' until it has its own government that is not controlled by an outside power – that is, until it is capable of political self-determination.
- (2) 'You've served your sentence; you're free to go.' You were imprisoned, or in some way had the number of choices available to you curtailed, but that imprisonment/curtailment has come to an end. 'Freedom' here means not the freedom to do anything you please, but that a different set of rules now applies which the speaker thinks is in some way find less constraining, or more fulfilling.

We need to be careful when we think about freedom. For many people, a 'free Tibet!' style of thought applies. 'Freedom' in that sense means *independence* from another person's power. Classically, political *liberalism* [liberal: free] refers to a minimization of constraints on a person by the state; the individual is deemed the best person to determine how to run their own lives.

Human rights are a product of liberalism: because the individual is better able to determine how to run their own lives than the state is, the individual is equipped with *rights* against the state with which to protect their *liberty*. 'Freedom' in this context stands in opposition to conceptions such as *slavery* – subjection to others.

So: when talking of 'freedom', many people mean *personal independence*; freedom from the power of others and corresponding *self-reliance*.

The second sense of the word refers to *quality of life*. The guardsman announcing my freedom is not saying that I am now able to go out and do as I please [which indeed I am not – the law forbids me from doing so, for a start],

but is telling me that from now on, I no longer need to abide by the rules of the prison – because I no longer live in it as a prisoner. ‘Freedom’ in this sense may include a greater degree of autonomy, but that is not its centrepiece: the point is that here, ‘freedom’ entails a *better way of living*.

What does the Bible say about freedom?

The Bible does speak of political freedom [Leviticus 19:20,¹ Acts 24:23,² 1st Corinthians 7:21³] – that is, a freedom from the claim of some other person over one’s life. However, it does not *idolize* it: ‘Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so.’⁴ Paul plainly does not regard political freedom as the highest goal.

More importantly, Paul justifies his claim by saying in verses 22.23: ‘For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ’s slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.’

Here, Paul is saying something strange: that we can be *free in Christ* and *slaves to Christ* at the same time. How can this be?

Slaves to Christ

Paul discusses slavery in Romans 6:16-18:

Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Plainly, then, Paul does not regard *slavery* as a problem – the interesting question for him is *what we are enslaved to*. And he gives us two options: we can be slaves to sin, or slaves to righteousness.

Slavery to righteousness is the result of being ‘set *free* from sin’.⁵ In other words, Paul is saying that whatever happens, we will be slaves either to sin, or to Christ. Those are our choices – there are no others.

¹ “‘If a man sleeps with a woman who is a slave girl promised to another man but who has not been ransomed or given her freedom, there must be due punishment. Yet they are not to be put to death, because she had not been freed.’”

² ‘He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.’

³ ‘Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so.’

⁴ 1st Corinthians 7:21.

⁵ Romans 6:22, emphasis added; in the same verse, it becomes clear that slavery to righteousness is slavery to God

Slavery to sin leads to death [Romans 6:16,⁶ 6:23⁷]; slavery to Christ leads to obedience, righteousness, holiness and eternal life [Romans 6:16.17,⁸ 6:22.23⁹].

Free in Christ

Freedom in Christ *cannot be separated* from slavery to Christ. The two go hand-in-hand: there is no freedom in Him without slavery to Him. We cannot be slaves to sin and free in Christ. Similarly, though, we cannot be slaves to Him and not reap the benefit: freedom in Him.

Freedom stems from recognizing God's *glory*. John Piper puts it this way:

The deepest longing of the human heart is to know and enjoy the glory of God. We were made for this. "Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth... whom I have created *for My glory*," says the Lord (Isaiah 43:6-7). To see it, to savour it, and to show it – that is why we exist. The untracked, unimaginable stretches of the created universe are a parable about the inexhaustible "riches of His glory" (Romans 9:23). The physical eye is meant to say to the spiritual eye, "Not this, but the Maker of this, is the Desire of your soul." Saint Paul said, "We exult in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). Or, even more precisely, he said that we were "prepared beforehand for glory" (Romans 9:23). This is why we were created – that he might "make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy" (Romans 9:23)...

We are all starved for the glory of God, not self. No one goes to the Grand Canyon to increase self-esteem. Why do we go? Because there is greater healing for the soul in behold splendour than there is in behold self. Indeed, what could be more ludicrous in a vast and glorious universe like this than a human being, on the speck called earth, standing in front of a mirror trying to find significance in his own self-image? It is a great sadness that this is the gospel of the modern world.

But this is not the Christian Gospel. Into the darkness of petty self-preoccupation has shone "the light of the *gospel of the glory of Christ*, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The Christian Gospel is about "the glory of Christ," not about me.¹⁰

Why does recognizing His glory mean freedom? It is because when we do so we are no longer constrained by our own little lives, by fears about our own inadequacies, by our own pride and self-congratulation. We recognize that we *cannot be our own saviours*. The first step of salvation is the recognition that *we fall short of the mark, and God does not*. The second step is repentance; the third is submission to Christ.

⁶ 'Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?'

⁷ 'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

⁸ Verse 17: 'But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.'

⁹ Verse 22: 'But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.'

¹⁰ John Piper, *Seeing and Savouring Jesus Christ* (Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 2001) 20-22.

When we submit to Christ, our *pride* – the belief that we can do what we do *independently* – takes a huge blow; in fact, so much so that Paul, referencing Jeremiah 9:24,¹¹ says ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord’ – not in himself!

But why call that ‘freedom’? Firstly, because Christ says that His yoke is easy and His burden is light,¹² and in doing so, He says that this is better than being ‘weary and heavy-laden.’¹³ This is freedom in the second sense discussed above: not personal independence, but the *best* quality of life. Psalm 31:8 says ‘You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a *spacious* place’ [emphasis added]. ‘Freedom’ does not mean ‘self-determination’; it means *becoming all that God intends you to be* – and the good news is that His intent for us is wonderful!

Freedom in Christ is freedom to be made whole,¹⁴ freedom from worry,¹⁵ freedom from fear,¹⁶ freedom from guilt.¹⁷ To have freedom in Christ is to grow in ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control’.¹⁸ It is freedom from resentment¹⁹ and freedom from unforgiveness.²⁰

A closer look at some of the freedoms: freedom from guilt

Freedom from guilt is rooted in our relationship with Christ. Guilt can be understood in two ways: firstly, it describes a state of affairs in which someone has committed an offence – to say that someone is guilty is to say that they are offenders. Secondly, it describes an emotional state in which someone *feels* a burden because of their perception of a wrong that they have

¹¹ ‘[B]ut let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord.’

¹² Matthew 11:30.

¹³ Matthew 11:28-30: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

¹⁴ Acts 3:16: ‘By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.’

¹⁵ Matthew 6:28-33: “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.’

¹⁶ 2nd Timothy 1:7: ‘For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.’

¹⁷ Romans 8:1-2: ‘Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.’

¹⁸ Galatians 5:22-34.

¹⁹ 2nd Timothy 2:24: ‘And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.’

²⁰ Colossians 3:13: ‘Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.’

committed. Slavery to Christ brings about freedom in both senses. In Romans 8:1.2, Paul tells us that ‘...there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.’ There is no condemnation for those who are slaves to Christ; He is the judge, and He does not find us guilty. What is more, He does not expect us to walk cowed, with our sin at the forefront of our minds, always dwelling on our unworthiness and sinfulness, feeling guilty to the core:

...but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.²¹

We are the children of God, not slaves to fear, and while that does not mean that we are free to do anything we might choose,²² it does mean that we need not dwell on our misdemeanours. They are to be brought before God, repented of, but they are not then to dominate our thought. As we draw closer to Christ, learning to *trust* Him, we discover that He does not hold our confessed sin against us, but washes us clean.

Freedom from strongholds

Strongholds are those areas of our lives in which sin dominates – that is, where our slavery to Christ is not complete. Paul speaks of them like this:

...I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?²³

We may *want* Christ to exercise His lordship in every area of our lives, but find that there are some areas where this does not occur, because some other part of us holds back in handing them over to Him. Often, the sin is just too pleasurable, or too ingrained in us.

Yet, again, as we draw nearer to Christ, learning to believe His words and learning to let go of our own glory and misplaced self-belief – as we learn to stop believing that *we* can free ourselves from our sin, and start instead to say, ‘Lord – I *cannot*, but You can’, He leads us into freedom even from the things we find hardest to let go of: ‘...if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.’²⁴ Note Paul’s insistence that it is *by the Spirit* that sin is put to death – not by our own strength. If we can learn to say, and to *believe*, ‘Lord – I will fail if I try to combat this on my own, as I have done before – but I will turn to you in all temptation, and will ask for Your strength’ – if we can

²¹ Romans 8:13-16.

²² See Romans 6.

²³ Romans 7:21-24.

²⁴ Romans 8:13.

learn to live this and believe it, we will find Him leading us into His freedom even from the greatest strongholds.

Freedom from resentment and unforgiveness

Resentment and unforgiveness are states of mind in which we find ourselves incapable of loving another person. The resentment is often natural – that is, it initially seems quite understandable, and many others would be inclined to react in precisely the same way. This then gives rise to the impression that our resentment is justified: ‘so-and-so mistreated me and *deserves* to be resented.’

Christ does not give us that option. In one of the hardest prayers, He says ‘...forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.’²⁵ In other words, the forgiveness of the Father towards *us* is tied to our forgiveness of *others*. There is no place for resentment and unforgiveness in the Kingdom of God.

As with strongholds, resentment may seem impossible for us to let go of – indeed, it may be a stronghold in its own right, and for that very reason, the remedy is precisely the same: it is Christ Himself. As we learn to appropriate the Father’s forgiveness and in doing so learn humility, and as we learn to see others with His eyes and to let go of our pride, we also find that having been forgiven much, we become able to forgive others.²⁶ Loving others may not always be an easy task – but His love is more than sufficient for us to do so.

Walking in victory

It is common in Pentecostal churches to speak of ‘walking in victory’. What does this mean? To walk in victory means simply to *enjoy Christ* and to live in the consequences of that enjoyment, in all the freedom He gives.

By some miracle of God, ‘pursuing the highest good [namely, the enjoyment of God] will always result in our greatest happiness in the end.’²⁷ By serving Him – by placing Him first, loving and desiring Him, *enjoying* Him with all our hearts, we attain all the freedoms as a by-product.

This is not some perverse form of freedom in which we are tightly constrained but are told that we are free: no, God intends us *to be joyful*:

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that *my joy may be in you* and that *your joy may be complete*. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”²⁸ [emphasis added]

²⁵ Luke 11:4. See also Luke 6:37: ‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.’

²⁶ Consider Luke 7:47: ‘...I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.’

²⁷ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* (Broadman & Holman, Nashville 2002) 46.

²⁸ John 15:9-12.

Similarly, in 1st Thessalonians 16-18: '*Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*' [emphasis added].

God's will for us in Christ Jesus is that we be joyful always.

It is *not* some strange freedom He promises us, in which we will be free on the one hand, and miserable on the other because the rules are so hard to keep; what kind of freedom would that be? It would be a lie, not freedom.

And note this of the commands that He gives us – to love one another,²⁹ to be slow to anger,³⁰ to forgive others,³¹ to lead righteous lives,³² not to serve money,³³ not to judge others,³⁴ to love our enemies,³⁵ to be pure³⁶ and so on: though they may seem impossible to keep,³⁷ *He enables us to keep them*: 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'³⁸ Because Christ lives in me, and His Spirit works within me, it is possible for me to live in accordance with His law; Christ, living in me, will cause me to keep it. Certainly, we fail sometimes, but we are *being made perfect* by Him,³⁹ and we find in the keeping of His commands not only a joy, but freedom from guilt and sin. This is genuine victory – victory is not a mere assertion that 'Christ has overcome the world', but it is a *living out* of that truth. To be victorious means simply to serve Christ, submitting to Him, enjoying Him and the freedom He gives, and thus taking part in His overcoming of the world by not being bound to its slavery to sin.

Conclusion

To be free in Christ is to live in obedience to Him, as opposed to living in obedience to sin. We can only be obedient to one or the other; there is no third way. If we submit to Christ, then we will know His freedom and

²⁹ John 13:34.35: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

³⁰ James 1:19.20: 'Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.'

³¹ Matthew 6:14: 'For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.'

³² Matthew 6:33: 'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'

³³ Matthew 6:24: 'You cannot serve both God and Money.'

³⁴ Matthew 7:1.2: 'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.'

³⁵ Matthew 5:44.45: 'But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.'

³⁶ 1st John 3:3: 'Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.'

³⁷ Romans 7:18: 'I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.'

³⁸ Galatians 2:20.

³⁹ Philippians 3:12: 'Not that I [Paul] have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.'

His joy. The closer we draw to Him, the more His joy will fill us, and the better able we will be to recognize that His precepts are good and fulfilling. We will discover that He has set our feet in a spacious place – we are not hemmed in on every side, but the more we cleave to Him, the more of His freedom we enjoy.

Freedom does not mean total independence and self-reliance – it means to love, to forgive, to grow, to be joyful, to show patience, kindness, self-control, gentleness. It means freedom from anger and resentment, freedom from guilt and fear.

That freedom is *only* possible in the context of recognizing His glory. When He becomes central, and we become peripheral; when He is God, and we are but men; when His glory replaces our pride – then we can be free in Him. As long as we cling on to our own pride and vanity, we will live in the fear of seeing that pride undermined, and our vanity exposed for what it really is: an attempt to claim unmerited glory for ourselves. But in Him, all that must disappear, and with it, all the fear and doubt that came with it. Our freedom consists in loving Him, not in loving ourselves.

This is only a very brief introduction to what it means to be free in Christ. The primary claim is that freedom in Him does *not* mean independence [which can never occur], but total dependence. If we can abandon the idea that we can be self-sufficient, then we can experience His freedom.

I have deliberately not discussed such issues as freedom from guilt, and how it is attained, because this is usually a very difficult topic to study. I have said here that that freedom *is* available, but the reason for it being there in the first place tends to vary from person to person. Guilt often ties in with unconfessed sin or feelings of worthlessness, and this is something which may be better dealt with in one-to-one prayer ministry than an introduction to what it means to be free in Christ.

What this example show us, however, is that freedom *is a very real issue*. People take their own lives out of guilt. People become blind with rage and hatred until they are incapable of enjoying anything and they are inwardly dead. Freedom is not a game – it is a very serious issue, and the freedom of God's saints is not something to make light of, for its absence indicates some defect in the relationship with God. 'Walking in victory' is *not* a phrase we should throw about lightly, lest it should become meaningless; to walk in freedom, or to walk in victory, is to *genuinely overcome sin* and to *genuinely live in obedience*. Most of us struggle with this in one area or another, and we need to be careful neither to make light of this through flippant language or casual treatment of the matter, on the one hand, nor to condemn others for so struggling, on the other. Part of our own freedom comes from leading others into freedom – that is, into a deeper relationship with God, where we can be fully healed and fully equipped to serve Him. As we do so, we will enter into His freedom.

THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS

PHILIPPIANS 2: 9-11

God has highly exalted Him and has freely bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

We often state that Jesus is Lord! Is He my Lord? Is He your Lord? We can so easily keep parts of our lives back and as someone has stated 'if He is not Lord of all, then He isn't really Lord at all!'

Sometimes we can even treat God as an errand boy who is there to answer our requests and do our bidding. How dare we treat Almighty God in this way!

What is it that motivates you in your life? What gives you a buzz? What holds your fascination? What are you passionate about? What excites you? Nothing and no one should hold our fascination more than our Father God and His son Jesus.

What worries you? What heartaches do you have? What do you fear? Do bad memories haunt you? Does guilt plague you?

Nothing should become so large that it crowds out Jesus being pre-eminent in our lives. He heals the broken hearted and sets the captives free. In Him there is forgiveness, peace and joy. In Him there is life! The only safe place to be is 'in Him'.

Loving Jesus is imperative to making Jesus your Lord- He wants your heart

The Bible tells us that we should love the Lord with all our being. Jesus said that if we love anyone more than Him we are not worthy to be His disciples. [Matthew 10:37]

Almighty God, the maker of the universe wants a heart to heart relationship with us! He made us and understands what is best for us. He loves us with a 'phileo' type love which is a tender emotional love- In revelation [Rev.3:19 Amplified Bible] it says that God disciplines those He tenderly loves and this is one of the places that the word 'phileo' is used in the original Greek. He loves us with an 'agape' type love which is a reasoning love whereby He is committed to us with a love that does not depend on our behaviour. And similarly God wants us to love Him with all our heart and mind. God is love!

Ways which lead you to love God more

How can we begin to love God in practical terms- because we will not be able to make Jesus Lord without a love relationship with Him and the Father-If we try, we will become legalistic.

1. We can read and meditate on His word, asking the Holy Spirit to give us understanding. The Bible says that the Word cleanses us. (Ephesians 5:26) Some people say they find it hard to meditate. Do you ever worry? Worry is a form of negative meditation! As we give time to study God's word, we begin to know about Him. It is difficult to love someone you don't know.
2. We begin to love God more by praising Him and worshipping Him. It has been said that we become like what we worship. We are part of the bride of Christ and as we prepare for that glorious day when the marriage feast of the Lamb has come, it should be natural to tell Him we love and adore Him. It is not a one way street-The Bible says that 'We only love Jesus because He first loves us.' [1 John 4:19] And God shows His love for us in that he sent His son to die for us. In His word there are numerous references to how He loves, comforts, provides, delights in and rejoices over us and as we spend time praising and worshipping Him and then begin to wait on Him and listen to Him, He will speak to us by His Holy Spirit.
3. We can ask the Holy Spirit to help us love God. The Bible says that we are temples of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 6:19] and so the Holy Spirit inside us is loving and glorifying Father God and Jesus. Roger Forster, founder of Ichthus Christian Fellowships once said that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are always having a praise party inside us-the Holy Spirit giving glory to Jesus, Jesus, giving glory to the Father and the Father giving glory to His son! [Coll.2:9-10]

Jesus cannot have control over your life if something or someone else has

Another way we can determine if the Lord has first place in our lives is to answer the question 'Who pulls your strings or who or what controls you?' The only right and safe control over our lives is God- Everything else is ungodly control. Despite the fact that we acknowledge His lordship over our lives with our lips, it can be a different story in practise! The Bible says 'A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.' [James 1:8] Do we control things ourselves out of fear that if we don't do something it won't happen the way we want it to? Are we driven by our fears? The Holy Spirit always leads giving us a choice as to whether we want to follow but the devil drives from behind making us feel that we have to take control or go a certain way. Strong emotion can often block the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Other people can control us and we are all capable of exercising ungodly control over others. People can control by differing forms of manipulation, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. Control can come in many guises-by anger, silence, even humour, charm and flattery.

We need to be careful what spiritual influences we allow ourselves to come under. The Bible says we are to test the spirits and Jesus said there would be people who would do works in His name but He will say that He never knew them. And Paul says that if He had faith to move mountains and had not God's love, it would profit him nothing.

The devil can do counterfeit imitations of the gifts of the Spirit. The one thing that the devil cannot stand is people worshiping the Lord with their lips and in their lives coming under the control of the Holy Spirit because the devil wants to control us and have us bow down to him which will ultimately lead to our distraction.

May it be our prayer as in the song, 'As the deer pants for the water, may our souls long after Jesus and to Him alone may our spirits yield!' And may we look onto Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith and who is the lover and saviour of our soul.

CHECKLIST

Bearing in mind, that as Christians the Bible says that we are not 'our own, we are bought with a price' [1 Cor. 7:23], and that we are temples of the Holy Spirit, are you always comfortable with the fact that the Holy Spirit is witnessing everything you do, speak, read, see and hear?

Is Jesus Lord of your time?

Is Jesus Lord of everything you read?

Is Jesus Lord of your speech?

Is Jesus Lord of your thought life?

Is Jesus Lord of your finances?

Is Jesus Lord in your relationships?

Is Jesus Lord of what you allow yourself to see?

Is Jesus Lord of what you allow yourself to hear?

Is Jesus Lord of what you wear?

Have you give Jesus your ambitions?

Are your talents under the Lord Jesus?

Is Jesus Lord of your studies?

Is Jesus Lord of your work-life?

Is Jesus Lord of your heart and all your desires?

Romans 13:14 Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ... Put a stop to thinking about the evil cravings of your physical nature to gratify its desires.

Romans 12: 1-2 I beg of you in view of the mercies of God, to present all your members and faculties as a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God which is your reasonable service and spiritual service. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the entire renewing of your mind so that you prove what is the good and acceptable will of God.

2 Timothy 2:4 No soldier when in service gets entangled in the enterprises of [civilian] life; his aim is to satisfy and please the one who enlisted him.

Phil 3: 7-14

Coll. 3:17

Phil. 4:8

Baptism

Jesus said, 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just one grain; it never becomes more but lives by itself alone. But if it dies, produces many others and yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it but anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.' [John 12: 24-25]

The war between flesh and spirit

Thomas a Kempis said, 'Understand that love of yourself hurts you more than anything in the world' and so often we can be blaming the devil, other people or our circumstances for our problems when the source of the problem is us! It is easy to praise God when everything is going well, but it is the trials and testing times that expose how much we trust in God and these times are very precious if we use them to draw nearer to the Lord.

We are so programmed to take after ourselves and our comfort and as soon as we become Christians there is a war going on between the flesh and our natural lives and following after our spirit. The Bible says that 'The mind of the fleshly which is sense and reason without the Holy Spirit, is death that comprise all the misery arising from sin, both here and the hereafter, but the mind of the Holy Spirit is life and soul peace both now and forever' [Amplified Bible Rom.8:6]

Dying to self but alive in Christ

There is only one solution to our sorry state and that is we need to die to ourselves! Paul said that 'He had been crucified with Christ but nevertheless he was alive but the life that he now lived, he lived through faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave Himself for him' [Gal. 2:20]

We need to put all our old nature- all our sin into that cross with Jesus and know that as we do so, as surely as Jesus was raised from the dead, we will rise in new life as Paul testifies. The Bible says that 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, the old has gone and everything has become new!' [2 Cor. 5:17]

Be Baptised

Baptism is an outward ceremony signifying publicly as we go under the water that your old nature is dead and has been buried with Christ and as you come up out of the water you are raised up with Christ into new life.

Romans 6:4 says, 'We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father so we too might habitually live and behave in newness of life.'

Galatians 3:27 says 'For as many of you that were baptised into Christ, into a spiritual union and communion with Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah have put on (clothed yourself with) Christ.'

Ananias said to Paul, 'Why do you delay? Rise up and be baptised and by calling upon His name wash away your sins.' [Acts 22:16]

ALL BIBLE QUOTATIONS ARE TAKEN FROM THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE.

READ AND STUDY ROMANS CHAPTERS 6,7 AND 8 WHERE PAUL EXPLAINS THESE MATTERS BETTER THAN ANY OF US CAN

THE TRUTH AND FREEDOM AND INVESTIGATING SESSIONS ARE RECOMMENDED FOR FURTHER HELP

Our inheritance in Christ

Matthew 3: 11b Jesus- He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with Fire.

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you and you shall be my witnesses.

John 3:34b Boundless is the gift God makes of His Spirit

Titus 3:4-7 When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour to man appeared, He saved us not because of any works of righteousness

which we had done but because of His own mercy by the cleansing bath of the new birth of the Holy Spirit which He poured out so richly upon us through Jesus Christ our Saviour and He did it in order that we might be justified by His grace that we might be acknowledged and counted as conformed to the divine will and purpose, thought and action and that we might become heirs of eternal life according to our hope.

2 Peter 1: 3-4 His divine power has bestowed upon us all things that are suited to life and godliness, through the full, personal knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence. By means of these He has bestowed upon us His precious and exceedingly great promises, so through them you may escape from the moral decay that is in the world.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the work which His presence within accomplishes is love, joy, peace, patience and [even temper, forbearance] kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

1 Cor. 12: 8-10 To one is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a word of knowledge, to another wonder working faith, to another extraordinary powers of healing, to another the working of miracles, to another prophetic insight, to another the ability to discern and distinguish between the utterances of true spirits and false ones, to another various kinds of unknown tongues, to another the ability to interpret such unknown tongues.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; MY own peace I now give you and bequeath to you, not the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled neither let them be afraid.

John 10:10 Jesus said, 'I came that they might have and enjoy life and have it in abundance to the full till it overflows.'

1 John 3:1 See what an incredible quality of love the father has bestowed upon us, that we should be committed to be called and counted the children of God and so we are!

Rev. 1:5b To Him who ever loves us and has once for all loosed and freed us from our sin by His own blood and forged us into a kingdom, a royal race, and priests to His God and Father.

Hebrews 7:25 Therefore He is able also to save to the uttermost, finally, and for all time those who come to God through Him since He is always living to make petition to God and intercede with Him for them.

Ephesians 2:6 And He raised us up together with Him and made us sit down together, giving us joint seating with Him in the heavenly sphere by the virtue of us being in Christ Jesus.

John 15:11 I have told you these things that My joy and delight may be in you and that your joy and gladness may be a full measure and complete and overflowing.

FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST

1. HOW GOD COMMUNICATES WITH US

'God Speaks, We listen- We speak, God Listens'

-Through creation [Romans 1:19-20; Psalms 19:1-4]

The systematic, complexity and beauty of creation communicates the character, power and majesty of God. The fact that we are the focal point of this creation and have been given dominion over this creation indicates our status in, purpose and responsibility to God and the world He has placed in our care.

- Through the work and life of His Son Jesus [John 3:16, John 1:14]

The Gospels highlight the ministry and life of Jesus and indicate just how much of a priority we are on God's agenda. We are of such value that Jesus gave up His life for us as God willed.

- Through prayer [Ecclesiastes 5:1-2]

Prayer is conversing with God- listening and speaking. We listen not just with our ears but also with our hearts through what we read and the convictions we sense in our own spirits

- Through the Holy Spirit in us [John 14:26]

The Holy Spirit is God's presence living in us. An extension of Himself that takes from Himself and relates to our spirits the will of God

- Through His word; the Bible [Psalms 119:9-11,105, 130,133]

The bible is God's word for and to us. It has communicated God's heart to and for us through all generations of mankind. It has been proven as reliable, true and a vital companion to the Christian lifestyle.

-Through other people [Jeremiah 50]

God speaks through ordinary people as well as through chosen messengers. Those who know God and have His Spirit in them are able to communicate His will to others based on what God has revealed to them of Himself. This revelation may be through reading the word, prayer and convictions one gets. This is irrespective of age, status, wealth, nationality or race or even how long one has been a believer but based on relationship with God.

- Through dreams, visions [Gen 37, Revelation]

God communicates to people in sub-conscious [while asleep] or in vivid pictures whilst wide awake e.g. Joseph's dreams, Isaiah's visions of God in the temple, Moses and the burning bush.

2. KNOWING GOD'S VOICE

Requires being in personal relationship with God

John 10:4-5, 7

-Obey & learn from experience. Train yourself to live according to God's word and you will be able to distinguish when you hear a counterfeit voice [Psalms 119: 9-11]

There are no short cuts to learning to decipher God's voice in this busy world. It only comes through practice. Consistently exposing ourselves to the sound of his voice to the point where even before we hear His voice, we know his heart. To be so in tune with His ways that we finish his sentences as we would with a close companion. Many times we are unsure if it is God we hear because we have not known His heart.

-Is it scriptural? [Acts 17:11]

The Bible as the word of God sets a standard and acts as the measuring gauge by which we determine whether we are hearing from God or from a different source. Anything that is fundamentally contrary to what we find in scripture can be identified as counterfeit to God's voice.

On the other hand, what we find in scripture must also be contextualized to extract its intended meaning; otherwise human nature is inclined to materializing what we want to interpret from scripture to suit our situations. Whereas this may work say in the context of appropriating a promise of blessing that was declared over a nation thousands of years ago, it can go terribly wrong in the case where for instance one literally chops their hands or legs off because the bible says it should be done to avoid sin

-Does your Spirit bear witness to it? [Romans 8:16]

God has placed His Spirit in us and consequently a good way to measure whether we are indeed hearing God's voice is if the Holy Spirit and our spirits are in harmony over an issue. If there is a disparity, it is often indicated by a lack of peace or restlessness in ones heart, at times even a sense of fear or doom- this is often an indication that there is an ungodly influence in play. God is not a God who instills fear but He is a God of peace and love.

It may take a time of prayer on our parts to get the revelation of what God requires of us if our spirits don't agree initially, but a word that even after much prayer and seeking God still leaves us apprehensive and tense and even doubtful of God is an indication that it may very well be from an ungodly source.

-Does it focus on grace or judgment, faith & hope or fear, build up & edify or tear down

[2 Timothy 3:16-17]

Every word that comes from God is meant to encourage, edify, and build up believers. There may at times be rebuke or correction but always with the aim of restoration. If we indeed are true sons of God, He will discipline us as a father- but never as a dictator or slave driver. Any word we hear that seems to impose a heavy sense of condemnation or judgment without room for restoration is very likely ungodly- it defies the very reason Jesus Christ came- To restore relationship between man and God.

- Distinguish between personal preference and true submission to God

[Luke 22:41-43]

At times what we desire may not be what God wants for us. It is necessary to examine our motives and desires and take note of how they influence our willingness to let God have the final say in our situation. Jesus Christ Himself found Himself at crossroads where His preference was not what God willed but He, like all obedient Sons should, submitted to God, trusting that if that was what was required of Him by his father, then there could only be good to be had from the situation- even if it cost him heavily. We must learn to trust

that when our preference and God's will don't seem to align, we serve a God who ultimately has our best interests at heart and will never act to our disadvantage. And with that knowledge and confidence, we allow Him to direct the course of our lives.

- Does it reflect God's character?

It is often said that a man's word is his bond. The quality of a man's character is often indicated by how good he is at keeping his word. God has and will always keep His word. His promises are sure and trustworthy. We can rely on the fact that God's word is His bond. Any word that does not portray God as good and just and all powerful, any word that puts into question his authority, and integrity as Sovereign God over all is clearly an ungodly interjection. Over and over the bible declares God as good and just and merciful and powerful and loving and compassionate, slow to anger, not wanting anyone to perish, patient, glorious, reliable, never changing and many other qualities that are characteristic of Him. If we have a deep revelation and appreciation of His character, any declaration that suggests otherwise becomes automatically suspect.

3. HEARING GOD'S VOICE - How to listen to God

Wanting to verify what one hears as a word from God does not mean one lacks faith in God but serves as a means of confirming the identity of the one who speaks

-Pray [1 Thessalonians 5:17, Ecclesiastes 5:1-2]

Listen twice as much as you speak. There is more that God has to say that we need to hear than there is for us to say that He needs to hear. This is not the time to enjoy the sound of your voice but a time to have 'few words'. This does not mean not saying anything but rather being brief and to the point then waiting on a response from God.

Continually remaining in an attitude of communication with God puts us in a position where we can hear Him speak. As we pray, God may speak audibly,

by way of strong conviction, through the word or through a super-natural change in the situation we are praying over.

-Write

We have the bible today because people made an effort to write down what God was saying. It was not enough to just have it in memory, it needed to be tangible. How thankful we are today that they did so. We too have a responsibility to write an account of what God says to us- for our own benefit but also for those it may encourage afterwards.

Make note of what you sense God communicating to you- mentally and physically. We are prone to forgetfulness and doubt. Noting down what God says to us serves to remind us of what He said as well as to encourage us when we lose sight of His promises in the storms of life.

- Worship. [Romans 12:1]

Worship is the act of making God the focus and object of one's attention, service, and adoration. It's not so much about us or for our own benefit but it's about God. It's not about what we get out of it but what we give to him. Inevitably we receive the blessings that come with being in right standing with God - but that is not our motive. To worship with the focus on what we get out of it cheapens the experience.

Intentionally invest time in building a relationship with God. Express your dependence on Him; trust in Him, reverence Him, acknowledge His lordship over your life and everything that concerns you. Focus your attention; engage your mind, spirit and heart to connect with God. Tune your heart and mind to look out for His response to you in likely as well as unlikely ways.

- Study the word [Psalms 119:130]

On your own and in discussion with other believers and internalize it. Think about what it says, what your response to it is. Learn not just to depend on other's perceptions but cultivate your own ability to recognize when God is speaking to you personally. We are called not to believe blindly but to know the reason for our faith and this can only be done as we study the bible

-Personalize what you learn, [James 2:17]

Knowledge without action is redundant; faith without action is dead- ineffective. Practical application of what we learn in God's word helps reinforce our knowledge and appreciation of Him and increases our ability to recognize his voice based on experience.

- Seek godly counsel [Psalms 1: 1]

Be open to the insight of spiritual leaders over you. As much as ungodly counsel is able to misguide and corrupt, godly counsel instructs, guides, directs, cautions and acts as a shield against foolish mistakes or unforeseen troubles

Growing in God's Word

What is meant by the phrase 'the Word of God'?

1. The Word of God as a person: Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ has been referred to as the Word of God in several places in the Bible. The most compelling evidence is John's account in John 1:1-4
Rev 19:13, John 1:1, 14, 1 John 1:1-4

2. The Word of God as speech by God

- God's decrees [Gen 1:3, Ps 33:6]
- God's Word of Personal Address
[Matthew 3:17, Gen 2:16-17, 1 Kings 19:9-11]
- God's Word as speech through human lips (prophets)

3. God's Word in Written Form (The Bible)

[2 Timothy 3:16]

Power of God's Word

God's word is the power of God unto salvation. Romans 1:16-17. It is the power of God's Word contained in the gospel of Christ that leads one unto salvation.

John 6:68-69

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and powerful, and **sharper than** any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The word of God is powerful; the word illuminates our lives and brings revelation that leads to eternal life. The word of God also increases our faith [faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Romans 10:17]. Ephesians 6 calls the word of God our sword of the Spirit. It is our offensive weapon in our fight against the enemy.

The Lord Jesus when He was tempted used the word of God to repel him. [Matthew 4:1-11] This is what we must also do if we are to overcome the enemy when tempts us. Using God's Word in this manner reveals our recognition of His Lordship and authority. It reveals just how submitted we are to His Lordship. We can only overcome the enemy if we are submitted to God [James 4:7].

The Word of God is what brought everything into being [Psalm 33:6]. The Word was used in creation and everything was created by and through the Word of God. The Word of God is creative and it regenerates the sinner.

There is a supernatural connection between revelation and sanctification. Revelation leads to sanctification when the revealed word of God is applied to one's life. (For example, the people of Nineveh repented after God's word was revealed to them by the Prophet Jonah) [Jonah 3:5-10]

The power that is contained in the **Word** of God is beyond comprehension and outside the confines of human intellect and imagination, we must seek a closer walk with Holy Spirit if we are to fully understand and comprehend the power that is contained in the Word of God. When we realise how Mighty, Supreme, Majestic, Powerful and Awesome God is, we will know how powerful His Word also is.

Your quiet time

Every Christian needs a space where he/she can spend time with God alone. [Matt 26:36, 1 Kings 6:7]

Your quiet time is a place of solitude, a place of sincerity, a place of nakedness to the Lord and a place of complete focus on the Lord. It is a place where your relationship with God is developed and shaped; a place of intimacy with God. Things happen here that cannot happen anywhere else. In numerous places in the Bible, we see Jesus retreating to a place of solitude so He could fellowship with the Father. We see that He did this on a regular basis. No matter how busy He got, He always found time to do this. This was the source of His strength and intimate knowledge of the Father's Will. Your quiet time will reflect on your effectiveness for God.

When we come before God in our quiet time, we must do a few things:

1. In Matthew 6:6 the Lord Jesus tells His disciples this: *"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who **is** in the secret **place**; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly"*.

We must get to a **quiet secluded place** and shut the world behind us and then have our minds focused on Jesus.

2. We then ask the Lord Jesus to wash us clean from all our sins by His precious blood': [Hebrews 9:12-14, 1 Peter 1:18-20, **Revelation 12:11**]
3. Knowing that we are only able to enter into the throne room of grace because of what Jesus has done we must then ask the Holy Spirit to enable us to enter into a place of worship in spirit and in truth. Our hearts must be completely sold out for Jesus for this to happen. We do not go with petitions but we go to worship and to be in His presence.
4. As we worship Him we will be aware of His awesome presence and we must ask the Holy Spirit to tune our ears to hear the Father's voice. We are then able to feel what is on His heart. Quite often we will find answers to prayers we have not even yet prayed for the Father knows what is on our heart. We begin to hear God in an intimate way. He will

show us what to pray for and reveal things in us that needs dealing with to allow us to move into a higher place of fellowship with Him. [Jude 1:20-21, John 14:26].

If you find it difficult to enter into a place of worship, ask the Holy Spirit to enable you [Romans 8:26] “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered”.

Here are some practical things you can do: put on a worship song that you know the words to. This must be a God focused song and then sing along to it. You can also read some of David’s Psalms that talks about God’s greatness and goodness. Also, call into remembrance some of the good things God has done and begin to open your mouth and praise trusting the Holy Spirit will enable you.

5. Spend some time reading His words or praying as the Holy Spirit leads. The quiet time must be guarded very carefully, do not let anything or anyone get in the way. The best times are early in the morning and late at night. Prepare the night before and give yourself a good length of time at least an hour as the time can fly when you get into the presence of God.

Remember your quiet time is not the end of your fellowship with God for the day but the beginning. It should set you up to continuously fellowship with God. I have learnt in recent weeks the importance of being aware of God’s presence continuously. I do not like to be unaware of God for more than a few minutes.

Spurgeon said he loathed being unaware of God for more than 10 minutes.

Studying and meditating on God's Word / Going deeper into God's Word Psalm 1:1-3

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; But his delight is in the law of the LORD,

And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season,

Whose leaf also shall not wither;

And whatever he does shall prosper.,

Psalm 119:11 “Your word I have **hidden** in my **heart**, that I might not sin against You”.

2 Timothy 2:15

*“Be **diligent** to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”.*

The word of God is our spiritual food [Matthew 4]. Without it we will starve the spiritual man and cause his growth to be stunted. The paucity of God’s word in our lives is the cause of immaturity.

1 Timothy 4:8

*For **bodily exercise** profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.*

To mature in our Christian lives we must spend time studying and going deeper into God’s word. This is a time apart from our quiet time with God. It is the time we bring out all the study tools (study Bibles, theological books, books on biblical exploration and exegesis, and of course e-sword).

Some have referred to the Bible as a road map to life; I believe it is more than that. The bible allows us to know God’s character, promises and commandments. God speaks to us through His Word (Bible) **[2 Timothy 3:16]** All **Scripture** is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

I believe the Bible is a road map to a life of righteousness and should be the daily bread for every Christian.

Studying the Bible allows you to know the Word of God (Jesus), the Word of God (His audible voice) and the Word of God (scripture).

Any attempt to study the word of God will be pointless without the Holy Spirit’s enabling **[John 16:13]**. Before we start our study, we must spend time asking the Holy Spirit to open our spiritual eyes and grant us revelation as we read His word. Study aids are great but use them as **aids** and not as authorities on their own. I find it is best to read the Bible first and with the Holy Spirit’s direction receive your own understanding. This understanding will be enhanced when you begin to apply exegesis and hermeneutics; and this is where study aids and commentaries come in.

Applying God's Word

God’s word leads to revelation and its application to one’s life brings about sanctification.

James tells us to be doers of the word and not just hearers. [James 1:22]

Applying God’s word takes faith and builds faith.

As Christians, it is our duty to know God's Word and what it says to and about us. We must exercise our faith daily by speaking it over our circumstances if we want to see positive changes in our lives (**remember** once we are saved we go through the process of sanctification).

Remember, the Word is like a two-edged sword. It cuts one direction to bring about the changes we desire and another direction to halt the devil. Just as Jesus used the Word to defeat Satan in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11), so should we.

Jesus knew the Word, and He applied it. So, in order for us to apply the Word, we also should know it.

Make it your priority to know God and His word.

