

CHURCHES THAT GIVE LIFE

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PREFACE

Jesus said that one of the reasons He came was to give us life, a more abundant life. So passionate was He to give us this life that He went to the cross to purchase it and has given us the Holy Spirit so we might live it. The apostle Paul made it clear in his letter to the church at Rome, especially in chapters 6 to 8 that this life was on the other side of death. Just as the victory of the resurrection life of Jesus was after the cross so it is with us. The more abundant life that Jesus promised we could experience comes after our dying to self not before it. The Christian life is not God helping us to be good; it is a brand new, never before experienced, life that has its origin in God. It is a completely different way of living. It is so different that there is nothing in our old life that is of any use to us in living our new life. Gal 2 v 20 *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

This book has been written to help Christians build churches that give spiritual life, abundant life, to their congregations. The church belongs to Jesus not us and He is the one who builds it. Although it is right that we should use every means at our disposal when we preach the Gospel to get people saved and to teach the word to build up those already saved our methods have no life in themselves. The Holy Spirit is the only one who can give divine life to either the saved or the unsaved and without Him all our efforts are useless. Ps 127 v 1 *Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it. Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.* Our Heavenly Father is the one who initiates everything we do just the same as it was in the life of His Son while He was here on earth. Jesus brought life because he did things God's way. I only do what I see the Father doing and I only say what I hear the Father saying was the root of all His works. Not my will be done but your will be done applies to how we build and organise our churches just as much as it does to our individual lives.

CHAPTER 1

LIVING CHURCH STRUCTURES

When we look into the biblical doctrine of the church and how it is set up we discover that its organisational structure is independent of the culture of the place where it is planted even though it has its origins in Judaism. If you keep to the simple scriptural principles which govern church life you can have a church in any culture of the world, among any people of the world, no matter what are their traditions. You don't need to import the culture of your own nation or the country you are in to do it. One of the sad mistakes we make when we spread the gospel is that we make the culture of the country that the missionaries come from part of the Gospel. This is especially true if the principles of their national life are based on the Bible, like the UK and the US. Although this may be contested I believe that there is no such thing as a Christian Nation. It is not true to call the UK a Christian nation just because much of our national life was formed by individual Christians who had become part of its government. There has never been a time in our history when everyone in the country has been born again. Calling a nation which is a mixture of believers and unbelievers Christian, even if the believers are in the majority, only brings confusion as to who is a Christian. When the Bible speaks about a Christian nation as in 1 Peter 2:9 it is referring to the invisible worldwide body of born believers in Jesus. Because of this confusion the visible local church is often a mixture of believers and unbelievers and that mixture which can extend into its leadership explains why behaviour which are directly opposed to what the Bible teaches is accepted.

THE CURRENT PRACTICE

Because church has to be organised we have a tendency to organise it on the same principles as a club. A club has the following framework to its structure:

- 1 It exists because of a common interest
- 2 It is usually run by an elected or appointed body; a committee of some sort
- 3 It has a set of rules to govern its business and bring order to its members
- 4 It organises events so members can pursue their common interest

If I have an interest in photography I join a photographic club so I can fellowship with like-minded people and further my interest. This is how we tend to organise our churches:

- 1 We have a common interest - Jesus Christ;
- 2 We have a ruling body – elected or appointed;
- 3 We have rules – The Bible and sometimes a constitution;
- 4 We have a church programme which consists mainly of organised events to further our growth in the Christian life and draw others in.

It appears to be OK but on closer examination it has a serious flaw because it is a strong tendency to focus its way of life on me and my perceived needs than God Himself. The perceived needs or desires of the people in the church produce the programme of events which are designed to meet those needs. Many people in the church get involved in the programme more to fulfil a need in themselves, to feel they belong or are accomplishing something with their Christian life than they do to serve God. They do serve God but it is more about them than about God. This is because we have been taught that the purpose of the church is to meet our needs and fulfil our desires. When we are looking for a church to attend the most common questions we ask ourselves is, does it meet our needs? Or does it suit our understanding of how a church should be. I have even heard preachers say 'if you can't find a church that suits you start your own'.

We teach that the Bible says that as a church we need to be doing certain things, each member has a need or desire to:

Worship
Have fellowship
Study the Bible
Evangelise
Disciple people

So together out of what we believe is obedience to God we organise a church programme of events to meet these needs, we organise:

Worship services
Fellowship groups, teas, picnics, etc.
Bible study and prayer meetings
Home groups of many varieties
All sorts of evangelistic works

This seems OK and it can work after a fashion but it has this serious weakness because our service is tainted with self interest. When the events don't meet our needs as we perceive they should we moan, complain and try to manipulate things till they do. The result is strife in the body. Acts 6:1 reveals that it wasn't long into the growth of the early church that a group felt that they weren't getting their fair share of the hand out so they griped about it. When we don't get what we came to church to get we moan, gripe, criticise, complain, back-bite, gossip to others and become involved in all manner of contentious behaviour. The Bible warns us where that leads. James 3:16 *For where envy and self-seeking exist confusion and every evil thing are there.* Gal 5:15 *But if you bite and devour one another beware lest you be consumed by one another.* James 3:10 *Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.* This is a great way to fill our lives with frustration, disappointment and sorrow and the leaders get trapped in a constant round of appeasing people or changing the programme to satisfy people so they don't leave because the church needs their money to survive instead of doing their proper job. So our churches tend to be need centred and event orientated organisations. God does it somewhat differently.

GOD'S ORGANISATION

God doesn't do anything out of a need like we do. He does it from the love and compassion for the good of others. God is self-sufficient – He has life in Himself. He didn't create man out of a need for fellowship because He was lonely but because he wanted to shower him with His love. God didn't save us because we needed to be saved, although we did, but because He loved us. God does what He does out of love not lack whereas we unfortunately tend to do things to fulfil what we think is lacking.

HEART CENTRED

God is heart centred in his dealings with His creation. 1 Sam 16:6 - 8 tells the story of choosing a king to replace Saul and shows quite clearly that when God chooses someone for a task He is not interested in outward appearances. He chose David because he was a man after His own heart 1 Samuel 13:14. Proverbs 4:23 warns us above all else to keep our hearts safe because what sort of life we have is decided by what comes out of our hearts rather than the things that we do or have. God's requirement for us is to love Him first above everything else. Mat 22:37. God has put his salvation in our hearts. Our relationship with Him meets all our needs and out of grateful love we get in involved with church. The foundation of our Christian life is the new heart that our Father gave us when we were saved. The whole invisible church, the body of Christ, is the dwelling place of God by the Holy Spirit Ephesians 2:19 – 22 and a local church is a visible part of that whole body. The foundation resources it has is the hearts of the people who make up the congregation and what God has put in them because visible the church is a gathering of born again hearts and its life flows out of those hearts. The organisational structure that a particular group uses to conduct its affairs flows out of those hearts because the local church has a spiritual dimension to its ministry and that spiritual life is in those hearts. It is the Holy Spirit in the congregation's heart that gives the church its life not the quality of its organisation although we do need to do things 'decently and in order'. We have glimpses of this life in Acts 2:42 – 47 and 5:12 – 16. The worship we have and the activities that take place amongst us when we get together are not the product of our organised efforts to get the Holy Spirit to meet our needs so we can live but the result of us releasing what is already happening in our hearts before we get to the event.

GIFT ORIENTATED

The other feature of God's organisation is that He works through the gifts He has placed in our hearts not events arranged to meet our needs. The church programme of events that we should be organising are the ones that allow us to give expression to our gifting rather than the things we feel we need to do whether or not we have the ability to do them or not. Rom 12 contains a list of gifts and each born again believer receives at least one at their new birth. Just like the talents you have when you are born naturally. 1 Cor 12-14 contains the gifts of the Spirit, which we can seek for and use in conjunction with our basic gift or gifts. Eph 4 contains a list of the gifts Jesus gives to His church so it can carry out its work and purpose in the world.

The church should be heart centred and gift orientated not need centred and event orientated. One of the most important roles of church leadership is to feed the hearts of the people and manage the gifts God has placed in them. These resources should then be united behind the vision God has given to the church. This vision is based on the gifts that have been brought together so the church you go to should be a placement from God because of your gifting not one of your own choosing because it meets your needs. When each person is flowing out of their gift, having met all their needs from their relationship with Jesus, He is at the centre and their motivation is His love. Jesus said of believers that out of their bellies would flow living water. This is not just true for us as individual Christians it is also true for the local church. Life should flow out of our hearts to the community outside. The result is a spiritual anointing and flow which carries great power in sweeping away the strongholds of the world, the flesh and the devil. The ground of discontent on which strife thrives is destroyed. A tremendous sense of belonging and destiny results from this life style and fellowship happens without organisation 1 Peter 4:11. True fellowship is me helping you fulfil the God given desires of your heart and you helping me fulfil mine. Commitment no longer becomes the struggle it so often is because spiritually minded Christians don't usually drag their feet to do what

they know is from God. It also helps us walk in faith because we don't need the boost of outward success to keep us going. Instead of the world seeing the usual fighting and squabbling that so often mars our witness they see a harmony beyond natural togetherness. It is easy to get people committed to what is in their hearts.

To sum up we do not organise the church like a club because we are a living spiritual organism, a dwelling place for the Spirit of God. God wants His church to be heart centred and gift orientated not need centred and event orientated so the church programme is the result of what is in the hearts of the people. God has a unique vision for a church. He brings together people with the resources in their hearts to execute that vision and gives them leaders who, under His direction, will unite the hearts of the people behind that vision and let loose their combined resources to accomplish the vision. Have you ever really asked God what He has put in your heart and which of the Romans 12 gifts you have? CWR have a free Q & A form you can download from their website to help you find it

CHAPTER 2

LIFE GIVING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LEADERS AND MEMBERS

If we survey the Christian scene at any time we will see that God raises up leaders who move his kingdom on and help His people grow. A major part of our church life concerns the relationship between leaders and congregations. Today this aspect of our Christian life is global because the influence of leaders through modern technology and the media extends throughout the world. People can be lifted up and reach great public prominence. As long as they are faithful then all is well but if they fall into sin or heresy they can lead a lot of people astray. There is also the problem of the media if they get hold of the story of their failure. Unfavourable headlines make their way into the national news which brings the church into disrepute and gives ammunition to the enemies of the Gospel. Also this tragedy is compounded by the fact that the body of Christ quickly turns on its fallen leaders and the bigger the leader the bigger the hostility they have to suffer. This results in innocent believers working with Godly integrity getting caught up in the fallout. We had just such a situation a good while ago when Jimmy Swaggert and Jim Bakker fell to temptation. The result was devastating for the body of Christ because their sin involved money so many people stopped giving to Christian work in general and all sorts of faithful honest ministries suffered serious financial difficulties.

At that time I asked God about the whole situation; after all, these people were our Christian brothers even if they had fallen prey to the wiles of the devil. I asked Him how are we supposed to relate to our leaders, what is your heart for their function in the body and how can we as rank and file soldiers in the army of Jesus help them to stay on track? God gave me an answer which I believe will help us get leadership into perspective and enable us to assist any who are clearly called to prominent public positions to remain faithful. Here is what I believe He told me.

1 LEADERS ARE THE SAME AS US

Leaders are not some sort of super Christian as if God has put them in a special category of their own. It is true they are people who have been willing to completely abandon themselves to the call of God but they accomplish their extraordinary feats through the same Holy Spirit that dwells in us all. For example, it is not a different Holy Spirit who is in Benny Hinn from the Holy Spirit who is in you. Admiral Horsey achieved great success in the Second World War by turning the tide in favour of the Americans against the Japanese. When someone called him a great man because of what he had achieved he replied that there were no great men only ordinary men who rose up to great challenges. We need to respect and honour the people whom God raises up and respond to the challenges put before them but we must not put them on a pedestal as if they were in some way superior to us. We are all joint heirs with Christ and we all have the same resources available to us. Don't devalue what you do and judge yourself unfavourably to them. Public prominence does not determine greatness in the church as it does in the world.

When we examine the details of why some of them have fallen into temptation we find that we are not as innocent of their downfall as we often think we are. We, the body, put them under so much pressure to perform to the reputation we have given them. We criticise them unmercifully when they don't come up to our expectations. Some of the partnership materials with Andrew Wommack Ministries where I worked for a while involved other speakers, like Tape or Video of the Month. From time to time we had some people leave the partnership because they only wanted to hear Andrew. Some people came to the conference only wanting to hear Andrew. Jesus was not an exclusive leader and He was always investing Himself into His disciples. Matthew 28:19, Mark 6:7, Matthew 14:15 – 16 and John 14:12. We have a duty of care towards these leaders that we do not lay expectations on them that it is not lawful for us to do. If we fail to hold on to the blessing that God gives us through their ministry then that is not their fault it is ours. We need to join our faith with their faith so we can keep what the Lord gives us through them.

2 LIVE UNDER THE RIGHT COVENANT

The Lord showed me that the real problem with the relationship between leaders and followers is that the body of Christ tends to relate to its leaders as if they are living under the Old Covenant instead of the New.

(a) God's leaders under the Old Covenant

Under the Old Covenant God did not indwell His people like He does in the New. When there was a need God came upon a person and raised him or her up to meet that need. The people were dependent on their anointing to do the task for everybody. This system operated in all aspects of Old Testament life, from a national crisis to ordinary domestic situations because the general populace related to God through their specially anointed and appointed leaders. Hebrews 3:16 - 19 shows us that the failure of the generation that crossed the Red Sea to enter the promised land was because they didn't believe. Moses was the only one who really believed God. Except for Joshua and Caleb the rest had a ride on his faith because they didn't believe for themselves. People in the Old Testament who wanted to enquire of God did it through others 1 Sam 3:19 - 21 & 9:9, Jer 42:1 - 4. Even in the small issues of life they took the man of God along just in case they needed a miracle to get them out of a sticky situation 2 Kgs 6:1 – 7. The people came to God through the priesthood and the temple system of worship. They

were instructed in God's will for them through the anointed leaders God raised up to teach them and show them what to do because they could not do it for themselves.

There was a divine purpose in this system for it pointed towards the One who would eventually come and be the final anointed person raised up to do the one thing we could never do for ourselves – our salvation. Jesus was the last man raised up under the Old Covenant and had the job of the ultimate deliverance of mankind from the power of sin and the devil Acts 2:22 - 24 & 36 – 39. After that great final work the Old Testament way of doing things came to an end and a New Covenant with a new way of doing things was ushered in by the resurrection of Jesus. We naturally like the Old Covenant way of life because if we can get someone else to believe God for us rather than us rising up to the occasion, taking personal responsibility and using our own faith, we will.

(b) God's leaders under the new covenant

Life under the New Covenant is radically different from life under the Old Covenant and Jesus drew our attention to it in Mat 11 v 11 where He told us that the person who was the least under the New Covenant was greater than John the Baptist who was the greatest under the Old Covenant. Jeremiah prophesied in Jer 31 what the New Covenant way of living was to be like. The radical change that took place through the work of Jesus was that every member is now a partaker of the divine life so we all have access to God without the need of an intermediary. Jesus did the ultimate work for us so that we could, through the indwelling Spirit, using our own faith, overcome for ourselves. The spiritual power of miracles, deliverance and victory and the ability to communicate with God that was done through His anointed leaders now becomes available to us all. There is now complete equality amongst all believers in the New Covenant from the newest believer to the oldest most experienced believer so none should be despised and none put on a pedestal. 1 Cor 3 v 5-10 *After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building. Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful.* What one can attain, all can attain; we respect God's calling and anointing and the experience of older believers but we are inferior to none. We might be more carnal or inexperienced or less committed, but not inferior.

The reason that God still raises up people under the New Covenant is that he equips them so that they may help us to believe for ourselves. They are not there to believe or hear God for us. Under the New Covenant there are no Prophets Priests and Kings to stand in the gap between us and God like those under the Old Covenant. We are all Prophets Priests and Kings. There is still a valid ministry of praying for each other and having 'words' for each other. The difference is that under the New Covenant, along with others' faith and power we must have faith for ourselves if we want the blessing we get from them to last. One of the reasons we fail to hang onto things we get when people pray for us is because we are relying more on their faith than ours. Often the main motivation for asking someone to pray for us is because we have no faith in our own faith. I am not saying that other people's faith is not part of our life and experience and cannot benefit us when we seek help but the bottom line of our spiritual development is the faith we exercise out of our own hearts. We must combine the faith of Christ that lives in us with the faith of Christ that lives in those who help us. We are not to rely entirely on their faith because that is Old Covenant living which is the cause of much of the failure and loss of blessing that we experience. That is the reason why before the list of things given in Mk 16:15 – 18 that we are capable of as a Christian it says *those who believe will.....*

To summarise, God raises up leaders to lead His people. Under the Old Covenant it was to do for the people what they could not do for themselves. Under the New Covenant it is to help us to personally enter into the benefits of our relationship with God and have faith for ourselves. The downfall of many a leader is the pressure our unrealistic expectations put on them to perform to the reputation we have given them. Remember when you next go to a big meeting you are as much responsible for the results of the ministry as the big name you have gone to see.

CHAPTER 3

LIFE GIVING FELLOWSHIP

In Gen 2 v 24 we have a marriage. Marriage is simply a man and a woman committed to bless each other. Because of that commitment there arises around them a host of activities and possessions, some are essential and some are voluntary. No matter how prolific the possessions and activities become the essence of the marriage is the commitment of the people to each other. Everything else that the people get involved in should build and enhance the central relationships. If the couple lose all the externals of their relationship it is still a marriage because the activities do not make the marriage. Unfortunately what so easily happens is that the externals become central and the marriage becomes dependent on them to function. The resultant whirl of activity begins to drive the partners apart. When the wife wants the husband's attention it's a nuisance, when the husband wants the wife's attention it's a nuisance and if there are children, their demands can easily overwhelm them and set them against each other. A skirmish breaks out about whose turn it is to transport the kids to or from their activity. Why should a rise in unemployment cause more divorce? Because people who spend most of their time apart are suddenly thrown together and they can't handle it

THE CHURCH FAMILY

Church life is a commitment to people. You can't go to church because you are the church. The word means 'a called out people'. The church is God's family and as it is in the natural family so it is in the church. The essence of church life is our commitment to each other. Church membership is primarily a commitment to God and the people in the particular family you have decided to join. Now this will involve activity, a real hive of activity, but the purpose of the activities is to 'build us up in our most holy faith' not set us at war with each other.

The essence of Christian commitment is revealed to us through the words of Ruth to Naomi when Naomi decided to return to her own land Ruth 1:16 - 17. *But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, And there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, If anything but death parts you and me".* A commitment to people was an integral part of Ruth's conversion to God and as we read the story all the activities she was later involved in were to support her relationship with Naomi. God's great method of reaching, teaching and changing people is working through other people. When man wants to do something he looks for methods and plans but God first looks for people who are committed first to Him and then His people Romans 12:1 - 2. Revivals come by God moving through people not from some great programme of activities. The best picture of church life is found in Eph 4 v 15 & 16 *but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ-- from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.* It is this sort of church in which God lives and moves and has His being. Jesus lived and died for people and the Holy Spirit has been given so that the resurrected Christ may go on ministering to people as He ministered while He was on earth.

THE ACTIVITY PROBLEM

Sadly what we have seen that can happen to a family can happen to the church. The activities take centre stage and drive a wedge between the people. There is great emphasis today in the church to get everybody involved in the activities to get away from just a few people doing eighty-percent of the work. This is commendable but there can be a negative side-effect to this because when new members come in we tend to quickly start thinking, what can they do? We tend to see people as Sunday school teachers, elders, deacons or someone to look after the flowers or do the cleaning or whatever else makes up that part of the programme where we have a vacancy. We pray people in for a specific job that needs to be done with a bias to be more interested in their abilities than who they really are. Church relationships so easily become work centered. If we leave the work we very often lose the relationship with the people we have been working with or we can fall out with each other because of the work. What can be worse is that when workers have problems and it causes them to be less productive we can be tempted to look on them with some irritation. If someone wants to give something up the cry is, who will do your job? With the result that some can be persuaded, beyond their better judgment and God's will, to carry on.

When activity becomes the centre then it becomes the arbitrator of who is spiritual and who is not, the church becomes divided into two groups, those who are committed to the programme and those who are not. The Mary/Martha syndrome easily rears itself Luke 10:38 - 42. Jesus gently rebukes Martha because the real arbitrator of who is spiritual is devotion to Christ because all calls to discipleship are calls to devotion to Jesus and his people. It can be said that the first murder between Cain and Able was over religious activity and how many Christians have 'murdered' their brothers and sisters with their mouths filled with criticism and condemnation over some part of the church programme? How many pastors and other leaders become depressed and disillusioned because they cannot keep the programme going.

GOD'S CHURCH PROGRAMME

I wouldn't want you to think that the church should be non-active and introspective. A church that is truly devoted to Jesus and each other will be a place of great activity and that activity will be healthy and up-building to the people involved. This is what it will look like:

Romans 12:10 *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another*

Romans 14:19 *Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.*

Romans 15:7 *Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.*

Romans 15:14 *Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.*

Galatians 5:13 *For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*

Galatians 6:2 *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

Ephesians 4:32 *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.*

Ephesians 5:21 *submitting to one another in the fear of God.*

Colossians 3:9 *Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,*

Colossians 3:13 *bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.*

Hebrews 10:22-24 *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,*

James 5:16 *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

1 Peter 4:9 *Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.*

This is the real church programme without which all the activity will get you little profit.

A LESSON FROM THE GARDEN ABOUT REAL FELLOWSHIP

When God made Adam in His image and placed him in the position of the sovereign ruler of earth, he was ruling it on behalf of God and by creation Adam knew the will of God for the earth and mankind. His sovereignty gave him full scope of initiative which is seen when he named the animals because it says that *whatever Adam called them that was their name*. This sovereignty was meant to be used only in harmony with God's will. Before Eve was a separate person she was part of everything that Adam was involved in because they were two persons in one body. This is a common way of attributing the actions of the human race when looking at things from God's perspective. Heb 7 v 9 – 10 *Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.* In this verse God is using, as His argument to justify why Levi should give tithes, the fact that he gave tithes when Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek even though Levi was not born till long after Abraham had died. So it is not unreasonable to say that Adam with Eve inside him was God's helper to rule creation, so Eve who had already been created but not separated into her own body was already operating as Adam's helper.

When God made Eve a separate being by taking her out of Adam she was also made in God's image and became a sovereign being. Now she had an identity to be able manifest who she was in Adam. God made her a perfect helper for Adam so as God was making her to become woman He had Adam and his position in mind; Eve was made for Adam, Adam was not made for Eve. Just as Adam was supposed to use his sovereignty to rule the creation for God, so Eve was to use her sovereignty to rule jointly with Adam from her position as his helper. Adam's sovereignty was for God, Eve's sovereignty was for Adam; so that together they would be committed to the joint enterprise of ruling creation for God making their individual ability to walk with God available to each other. This harmony failed when they were conned into using their sovereignty to do their own thing. They followed the pathway of self-interest believing it would give them a better life. Instead all they got was death and the curse of sin. Here is a pattern for Christian churches and Christian businesses to get the best out of everyone and produce a Godly harmony in furthering the Kingdom of God. All people in an organization are to use their abilities and

sovereignty to further the vision of the 'Adams' who are answering the call of God and need us to be their 'help-meet Eves' to bring it about. Harmony and unity is produced when all the individuals involved in the programme use their sovereignty within the limits that is appropriate to their position for the good of the vision. When we seek to appoint someone to fill a position in the church or organisation we first need to find out whether they have a 'help-meet' heart because, no matter how perfect their abilities, if they do not have a help-meet attitude they will bring trouble in the form of division created by their self-interest as they pursue their own hidden agenda.

To sum up activity is important to the people of God but it is there to support and build up the people doing it, not break up their marriages alienate their children and give us nervous breakdowns. Let the early church have the last word. Acts 2:42 - 47. They had a heart for each other so we conclude with the question we began with; what are you committed to?

CHAPTER 4

LIFE GIVING COMMUNICATION

We live in an age with the most amazing advances in our ability to communicate and as Christians it is right to take full advantage of these methods to share the gospel and spread our understanding of the Christian life. Our communication of the gospel and the Christian life is to two groups of people, the saved and the unsaved. It is however very important not lose sight of the most important aspect of our communication of the Christian message which has a unique element which cannot be found anywhere else.

COMMUNICATING TO THE UNSAVED

We are the only people on earth who communicate a message to the dead or more correctly, the living dead. The Bible doesn't use the concept of ignorance when dealing with the relationship of God and man, indeed it clearly declares that all are without excuse for not believing in God. Paul writes in Rom 1 v 20 that the world we live on with all its complex beauty leaves us without excuse for not believing in God. The Bible always uses the concept of life and death when talking about the relationship of man to God, the unsaved to the saved or the old life to the new. John 5 v 24 talks of passing from death to life and Eph 2 v 1 says that through God's salvation we who were dead have been made alive. This means that our communication methods are unique because our aim is unique. Jesus did not come to make bad people good he came to give life to the dead. We are not seeking to inform people that the Bible and the Christian faith is the only valid explanation for mankind and the way things are in the world in an effort to get them to agree with us so they can make a rational decision to follow Christ. We are not seeking to get people to choose a way of life that will give them the power to save themselves. We are seeking to give a message that will raise the dead by causing people to die to themselves and be born again to newness of life. The Christian life is a new life, not the old life made good. 2 Cor 5:17, Gal 2:20. Comparing how Paul preached the Gospel at Athens and then at Corinth gives us a good contrast in communicating our message. It shows that the explanation method has a poor take-up rate. Acts 17 v 16 – 34. He had a few believe but he didn't plant a church in Athens. When he got to Corinth which was his next stop he reflects on his experience at Athens and declares in 1 Cor 2 v 1 – 5 that amongst them he would he would preach nothing except Christ and Him crucified. Putting on a show or giving a good rational explanation can be part of our presentation to create interest but if that interest isn't followed through with a word of life that raises the dead all we get is still born babies.

SAVED

Although Christians are not dead we still have to remember our unique way of communicating because we are not just educating believers in the Christian life, even though there is a place for learning. Although we have life it is wrong to think that all we have to do is inform our minds as to how we follow Jesus and all will be well. The fact that many Christians look more like Lazarus bound in his grave clothes, rather than living free of those bondages, reveals to us that we need more than education to set us free. The renewing of the mind mentioned in Rom 12 v 1 – 2 is more than just knowing how to live the way we should. For the word to give us life it must take root in our hearts because that is where our faith is, which is why Paul prayed in Eph 1 v 18 *that the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.* I believe that the truth that changes lives is something we see with our heart which when combined with the faith in your heart makes it become a real part of our daily living. That is what renews our mind. It is not getting understanding from the mind to the heart, it is seeing it in the heart and getting it to the head. The word for renew in Rom 1 v 1 – 2 is a noun not an adjective, our minds were renewed when we were born again which is why Paul says in 1 Cor 2:17 that we have the mind of Christ.

What I am sharing with you about Christian communication is that it is not so much about getting the right method to suit who you are communicating with but having the right approach in whatever method you use. We don't want still births by getting people to use their natural understanding to be persuaded to make a decision for Christ and we don't want believers to engage in lifelong struggles to overcome the flesh. Our communication has to be spiritually dynamic to either raise the dead to life or set the captive free. We don't want the sort of commitment that the people in Jerusalem gave to Jesus on Palm Sunday Matt 21 v 8 – 9. They were very enthusiastic but it didn't last very long because it was for the wrong reason.

EXAMPLES

I want to give two examples of how we can effectively communicate with either the saved or the unsaved

Firstly the story of the deliverance of the Jews by Queen Esther. The devil didn't know exactly who the saviour promised in the garden of Eden would be so he planned to wipe out the whole Jewish race to prevent him from being born. God arranged it so that Esther had been made queen so God had His women in place. Praise Him He can never be caught out. What a comfort that is for us. However there was a problem. Although Esther was queen she had no power to do anything about it because she could not go to the king unless he called for her. If she did and the king didn't receive her, the penalty was death. At first she is reluctant but Mordecai persuades her to go so she gets all the Jews in Shushan the capitol along with her hand maidens to pray and fast. She then declares that in

three days time she will risk her life and go to the king unbidden. Not a good place to be in when you are saving humanity from the clutches of the devil. She takes the risk and God protects her as the king receives her. Now you would think that having victoriously overcome the risk of death she would make her request known immediately. If this was us we would want to make our request known straight away in case we didn't get a second chance, but all she wants is a tea party which appears to have nothing to do with her mission. At the tea party she continues to avoid the real issue. She procrastinates even more with a request for a second tea party which is really running a serious risk of ruining the whole operation. Now this is really pushing your luck with a king like this who's responses were very unpredictable and could be very violent. However, the second tea party is arranged where she tells all and deliverance begins. In this high risk strategy of delaying the moment for revealing the real reason for risking her life and going to the king we see the vital importance of listening to God through the complete communication process. What was crucial to the deliverance of the Jews was the fact that the events which set Haman up for a fall and enabled the Jews to be delivered took place between the first and second tea parties. Only God knew that the king would have a sleepless night and find out about Mordecai's missed reward. If she had asked her question at the beginning she would have pre-empted God's plan. Not only has the mission got to be received by divine appointment, it has to be executed in the Spirit as well. Many a prophecy has come to nought because of this issue.

Secondly the women taken in adultery. John 8 v 1 – 11 The communication of Jesus in this story was based on a very simple principle. I only do what I see the Father doing and I only speak what I hear the Father speaking. This means that His actions and words had their origin in God which meant they were the product of His close walk with His Father. They did not have their origin in His learning as a Rabbi or His accrued experience of life walking with His Father. They were directly out of the heart of God, just like Esther's request for two tea parties. You can't learn this sort of communication on a course or from a manual. No amount of training will give you the knowledge to deal with situations like these. They can only be dealt with by a close heart to heart walk with our Father. It is important to study ways of reaching people and trying to understand how they see life so our words are relevant to them but that studying must come from the Father's heart. This will cause us to work with the Father instead of trying to get the Father to work with us. The Father knows intimately the needs and experiences of the people we are trying to reach. He knows how and what will reach their hearts and that is what we must deliver to them because we are after people's hearts not their minds.

THE PRACTICE

In creation the Spirit brooded over the waters waiting for God to speak so that His speaking was the source of the action that produced the results. No matter how we plan to gather the people always have the heart attitude that as they come and as they get involved in the activities we have organised the Spirit is brooding over them and you are seeking to speak a life giving word to them. Producing spiritual life is a conception experience like the birth of a natural baby. When the seed enters the egg they become one and new life is born. The word of God must enter into us, we must receive it into us. For the word to do the work and accomplish the life God intends it to give it must come out of God's mouth as well as ours Isa 55 v 11.

I once worked on the prayer help line of Andrew Wommack Ministries. One day a lady phoned for prayer for her husband because they were having marriage issues. Right 'off the cuff' I gave her a principle that I had just recently learned. The result was that instead of praying for her husband I prayed for her to allow God to enable her to change and put into practice the principle I had just shared with her. I had a card from her a few weeks later testifying how that short incident had transformed her marriage. A pastor friend of mine had a dream in which he was preaching at a healing meeting. In the front row were twelve people in wheelchairs. At the end of the preaching he went along the line starting with the first and prayed for them all. None were healed. He then had the dream again but this time the praying was in a different order. As he went to pray he heard a number between 1 and 12 called out and he went to the number called. After the last number was called all were healed. When he asked the Lord what it meant the Lord told him that the second time of praying was in the order of the people's readiness to believe so the success of the first healing had a positive knock-on effect as he prayed in the new order.

When we live like this we will experience the success of the early church where it says *the Lord added to the church such as should be saved*. This is the way we approach preaching the gospel and must be at the heart of everything we plan and organise with all the training that goes with it. The new covenant prophesied in Ezekiel and quoted in Hebrews says *No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother saying 'know the Lord' because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest*, Heb 8 v 11. Only the Spirit of God can give life so it is vital that we work with Him and speak the words that He wants us to speak even if they don't always make logical sense to us; like Esther and her tea parties.

CHAPTER 5 LIFE GIVING UNITY

Jn 17 v 23 & 24 *"I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me"*

Unity of this type is way beyond the 'let's agree to disagree so we can work together on the things we do agree about' concept of Christian co-operation. Since there is absolutely not even the faintest shadow of disagreement within the Godhead between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it is strange that we consider it a virtue that we will work together in a climate of tolerance while strongly disagreeing with each other. That is not really the kind of answer that Jesus was aiming for with His prayer. Any form of teamwork is admirable but the 'agree to disagree' sort of harmony can be achieved by unsaved people so is not the kind of oneness that causes *the world to know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me*.

To answer our questions we will need to approach our subject from a very different direction than the one we normally use when we consider the unity of the body of Christ. The oneness of Jesus prayer is a thing of the spirit which comes from our new nature which is manifest to the world when we live out of that spirit rather than trying to create unity with our body and soul, so we can say to people we are one in the spirit. To see what this means and how we can live it in practice we need to see an essential fact that made our salvation possible and we find it in the answer to a question posed in 1 Cor 2 v 8.

WHAT DIDN'T THE RULERS OF THIS AGE KNOW?

When Jesus became sin for us and paid the price of death which it demanded it didn't contaminate the holiness of his spirit. 1 Cor 15 v 42 – 44 Where it reveals a difference between the first man Adam and the last man Adam. The first was a living soul and the last was a life giving spirit. Although Jesus was fully human and lived exactly as we do He was also God

SATAN DOESN'T KNOW IT ALL

When God made the promise that He would provide a Saviour from the seed of the woman it was spoken directly Satan who was masquerading as a serpent. Gen 3:14 – 15 Because he was a created being Satan didn't know everything, especially the council of God concerning salvation which was planned before the creation began. He thought that the Saviour would just be a man like Adam and that was his downfall.

In the beginning it says that Adam was made in the image of God whereas when Jesus was born it says he was in the exact image of God. Heb 1:1 - 4. Adam was body soul and spirit but his spirit was not divine, not like the new spirit we get when we are born again. Adam was innocent but not holy so he used his sovereignty to go against what God had said and when he did he died to God in his spirit and sin entered his soul and body. When we are born we inherit his fallen nature and are born sinners with a spirit that is dead to God with sin in our soul and body. Sin and its practice is in this world. To save us God had to become a man because all things done on the earth are done through a man with a soul and a body and because sin is in the realm of the earth so salvation had to be achieved on earth by a man with a soul and a body. When Jesus was born He was not born with a spirit that was dead to God like us with earthly fathers. His spirit was very much alive to God because it was God Himself. Jesus left heaven as the second person of the trinity and entered Mary's womb so He could become a man with a soul and body. When that baby was born He had no inherited sin nature from Adam through Joseph because He had no earthly father. He could be tempted in all ways as we are because He was living as a human being with a soul and body like us Luke 4:1 – 11. His Holiness of Spirit always assured Him of the victory. Jesus used His free will to always choose to live in fellowship with His Father and do His Father's will so His body and soul was always under the control of His Holy Spirit. Jesus had taken this decision to be faithful to His Father, no matter what happened to Him, before creation while He was part of the trinity before time began. God has always known good and evil, as He says in Gen 3:24 by declaring that after the fall man had become like Himself now that he had a knowledge of good and evil. He never chooses evil because He has made an eternal decision out of His love and Holiness to be faithful to His word. God has never been innocent of evil like Adam which is why it says in 1 Cor 15:44 *The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*

When he left the cross it was after He said *it is finished* so salvation was purchased before He left earth so when He left the cross and descended into Hades 'the place of the dead' to confront Satan and take back the keys of death and hades He did so as the glorious uncontaminated Holy Son of the living God. The first sin took place here on earth and we are living on the same earth that Adam and Eve lived on. It is a bit different and a lot more degenerated but it is the same earth, not even Noah's flood made it different, it just removed people. Because Noah had Adam's fallen nature it didn't change the human race either. Sin pertains to this natural life, it is in the body and soul down here on earth, so salvation had to be purchased down here on earth and that is why you must decide to follow Jesus in this life and why you can't be saved in the next if you have not been saved before you die.

When salvation had been purchased it enabled those who received it to gain a far better place than Adam before the fall because we have been born into the spirit realm of God. Adam was not a joint heir with Jesus Christ, we are. Adam was not a brother to Jesus, we are. Adam was not made to sit in heavenly places, we are and this is

the source of our ability to *experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me*. Such unity is not possible from any other source except by living out of the sinless realm our new spirits have put us into.

THE SINLESS WORLD OF THE SPIRITUAL REALM

There is no sin in the spiritual realm that we have been born into so the life giving unity we are capable of and which will cause the world to *know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me* can only come from our spirit man. We are one, all we have to do is believe it and maintain it Eph 4:1 – 6 and Phil 2:1 – 4. This last passage shows us what life is like when we choose to permit our sinless spirit to rule over our body and soul.

OUR REAL PROBLEM

Satan can't touch us because we have been born to new life and been given a spirit that is holy, created after the image of the God who gave it to us. We are out of his reach so all he can do is to try to make us ineffective and his strategy is simple. He cons us out of our ability to live out of our new life by getting us focused on this world and its values. These values are made to get you to live for your soul and body and not your new spirit. This is what keeps us from manifesting a dynamic living oneness and unity.

What is worldliness? The world outside of God was created by self-interest. Gen 3:6 shows us that sin entered in when first Eve, then Adam, used their free will to make their own decision about the information the serpent had given them. Sin begins with self interest which causes us to choose a pathway based on nothing else but whether we have decided the pathway we are considering will be for our benefit. Rom 14:23 says that whatever is not of faith is sin. It was Adam and Eve's failure to act out of faith in the word God had given them that was their downfall. The world system that mankind has lived in ever since that fateful day in the Garden has been created by people following their self-interest. They believe that the goal of life is to satisfy their body and soul. That means using any method, fair and foul to grab what they can because you have only got one life. Do we realise just how much time and money we spend on the consequences of sin. How many hours I spend weeding my allotment? How much money I have to spend on insurance and security. How much money is spent by the government on the NHS etc. We are in the world but not of the world. Our value system comes from an altogether different place. We are supposed to spend our time here on earth because we are in the world, involved in all the legitimate things that make up life on earth. However we are to do it with the value system of heaven because we are not of the world. Our real enemy is this world and its values which pander to our body and soul but we don't belong to this bunch anymore. There is no spiritual life available from the world system with its self centered values. At best it can only give you religion which is a system of trying to please God by living out of our body and soul which is impossible. The truth is that those who want to do anything in relation to God must do it *in spirit and truth*. That is why the Bible constantly encourages us to leave the world alone Rom 12:2, 2 Cor 6:14 – 18 and Col 3:1 – 2.

The message is obvious. If you want to live in all the benefits of your salvation and live in the Divine harmony of the Spirit, get your snout out of the world's trough and live in the sinless world you have been born into. In other words stop acting like you are not saved. The fruit of the flesh mentioned so often in the New Testament letters are in the body/soul realm of your life and it is the manifesting of these things which destroys our harmony. Paul is an example of this and it shows us the source of his victorious living and his ability to see his calling through to the end without periods of backsliding which so many Christians seem to think they have to go through. He could endure all the hardship that he suffered because he didn't try to serve God with his soul/body. He lived out of his spirit. His new spirit made in the image of God gave him the victory, he didn't try to get God to help him overcome the weakness of his body/soul. He felt all the pain of that realm but he didn't live in it. He lived above it, so he didn't respond to his hardships out of his flesh.

There is no division in the body of Christ in the spiritual realm. It only exist in our body/soul realm in this world and our natural life in it. Now in the body/soul realm this division is very damaging to us and real. We really are divided by our wrong attitudes and behaviour patterns towards each other. The hurt and pain inflicted by this damage is also real but to be released from its power we need to manifest the freedom we have in our spiritual realm. This is done by believing that our new sinless spirit is the source of our life, so we need to use our sovereignty to obey the word and live as we should 2 Pet 1:2 – 4. Lust is the satisfaction of self; all the bad attitudes we manifest come from lust, the lust of self-interest and self-protection when the desires of our self-interest are crossed. Our freedom comes when we choose to die to self and make Jesus our Lord and are born again and our Christian life is continued in that way by daily living in the death and resurrection experience of our conversion. We have been made life giving spirits and all we have to do is believe that this is who we are. You can only manifest the promises of God in your life by believing them because they are His not yours to perform.

CHAPTER 6 THE INVISIBLE ENEMY OF OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

I want us to consider an invisible enemy that hinders us from living as God desires us to live in our corporate life as a church. We know about the science fiction films where an alien makes itself look like a friendly human then when it has been accepted it turns on those it has befriended with a view to taking over the human race. This is what this enemy does to us. It is so good at it that we rarely see it until it has got us into a very disappointing situation in our relationships either with an individual or in a corporate church setting. Its name keeps it hidden until the damage is done because its name is love or to be more exact, natural human love which leads to human goodness and human enthusiasm, which will eventually let us down because it is tainted with self-interest.

NATURAL LOVE

Because all people have been created in the image of a God who is pure love, man was made a being with the capacity to love. When sin came in, although it enabled us to do bad things, it did not totally obliterate our ability to continue to love and care for each other. Natural love, which is the driving force behind the good things we do and the passion that we put into doing them, can be very powerful and achieve great results. Paul comments in **Rom 5:7** that some are willing to die for others. In the history of the human race, although we can see much evil, there have been many non-Christians who have done great heroic deeds for the welfare of others. Some even lose their lives in the process. Even today strangers will give one of their organs to save the life of someone in need of a transplant. Human love with its resulting commitment and goodness is a very valuable asset to the human race and has powerfully curbed the rule of evil in this world. If we look at the fruit of the Spirit we can see quite easily how natural love becomes invisible because it can produce fruit which looks very similar Gal 5:22-23. People who are atheists do manifest this type of fruit in their lives from time to time. They even use it as an excuse to say they do not need a Saviour, it's that convincing. Because the Bible mainly contrasts the bad side of our nature with the new life in Jesus we are easily fooled into not seeing the bad side of our good side. We have to look at things from a spiritual perspective not to be caught out by our invisible enemy. So what is the problem?

THE FLAWS OF HUMAN LOVE

As good as our natural love is with its resulting goodness and commitment it is flawed because it contains two serious weaknesses. It is tainted with self-interest and as a result it has limits. It will go so far but no further and because of this it is capable of being turned into hate. Many evil deeds have been done in the name of 'love'.

1 self interest

Jesus commented on the self interest of natural love when contrasting it with how God loves. Luke 6:32-36 where He shows us how much higher God's love is to man's love. We all find it easy to do good to those who do good to us but when they don't appreciate what we do then that's a different matter. Self-interest is much broader than our understanding of just being selfish. Being selfish is usually obvious, self-interest is much more subtle. Self-interest causes us to commit ourselves to God more for our reasons than His, we respond like Isaiah in Isaiah 6 '*here am I Lord send me*' then we add 'to do what I want you to want me to do'. In the kingdom of God He is the instigator of what we do and He directs how we do it. Jesus said of Himself that of Himself He could do nothing John 5:30. It was God who called Saul into His service and God who told him what he would do Acts 9 v 15. All Saul's subsequent actions were in line with that initial call. It was God who chose the time and place to launch Paul on his first missionary journey Acts 13:2. The Lord's prayer says in Luke 11 v 2 *your will be done on earth as it is in heaven* not my will be done in heaven as it is on earth.

When God created Adam and Eve He made them for the purpose of bringing about His will on earth as it is in heaven. We have no other reason for our existence on earth. We were given absolute authority in the earth which we were supposed to use to make it happen. Instead we chose the path of self interest and instead of bringing life we brought death. We had this choice before sin entered in and we still have this choice today. We are to use our freedom of choice to do what Adam and Eve should have done. The self-interest of natural love will hijack our commitment to God and although it appears to produce a good result it will in the end bring death and the curse of sin. The words of Jesus in Mat 7:21 – 23 really challenges the motive for our Christian service because not all those who use the name of Jesus for their service are accepted. The work that will suffer most loss described in 1 Cor 3:12 - 15 will not be those things done full of mistakes and failures but those things done full of self interest.

2 its endurance is limited

Human love will go a long way but eventually it will run out because it needs a return on its investment and if that return does not materialise by an expected time it will quit. Human love is very dependent on visible demonstrations of appreciation and doesn't suffer long when there is a lack of those demonstrations. That is why some people in close relationships who appear to love each other very passionately at the beginning can get to a place where they say 'I don't love you anymore'. They start well but run out of steam when there is insufficient

return on their investment. This usually happens when their perception of the balance of the relationship becomes so one-sided, as they perceive it, that they consider that all they get is disappointment and pain so they say they can't love anymore. They quit the relationship to find someone else who they think will alleviate their pain and give them back some of what they feel they have lost and they will feel very righteous and justified in doing it.

This is not the sort of love and commitment that is able to cope with being a Christian but many are misled into using it to live their Christian life only to eventually become disappointed and give up. We particularly fail to recognise this trend or accept its validity in the life of the church. We have all sorts of people who show great promise and commitment to the work of God only to lose it a few years later when that work doesn't give them the fulfilment they were hoping for. We betray the presence of self-interest and the enthusiasm of natural love by the manifestation of anger with its accompanying bitterness and resentment when what we do is not appreciated. Lack of appreciation is the number one cause of taking offence. When we seek to inspire people to be committed to the work of God we need to avoid 'Palm Sunday commitment' like the plague John 12:12 – 13. This is the natural phenomenon of natural enthusiasm produced by natural love. In the natural world of humans it is a common experience of people who commit themselves to an interest to be very enthusiastic at the beginning only for it to decline over time. People do lose interest in something they were wholly committed to and wander off to become involved in something else with equal passion. Backsliding is often the product of the disappointments produced by natural love. According to 1 Cor 13 '*love never fails*' but this is divine love and only this kind of love will see us through.

NATURAL LOVE NEEDS VISIBLE SUPPORT

Our belief in the fact that we are loved is based on the how much we can see that we are loved. We do not believe in other people's love for us if they don't treat us in the way we have decided we need to be treated. If you treat me the way I believe you should then I will believe that you love me but if you don't then I won't. We impose this concept of love on God and we colour all the passages of God loving us as if His love is only a bit better than ours. This is why people have so much trouble believing God loves them, especially in difficult times. Natural thinking finds it impossible to believe in God's love when there is not only a serious lack of visible evidence, the evidence points in the opposite direction. A classic example of this is trying to tell someone God loves them in times of personal tragedy, like the death of a loved one because the reasoning of our understanding of love is that it does its best to prevent bad things happening. If God loved me why did He let this happen? Is the cry of the self centred human being. Jesus never doubted His father loved Him no matter what he went through. Isa 53:7-10 describes some of the experiences that Jesus had to endure to be our saviour. The most notable is the phrase *it pleased God to bruise Him*. How do we understand this aspect of God's love? It certainly doesn't mean that God is pleased to bring tragedy into our lives either as a punishment for sin or to teach us a lesson because this suffering of Jesus has delivered us from such things. The man Christ Jesus has been the only man in human history that God has been pleased to bruise and it happened because of the love that the Father had for the Son and the Son for the father coupled together as an expression of their love for us. No matter how badly Jesus was treated especially during His trial and crucifixion He never doubted His Father's love even though from a human perspective there was not only no evidence of it the evidence pointed in the opposite direction. Even when Jesus cried out on the cross '*My God My God why have you forsaken me*' He never doubted that His Father loved Him. It takes divine love to act this way. The problem of our church life is not direct wilful sin it is living together with too much natural love. When it fails, usually through a lack of appreciation, the fruit of the flesh follows from the ensuing bitterness and resentment. If we related to each other with divine love we would not sin against each other. Natural love turns to hate when it is offended. Broken relationships are an evidence of a lack of divine love.

PREACHING THE GOSPEL

Because of the deceitfulness of natural love and enthusiasm we need to make sure we preach the true Gospel. In the beginning God was God and the Lord of man so man lived under this beneficent reign through his obedience. Sin came in by an act of disobedience so man took himself out from under the lordship of God and made himself his own lord. God's salvation was given so that this situation could be reversed. The Gospel message is not just about our sins being forgiven it is about who is lord of our life. Our sins being forgiven enables us to be able to move back under the Lordship of God again so we can be enabled to live a life not tainted by sin, our new life. The essence of repentance is to change your mind about God's position in your life and the rest flows from that. Salvation is not designed to make our natural love capable of being adequate for our Christian life it is to replace it with a love that does not have the flaws of natural love. 1 Cor 13:4 - 8 *Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, 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. Love never fails.*

The natural goodness and commitment that natural love produces which we so often use to serve God with sincerity of heart puts us in a prison of condemnation because when it fails it gives us a bad conscience. We know that according to the Bible '*love never fails*' and we just did so we pronounce judgment on ourselves. This leads our conscience to produce a 'must do better' attitude which only makes us worse because our efforts will eventually fail again. We become locked up in the prison of our own self-condemnation. Because the lie of the adequacy of natural love is the reason for our prison life it keeps us failure conscious. Natural love in the Divine love for you will

not be enough to get you out of prison. It has to be divine love in you and through you that will break the prison that your dependence of the ways of natural love and its resulting goodness and commitment has put you in. Paul at Philippi is an example of the power of divine love when at midnight he and Barnabas had a praise party instead of a pity party and it brought the house down Acts 16:19 - 26. For Paul to be able to respond to his experiences at the hands of the people in Philippi in the way he did could only happen through the divine love in him not even the divine love for him. Divine love is not just a wonderful teaching about God's love for us in providing for our salvation, making us clean to go to heaven when we die; it is the very person of God causing us to get the victory over everything that comes against us and to see everything through to the end. The motivation of our life is divine love not natural love in divine love for us.