

Sons with  
**ASSURANCE**

Renewed in Christian hope

**STUDY GUIDE**

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH CONVOCATION | 2016

## Sons with assurance

*Renewed in Christian hope*

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Study Guide for International Youth Convocation 2016

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# THE PATIENCE OF THE SAINTS

David Hall

We are living in the season that the Scriptures call ‘the fullness of times’.<sup>1</sup> In these days the spirit of antichrist is rising up to rule over the nations. Lawlessness, opposition to the will of God, and hate for God’s faithful people are some of the defining characteristics of the antichrist agenda in the world. It is promoting opposition to everything called ‘god’, and is in opposition to every kind of religion. The objective of this antichrist spirit is to replace faith in God with humanism.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Eph 1:10

2 Humanism promotes the practice of ‘reason’, or the logical thinking of mankind, scientific enquiry and human fulfilment in the natural world. It has no regard for the word of God.

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

The book of revelation gives an account of a group of people who demonstrate what is called 'the patience of the saints'. They are described as those who 'keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus'.<sup>3</sup> They display the capacity to endure through opposition and to continue to believe.<sup>4</sup> The question for us is, how do we demonstrate the patience of the saints?

### The patience of the saints

God has given us the command to patiently persevere through many trials and sufferings to enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>5</sup> We display the patience of the saints when we live our lives by the grace of God and actively reject the pressure of the spirit of antichrist to compromise our sonship.

The church in Philadelphia was commended for keeping the word of His perseverance in the face of great opposition from the synagogue of Satan.<sup>6</sup> Christ encouraged them to remember their faith, love and hope in order to enter His rest and overcome opposition, even through suffering.<sup>7</sup> They needed to keep God's word and not capitulate to the attitude of lawlessness which opposes the predestination of every son of God.

The patience of the saints begins with obedience to the word of His perseverance. It is an 'attitude' that belongs to the culture of faith. It is an approach to relationships, to life and also to suffering. God gives us grace by His Holy Spirit to persevere in the love of God. We call this 'first love'.

It is especially during seasons of suffering that the patience of the saints becomes our steadfast resolve so that we persevere in faith, love and hope among God's people. It is important, then, that we discuss the hallmarks of this attitude so that we can be encouraged to endure.

### The culture of faith

We learn the patience of the saints when we reject lawlessness, and commit to persevere in faith, love and hope. We will encounter opposition in the workplace or school, in family relationships where some follow Christ and others do not, and also within the church, where not everyone is resolved with their discipleship. If,

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3 Rev 14:9-13 NKJV    4 Rev 13:10 NKJV    5 Rev 3:10.  
Act 14:22

6 Rev 3:7-13. 'The synagogue of Satan' describes a group of like-minded, disaffected people who become embittered and empowered over against the brethren who bring God's word to them.

7 Rev 2:2-5



## *The patience of the saints*

with patience, we endure hostility, temptation and suffering, we will possess, or save, our souls.<sup>8</sup>

We express faith when we align ourselves to God's will and purpose for our lives. This means that we believe the word that calls us to be His sons. We have the right to become sons of God.<sup>9</sup> Here, also, is the patience of the saints. We do not know what the final shape of our sonship will be, but we know that Jesus is the prototype of our sonship, and that we shall be like Him.<sup>10</sup> It is because we believe in His promise that we resolve to never let go of His word concerning our predestination as a son of God.

God has sent His word and revealed to us His desire for many sons. This means that we can behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us that we should be called the sons of God.<sup>11</sup> He has given us His love. It is this 'first love' that now motivates our sonship, and governs our relationships. We will keep ourselves in the love of God and not allow any offence or opposition to take root as bitterness within us.

It is because we believe the word of our predestination and love the Lord and His brethren that we persevere with patience until we receive the inheritance of our sonship. This is what we refer to as our 'hope'. We express our hope when we believe the word of God and proceed with our brethren towards the prize of the upward call in Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup>

We are now able to abide, or live, in faith, love and hope.<sup>13</sup> This is the culture of faith; the culture of those who believe in the promise of God. The Bible teaches us that those who believe have entered into rest. This is the patience of the saints. We know that God will bring His promise to pass, and that if we patiently endure to the end we shall be saved.<sup>14</sup>

The patience of the saints is expressed as the culture of faith. Through offences and opposition, temptation and trial, our patient initiative gives us rest. We can enter rest today if we will believe and obey God's ever present word of truth.<sup>15</sup> It is the Holy Spirit who comes to us, declaring a 'today' word. We can hear and obey a message 'today' concerning our labour, or work. We will find rest for our souls, because we are not wondering what to do. This is especially significant at times when we cannot find any reason for our sufferings. Our patient initiative in faith,

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8 Luk 21:19 NKJV      14 Mat 24:13

9 Joh 1:12              15 Heb 4:3

10 1Jn 3:2-4

11 1Jn 3:1

12 Php 3:14

13 1Th 1:3 NKJV

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

love and hope will give us the ‘rest’ of our sonship. In patience we will possess our souls.<sup>16</sup>

Our work now is a labour of love to put off unbelief and enter into rest.<sup>17</sup> We put off unbelief and doubt about whether or not God is serious about giving us a place in His family as His son. We believe in order to receive the hope of becoming His son. We are sons of God now, but we do not yet understand what the sons of God will appear like in the new heavens and new earth. For this reason, we patiently endure until the resurrection.

Faith makes us accountable, responsive and active. If we are offended, we cannot blame anyone for our response. Christians have an obligation, because of faith, to keep themselves in the love of God. We believe that God has demonstrated His love to us in Christ. We keep trusting in our relationships and demonstrate that we are connected to Christ by putting off disappointment and anger. While we maintain a spirit of conciliation by keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, we cannot compromise our sonship. This is the patience of the saints.

In conclusion, we are reminded of the words of Peter the apostle. He encouraged us that, because we have been told that all these things will happen, we should be on guard that we do not fall from our steadfast perseverance. He exhorted us to continue to ‘grow forward’ in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, considering ‘the patience of our Lord as salvation’.<sup>18</sup> This involves not only increasing in grace, but also moving forward in grace. God’s grace is helping us to progress ever forward to the inheritance of sonship that we have received, and to continue to believe.

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<sup>16</sup> Luk 21:19 NKJV

<sup>17</sup> Heb 4:3

<sup>18</sup> 2Pe 3:14-18

## **Study Questions - The patience of the saints**

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- We all say that 'we believe', but rarely take the time to examine how we display our faith, love and hope. Consider your testimony in the light of this article. How are you learning to express the culture of faith in your relationships?

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- Consider the phrase, 'Christians have an obligation to keep themselves in the love of God.' What do you think this means for you in relation to your family and the church community?

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# NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

*It is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. Rom 1:16*

Julianne Hamilton

## **Introduction**

Recently, my husband and I were driving in our car when we pulled up behind a smallish sedan with an unassuming black sticker on its bumper. Written in white upon this sticker were the words, 'Not ashamed of Jesus! Not ashamed of His gospel! Not ashamed to live it!' Such simple words immediately stirred an excitement within us and steadied our resolve to likewise live. We laughed together in that moment. We wanted to rejoice with our fellow believer and

communicate our support of his faith, but thought better of honking our agreement. We did, however, rejoice together at the uniqueness of our fellow believer's open declaration of faith.

We know well that the words which inspired that bumper sticker come from the testimony of the apostle Paul, written in his letter to the Roman church. He wrote, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes'.<sup>1</sup>

### The gospel is 'the good news'

The word 'gospel' is derived from a Greek word which simply means 'good news'. The wise man wrote, 'As cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a far country'.<sup>2</sup> Jesus Christ is the Messenger of the Covenant who was sent from a *far country* to bring us good news. His good news will enable us to 'abide with Him' forever.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is His 'good news'. Why, then, are we ashamed of His gospel? Jesus answers our question with the answer He gave to John the Baptist. When John had heard in prison about the works of Jesus, he sent two of his disciples to ask Him, 'Are You the Messiah?' Jesus answered them, saying, 'The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them'.<sup>3</sup> These were the signs and wonders that accompanied Jesus' ministry. God Himself was bearing witness to the ministry of Jesus, with signs and wonders, according to His own will.<sup>4</sup>

After listing the many signs and wonders that accompanied His ministry, Jesus said a very strange thing: 'And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me'.<sup>5</sup> This is such an interesting addition to the long list of miracles of His ministry. Yet, with this simple addition, Jesus communicated much more to John the Baptist than one might first realise. He communicated that He is 'the chief Cornerstone' of the foundation of the apostles and prophets, upon which the whole church is built.<sup>6</sup> And, thankfully, John the Baptist knew that only the Messiah Himself would declare such a thing! This confirmed that He was the Messiah, the chief Cornerstone, the One for whom John the Baptist, the greatest of all the prophets, was making the way.

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1 Rom 1:16

2 Pro 25:25

3 Mat 11:4-5

4 Heb 2:1-4

5 Mat 11:6

6 Eph 2:20

## Christ the chief Cornerstone

In ancient times, a cornerstone was used as both the foundation and standard upon which a building was constructed. Once the stone was set in place, the angles and size of a building would conform to its cornerstone and, if ever removed from its place, the entire structure would collapse.

The Lord declared in the book of Isaiah, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily'.<sup>7</sup> This precious Cornerstone was laid for all those who 'believe'. Those who 'believe' are those who 'rest' upon this 'precious' cornerstone. They conform their lives to this Precious Cornerstone. This is what it means in Scripture to 'believe'.

The promise to those who build upon this precious Cornerstone is that they will not be confounded by fear which causes them to act unwisely or 'hastily'. Neither will they know the shame of disappointment. By the wisdom and power of God made available to them by their precious Cornerstone, they will make their way prosperous and have good success in fulfilling the will of God in their lives.<sup>8</sup>

The psalmist wrote that this same Precious Cornerstone is 'the chief Cornerstone', rejected by 'the builders'.<sup>9</sup> Jesus declared in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke that the psalmist's words had found their fulfilment in Him.<sup>10</sup> He declared Himself to be the chief Cornerstone who is rejected by the builders. Isaiah further records that He is despised and rejected by men.<sup>11</sup>

## A rock of offence

It was written of Jesus Christ, the chief Cornerstone laid in Zion, that He would be 'a rock of offence'. But blessed is he who is not offended because of Him!<sup>12</sup> And whoever believes on Him will not be ashamed!<sup>13</sup> It is clear, then, that we are ashamed when we do not 'believe' on Him; that is, when we do not 'rest', or 'build', our faith upon Him, as our chief Cornerstone.

It is interesting to note that Jesus declared Himself to be the chief Cornerstone during the week of Passover, while He was in Jerusalem in the days leading up to His crucifixion. The timing of His declaration was perfect, when we realise

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7	Isa 28:16	10	Mat 21:42. Mar 12:10.
8	Jos 1:8. Rom 9:33. 1Pe 2:6. Isa 30:15. Isa 32:17	11	Isa 53:3
9	Psa 118:22	12	Mat 11:6
		13	Rom 9:33

that His cross is the ‘cornerstone message’ upon which every ‘believer’ is called to build. His crucifixion and His gospel are one and the same. The gospel of Christ is the message of His cross!

Quite simply, the message of His cross is the message of miraculous obedience. When we see Him lifted up on His cross and see His blood poured out, we know that He is the Son of God because we see His miraculous obedience. But, more than this, there is a revelation that *that same miraculous obedience* is possible for us. Paul wrote, ‘The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God’.<sup>14</sup> Paul was ‘not ashamed of the gospel’, because he had known it to be the power of God toward him, which enabled him to fulfil God’s will in his life.<sup>15</sup> To him, the gospel of Christ was *life-changing*.

### The cross of Christ

When we, too, build upon Jesus Christ as our chief Cornerstone, the way of miraculous obedience is opened to us by the power of His cross working in our lives. The cross of Jesus is the instrument by which the wisdom and power of God are made available to us, enabling us to fulfil God’s will in our lives. The apostle Paul wrote, ‘We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God’.<sup>16</sup>

The apostle Peter wrote that Christ, the chief Cornerstone, is precious to all those who ‘believe’. However, to the ‘unbelieving’, Christ is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. Rather than building upon Christ as their chief Cornerstone, they build their faith upon the words of human wisdom.<sup>17</sup> This is the way that seems right to them.<sup>18</sup>

Paul wrote that by doing this they empty the cross of Christ of its power in their lives. They are powerless to walk obediently, because they have rejected Christ and the message of His cross as the cornerstone upon which they build their faith. They are the unbelieving ‘builders’ of whom the Scriptures speak.<sup>19</sup>

These unbelieving ‘builders’ have no success in fulfilling the will of God in their lives. As a consequence, they experience the further disappointment that this

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14 1Co 1:18

15 Rom 1:16

16 1Co 1:23-24

17 1Co 1:17

18 Pro 14:12

19 Psa 118:22



shame brings. Their unbelief causes them to be ashamed of the cross of Christ, because they have no capacity to fulfil the will of God in their lives. 'They stumble, being disobedient to the word to which they also were appointed.'<sup>20</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that we must know Jesus Christ as the chief Cornerstone upon which we build our faith. However, we can only truly know Him if we see Him lifted up on the cross for our transgressions, as the One completely obedient to the initiative of the Father in heaven. This was the experience of the centurion at Calvary, when he looked upon Jesus, lifted up. His response was, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'<sup>21</sup>

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the wisdom and power of His cross. We who 'believe' are those who know the wisdom and power of His cross as a life-changing capacity. In this knowledge, we are not disappointed, because we have good success in seeing the will of God done in our lives. So we are not ashamed of the gospel. It truly works! We are enabled to 'believe' and we 'know in whom we have believed'. It is only by this knowledge that we can truly declare, 'I'm not ashamed of Jesus. I'm not ashamed of His gospel, and I'm not ashamed to live it!'

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20 1Pe 2:6-8

21 Mat 27:54

## Study Questions - Not ashamed of the gospel

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- How do you practically demonstrate that you are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ?

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- It was written of Jesus Christ, 'the chief Cornerstone laid in Zion', that He would be 'a rock of offence' which the builders rejected. Psa 118: 22. But blessed is he who is not offended! Mat 11:6. Why is Christ 'a rock of offence' for some people?

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- When we build upon Christ, who was despised and rejected of men, we must accept that we too may, at times, be despised and rejected of men. Jesus said, 'If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.' Joh 15:18-20.

Testify of how you have accepted, or are learning to accept, this reality.

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- The gospel of Christ is the message of His cross. What is your testimony of how the message of the cross is active and evident in your life?

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# DEALING WITH OFFENCE

Peter Hay

A son of God is a person who has been born of the seed of God's life. The seed is the word of life that has taken root in their heart.<sup>1</sup> Jesus explained that a person who receives the word of life is like a lamp that has been lit. The light of life that they have received can only be sustained if they remain connected to fellow believers in a lampstand church, and continue to receive God's word.<sup>2</sup> This is God's will for us.<sup>3</sup>

In light of this point, the apostle James exhorted us to be 'quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God'.<sup>4</sup> James was helping us to avoid particular responses to one another that

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1 Luk 8:11,15

2 Luk 8:16

3 Jas 1:18

4 Jas 1:19-20

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

affect God's will being accomplished in our lives. The primary reason that we get angry and reactive is because someone, or something, has *offended* us. We must learn to deal with our offences so that we do not stop growing as sons of God.

It is easy to recognise when we feel offended, and to identify the causes of our offence. However, the key for us is to understand *why* we get offended. Our feeling of offence is the outcome of a judgement that has been made. These judgements are based on a law within us that governs what we believe to be good or evil for us. From the basis of this law, we perceive certain things that are said, or done, as unreasonable, and become offended. Putting aside the question of whether what has happened is fair or not, we must recognise that this law is part of *our fallen humanity*.<sup>5</sup> It motivates the deeds of our flesh, including such actions as outbursts of anger, disputes, divisions, betrayal, and brings us into slavery to sin.<sup>6</sup>

If a person's own law is not dealt with, they will be unable to grow as a son of God. Their heart will become hard through the ongoing influence of their law on the way they see things and behave. As a consequence, the seed of God's life will not take deep root in their heart. Under the heat and pressure of the experiences that are causing them to be offended, the seed of their sonship will wither and die.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, as they continue to hold on to their offences, they will be unable to love others. This is because their focus will be on themselves and their hurts. They will also be unwilling to receive God's word from the mouth of their brethren. Jesus said that in this condition even the life they thought they had will be taken away, and they will be in *darkness*.<sup>8</sup> They will not be able to see the truth about matters or be cleansed of their self-centred motivations.<sup>9</sup>

In place of the seed of God's life, something else takes root in the heart of a person who holds on to their offences. The apostle Paul called it 'a root of bitterness'. He said that it grows up within a person and causes trouble.<sup>10</sup> Others who are sympathetic to the discontent that springs from a person's bitter heart can become offended *on their behalf*. This is one of the ways that people can be defiled by a person who has a root of bitterness. It is important that we do not join the offences and grumblings of others. Instead, we should be minding our own business and getting on with the works of sonship that God has prepared for us to do.<sup>11</sup> We can, of course, encourage our friends to seek restoration with their brethren at church.

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5 Rom 7:23                      11 1Th 4:11

6 Gal 5:1

7 Mat 13:21

8 Luk 8:18

9 1Jn 1:6-7

10 Heb 12:15

## Dealing with offence

We do this in a spirit of gentleness, giving consideration to our own motivations, so that we are not tempted to react to our friends on the basis of our own law.<sup>12</sup>

At one time or another, *we will all experience offence*. How should we respond at these times? Addressing the subject of the root of bitterness, Paul said, 'See to it that no one comes short of the *grace of God*'.<sup>13</sup> Here is the key! In the midst of all suffering, including that which causes offence, we need to cry out to the Father for grace. God does not give grace to those who demand that their rights are defended. He gives grace to those who are *humble* and committed to doing His will.<sup>14</sup> When we feel offended, we need to humble ourselves and recognise that this offence is the evidence of a law at work within us.

The first action of humbling ourselves is to come to the throne of grace through prayer.<sup>15</sup> As we do this, we are joining ourselves to Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane.<sup>16</sup> We are committing ourselves to the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and receiving grace from God to *endure* the sufferings that are causing us offence. Having received grace, our sufferings become the disciplining hand of the Father upon us to deal with the other law in our flesh. By receiving grace and the Father's discipline, we are changed from glory to glory to become mature sons of God.

Grace is the power, authority and capacity of God to love. The evidence that we have received grace is that we are able to move past our offences and continue to offer ourselves in love to our brethren. We press into fellowship rather than draw back from it. The blood of Christ cleanses us so that we are motivated and able to serve others. Just as we receive forgiveness for our sin by the grace of God, our willingness to forgive others who have sinned against us demonstrates that we are proceeding to live our lives by the grace of God.

We are entering a phase of history where the love of many will grow cold.<sup>17</sup> We must learn to deal with offences, otherwise this will be our experience. We can be confident, however, that God has made every provision for us to endure the seasons to come and to fully mature as sons of God.

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12 Gal 6:1

13 Heb 12:15

14 Jas 4:6

15 Heb 4:16

16 Luk 22:41-44

17 Mat 24:12

## Study Questions - Dealing with offence

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Holding on to our offences can have a significant impact upon the vitality of our sonship. It is important that we learn how to deal with our offences.

- Consider a time when you were offended by someone. What was the cause of the offence, and what impact did it have on your relationship with this person?

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- How did you recover from your offence and restore relationship with your brother or sister in Christ?

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- What did you learn about yourself through this process?

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Paul taught that the root of bitterness that grows up in the heart of person who holds onto their offences, defiles many. To 'defile' something means that it has been made unclean or impure.

- What are some of the ways in which our offences can defile others? How should we interact with our Christian brothers or sisters, who appear to be holding on to their offences?

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# RAISED WITH HIM IN NEWNESS OF LIFE

Jonathon Wills

## **Introduction**

The Christian life is extraordinary. It is exciting, dynamic and powerful. Through baptism into Christ's death, you have been granted daily access to the One who called all things into existence. While those who are without Christ are bound to a pathway where cause and effect rule, you are free from living by earthly and fallen principles.

Having died with Christ, you have also been raised with Christ, by the glorious working of the Father, to walk in a new way. This knowledge transforms how you live and how you relate. Your life is one that gives glory to the Father. You are always in His hand, and He is always working to form and to conform you into the

image of His Son.<sup>1</sup> Having been raised to walk in newness of life, you are walking according to the Spirit and not according to the pattern of this world.<sup>2</sup> Your mind has been set on the things from above and you possess a wisdom that is free from jealousy, selfish ambition and evil.<sup>3</sup>

## A new way of living in the blood of Christ

From the garden to the cross, Jesus established a blood-sprinkled way that could take you all the way from being 'dead in sin' to being 'made alive to God with Christ'.<sup>4</sup> He was filling up the cup with the blood of the New Covenant and establishing a new and living way through His blood.<sup>5</sup> With every shedding of His blood, He was being brought back from the dead as the great Shepherd of the sheep, and was bringing you back with Him!<sup>6</sup>

As a Son, He learned obedience from the things that He suffered. Having been made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for those who obey Him.<sup>7</sup> You likewise learn obedience when Christ hands you the cup that is filled with His blood and says to you, 'Drink it. This is the New Covenant in My blood.' The point of your obedience is clear. Christ has invited you to join Him in the fellowship of His sufferings, where His blood is powerful and effective. In this fellowship you find redemption and you receive life.

Jesus said, 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day'.<sup>8</sup> In this context, the apostle Paul said that we will only be glorified with Him if we have suffered with Him.<sup>9</sup> Suffering with Christ becomes your way of life. As you eat and drink at communion each week, you are receiving your life from Christ. To be raised at the first resurrection when Jesus returns, there has to be life in you when you die. The only life that will be raised will be the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup> If the life of Christ is not in you, there will be nothing to be raised.<sup>11</sup>

## Raised with Him in newness of life

When you are baptised into the Lord Jesus Christ, there is a remarkable transaction that takes place. The life of Christ is now in you! Just like the seed going into the

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1 Rom 8:29	5 Mar 14:22-25.	8 Joh 6:53-54
2 Rom 12:1-2	Mat 26:26-29.	9 Rom 8:17
3 Jas 3:15-18	Luk 22:20	10 1Th 4:13-18
4 Eph 2:5. Rom 6:11	6 Rom 4:25.	11 IJn 5:12
	Heb 13:20	
	7 Heb 5:7-9	



ground and dying so that it can rise up in new life, you also, having joined Christ in His death, are raised up from the dead, bursting forth in the newness of *His* life.<sup>12</sup>

It is no longer you 'doing your best'. Rather, Christ is living in you with resurrection power!<sup>13</sup> You are living by Christ's faith.<sup>14</sup> This faith comes to you every time you hear the word of God spoken.<sup>15</sup> As you listen, the way to walk is made clear and the life of Christ is yours to live.<sup>16</sup> The principle of new creation now governs the way you live.<sup>17</sup> His life is your life and your life is hidden in Him.<sup>18</sup>

## **Walking with Him in newness of life**

### *Not wearied by the sufferings of Christ*

When you walk in newness of life, you are not led into temptation, and you are not wearied by the sufferings of Christ.<sup>19</sup> Jesus warned His disciples not to fall into temptation while they prayed with Him. Their temptation was to be overcome by the circumstance and to become weary in their minds and their bodies.

You will be tempted to disobey when He speaks to you. If you do so, you will be refusing the cup that Christ is offering to you. Obedience to Christ connects you to the fellowship of His sufferings, where His blood was poured out for you. If you disobey, instead of receiving the life of new creation, you will become wearied in body, mind and spirit.

When the Holy Spirit brought the power of Eternal Spirit to Christ, He was strengthened to present Himself to God as a living sacrifice.<sup>20</sup> When you obey Christ's command to watch and pray with Him, you will be strengthened, comforted and enabled by this same power.<sup>21</sup> You will also know the power of resurrection life that gives you the capacity to endure in the midst of suffering. The apostle Paul highlighted this when he said, 'If the Spirit of Him [the Father] who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you'.<sup>22</sup>

This is what makes the fellowship of Christ's sufferings incredible. Finding fellowship in the sufferings of Christ runs hand in hand with the power that raised Christ from the dead. When you have one, you have the other! When you

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12	2Co 5:17. Joh 12:24	17	2Co 5:17	22	Rom 8:11
13	Col 1:27. Rom 8:11	18	Col 3:3-4		
14	Gal 2:20	19	Mat 26:36-46		
15	Rom 10:17	20	Luk 22:42-44		
16	Joh 14:6	21	Heb 9:14. Luk 22:43		

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

suffer with Christ, you are also raised with Him by resurrection power to walk in a new way. Because of this, fellowship in the sufferings of Christ is an entry into many healings and miracles.

When you walk in this way, you are kept by the love of God and joined to your brethren.<sup>23</sup> You are constrained and compelled by the love of Christ to remain steadfast, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain.<sup>24</sup>

### *Overcoming the world*

When you walk in newness of life, you overcome the world and all that is in it, not fearing man, suffering, or death.<sup>25</sup> When you make choices to keep life as easy and as pain-free as possible, you are living captive to your own fight for survival. When you walk in new creation life, you do not fear losing your life, your reputation, your money, your image, your status and even some of your relationships. You know that there is a higher power and that you have been raised with Christ above the things of this earth.<sup>26</sup> With this reality, your perspective on life changes and you see things as God sees them.<sup>27</sup>

### *Suffering according to the will of God*

When you are raised to walk in newness of life and you participate in the sufferings of Christ, the Lord is able to do a miraculous work in you and in the lives of others. You receive strength to endure in the trial so that the Spirit and power of God can be given to another. Your life is hidden with Christ in God, so any suffering you experience is now reckoned to be according to the will of God.<sup>28</sup>

Your sufferings are not a punishment for sinful actions, nor are they the result of your own actions done outside of the will of God. You are ceasing from sin, so your suffering should not be because of sin.<sup>29</sup> Suffering is now according to the will of God as you accept that all things are from His hand.<sup>30</sup> In this, you continue to learn obedience so that you can be made perfect, like Christ.<sup>31</sup> As such, you resist the urge to defend yourself, to define yourself, to excuse yourself and to accuse yourself. All of this is dealt with in the daily application of your baptism.<sup>32</sup>

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23 Jud 1:20-21

24 1Co 15:58

25 Rev 12:11

26 Col 3:1-2

27 2Co 3:16

28 1Pe 4:19. Col 3:3

29 Joh 9:1-3

30 2Co 4:15.

Rom 8:28

31 Heb 5:9. Php 3:15

32 1Pe 3:21

At times you will face fearful situations and you will look to the Lord for direction and help. When He says ‘Fear not, I am with you’, then your obedience is to walk without fear, knowing that He is with you, even though there is the threat that something might cause you pain. You can trust, knowing that, as you obey Christ’s command and are delivered from fear and anxiety, you will demonstrate the surpassing greatness of His power.<sup>33</sup> It is at these times that the principle of new creation life is most powerfully demonstrated.

It will be just as the prophet Isaiah prophesied. When you pass through the waters, you will not drown or be swept away. When you walk through the fire, its flame and its heat will not touch you. You have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and are precious in His sight.<sup>34</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Baptism into Christ’s death and the new way of living that it provides is a treasure that you hold dearly in the frailty of your human flesh. It demonstrates that the power you live by must be from God, because it most certainly cannot be from yourself; such is its surpassing greatness.<sup>35</sup> As you fellowship at communion each week, you will know a carrying about in your body of the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus can be fully revealed in you.<sup>36</sup> The life revealed is one that has conquered death and now demonstrates its power as you participate in the fellowship of His sufferings. You live assured as part of the new creation in Christ, knowing for certain that the Father will raise you up with Jesus in the resurrection.<sup>37</sup>

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33 2Co 4:7

34 Isa 43:1-4

35 2Co 4:7

36 2Co 4:10

37 2Co 4:11-14

## **Study Questions - Raised with Him in newness of life**

When Jesus took the cup at the first communion (last supper), He gave it to the disciples saying, 'Drink of it, all of you. This is the New Covenant in My blood.' Jesus went from this supper to the garden of Gethsemane, and it was there that His blood began to be poured out.

- What is your testimony of being joined to the fellowship of Christ's sufferings? How is your life changing through participation in His suffering?

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- Where in your life are you demonstrating that you have been raised up with Christ in newness of life to the glory of the Father?

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# JOINING THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS

Richie Kaa

## Introduction

I'd like to invite you to consider how you are 'joining the fellowship of Christ's sufferings' in the current circumstances of your life. As we have been learning, the fellowship of His sufferings will only be a reality for you if you're living in the faith of your baptism. With this in mind, the aim of this article is to define the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and to discuss what is achieved when you join this fellowship in your walk as a son of God.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul explained that his motivation to endure suffering and loss in his life was for the purpose of knowing Christ and the power

of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that he might attain to the resurrection from the dead.<sup>1</sup>

### **Attaining to the resurrection**

Paul's long-range view was 'to attain to the resurrection from the dead'. At the time when Paul wrote his letter, the subject of the resurrection was a contentious issue within the Jewish community.<sup>2</sup> However, Paul was saying that his desire to attain to the resurrection was his hope as a son of God. This is our hope as well.

Attaining to the resurrection means that we have received the full inheritance of eternal life as a son of God.<sup>3</sup> In the resurrection, we receive an immortal body, just like Jesus did when He rose from the dead. To be perfected as a son of God, we must join the process through which sonship was perfected by the Son of Man. This is the way of the cross.

In recent times we have come to understand that children born into covenant homes are born with the seed of God's life. This seed is the divine nature. So much is given to a child in this provision. As Christian parents faithfully nurture this seed, there is great confidence that a child will grow in the ways of the Lord and attain their full predestination as a son of God. However, the life of God alone will not be sufficient for a child to fulfil the call of God. This is because every son of God is born with a propensity to sin. The seed of God's divine nature will not flourish and bear fruit in a person's life if this propensity to sin is not dealt with.

### **Dealing with our propensity to sin**

Paul calls this propensity 'the other law' and 'a righteousness of my own'.<sup>4</sup> This law is the motivation to do the will of God, but in a way that seems right to us and according to our own strength. We call this 'walking after the flesh'. When we live this way, we are unable to fulfil the will of God or overcome the power of the law of sin in us.

### **The cross of Christ**

The cross of Christ was the entire provision of God through which we could receive His promise of eternal life.<sup>5</sup> Baptism joins us to the process of the cross. It

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1 Php 3:10-11

2 Act 17:32.  
Act 23:6-8

3 Tit 1:2. 1Jn 2:25

4 Rom 7:23. Php 3:9

5 1Jn 2:25

first joins us to the death of Christ. <sup>6</sup> Paul taught that if we have become 'united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin'.<sup>7</sup> Because we have been delivered from sin, we are now no longer under condemnation. Our sufferings in life are not signaling our eternal death. They are now the context in which the Father is disciplining us as His sons.

As you choose to walk the way of the cross each day, two aspects of His life will become evident in your life. The first aspect is that you will be given the same capacity that raised Jesus from the dead. The second aspect is that this resurrection capacity strengthens you to participate in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.<sup>8</sup> It is these two elements working together that enable us to overcome sin, present our body as a living sacrifice and begin to bear fruit to God.

## The blood of Christ

In his first letter, John stated that 'if we walk in the light ... we have fellowship with one another' and the blood of Jesus Christ is active toward us to purify us from sin.<sup>9</sup> The light that John was speaking of is the illumination that comes from the word of life. John was saying that as we understand how we receive and live by the word of life we will find *koinonia*. This is the Greek word for 'fellowship', or 'communion'. It is only in the *koinonia* that His blood can flow to us. As we remain faithful within the fellowship of His sufferings, and our fellowship together as believers, we are being changed. He is giving us His life, which is the only life that has 'come back' from the death of sin.

*The fellowship of His sufferings* is a key aspect of baptism. It emphasises the work of His blood, which is now available to us. We know that the blood of Christ was shed as He suffered. As His blood flows to us, it gives us His life, which enables three distinct actions in our life:

1. it is redeeming us back from the death that is caused by sin
2. it is cleansing our conscience from dead works
3. it is giving us capacity for obedience to do God's will.

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6 Rom 6:3

7 Rom 6:5-7

8 Php 3:10

9 1Jn 1:7

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

Every week, we eat and drink the elements of the New Covenant at the communion table. Here, we join together to minister His life to each other. As we partake of the elements of the communion, we are doing so in faith for our ongoing participation in Christ's offering through the week. Baptism joined us to this offering, and communion is the provision for our daily participation in the fellowship of His offering.

Jesus said that the cup that we drink is *His blood*. Obviously, we are not drinking real blood; we are not even drinking real wine! And it certainly doesn't mysteriously change into Christ's blood once we have consumed it. Rather, the cup we receive is 'blood that *speaks*'.<sup>10</sup> His blood is active toward us in the spoken word. The action of drinking from the cup and eating the piece of bread is the practical demonstration that we are receiving His word and are committed to doing the will of God by the capacity of life that Christ is giving to us.

Jesus taught that the cup He gives us to drink is a fellowship in His suffering. In fact, He connected this directly to baptism. He asked James and John, 'Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?'<sup>11</sup> Jesus was specifically referring to His death on the cross. Christ's blood was manifest when He suffered. His blood is effective in our lives when we are joined to the fellowship of His sufferings. As we partake of the elements of communion, we should not be surprised when we experience suffering in our daily lives. We drink the cup in faith to participate in these sufferings.

For a Christian, suffering is not a punishment. It is the means by which we are joined to a process through which we are being perfected as sons of God. Suffering is given to us by the Father to discipline us and train us as His sons. 'All discipline for the moment seems ... sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.'<sup>12</sup>

### The wretched condition

In writing to the Roman church, Paul defined the struggle of every Christian in dealing with sin, testifying that 'what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practise; but what I hate, that I do'.<sup>13</sup> He was describing the well-worn path of best intentions being completely hijacked by 'another law'

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10 Heb 12:24-25

11 Mar 10:38

12 Heb 12:11

13 Rom 7:15



within us.<sup>14</sup> Through this approach to life, we end up doing the very evil that we hoped not to do and fail to do the good that we intended to do. Exasperated by this dilemma, Paul asked, 'Who will deliver me from this body of death?'<sup>15</sup> In other words, 'Who will free me from this body controlled by sin that is leading to death?'

Many people reading this article will have asked the same question and, like Paul, we must understand the amazing provision we receive through baptism:

1. we are able to become like Him in His death, which frees us from sin
2. we are given resurrection life, which is the capacity to endure suffering
3. we are given participation in the fellowship of His sufferings
4. we are given access to His blood as we participate in this fellowship
5. His blood is now cleansing the conscience of dead works, bringing us back from the death of sin; and it's giving us capacity to obey the Father's will.

This then enables us to 'fulfil the righteous requirement of the law'.<sup>16</sup> Because we have been born of the Spirit, and sin in us has been put to death in baptism, we are able to set our minds on the things of the Spirit. The mind that is set on the Spirit is not some higher plane of thought. Rather, it describes a spiritual person who is focused on living as a son of God and fulfilling the will of the Father. This is what it means to 'set your mind on things above and not on the things of the earth'.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, a person who has not joined the death of Christ has not been delivered from 'the other law' within them that brings them into captivity to sin and death. As such, they are unable to set their mind on the things of the Spirit. A person whose mind is set on the Spirit believes that what they have received in the *koinonia* will enable them to do the will of God in their flesh. This is not the fulfilment of God's will sometime in the future, but a reality for every son of God *today*.

## **The other law**

The hope of attaining to the resurrection is dependent upon a proper understanding of the gospel. The deception for many Christians is to become 'sin-focused', thinking that we must personally address sin by our own religious zeal or spiritual ability. This is a favourite cause for 'the other law'. The other law is the desire in every person to serve God and 'do His will' in a way that seems right to them. If we approach life this way, we will most certainly return to the wretched state. This

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14 Rom 7:23

15 Rom 7:24

16 Rom 8:4

17 Col 3:2

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

is because we're engaging the other law to help us in the fight against sin. Instead, baptism enables us to join His death, burial and resurrection.

### **Christ's obedience**

The other law that compels us to pursue a way that seems right to us, and that locks us up to obey our own idea of what is right, was completely absent in Christ. This provides a much clearer understanding of Christ's obedience. We know that as we are obedient to the will of the Father, our obedience leads us to suffer. Suffering on this basis is never futile, because it leads to sanctification. In this way, the fellowship of His sufferings then becomes an essential requirement for every son of God.

## **Study Questions - Joining the fellowship of Christ's suffering**

- Discuss why the life of God alone is not enough to achieve the call of God in our lives.

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- What does it mean to 'set our minds on things from above'?

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- Discuss how the blood of Christ is ministered to you today.

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- For a Christian, suffering is not a punishment. Rather, it is the chastisement, or discipline, of the Father. Discuss the discipline of God that has brought change in your life.

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# A SON OF GOD KEEPS HIMSELF

Bruce Hamilton

The apostle John wrote, ‘He who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.’<sup>1</sup> Note the three main points in this statement.

1. The apostle John is addressing *sons of God*. He is not just addressing a particular group of people at a particular time in history. John is addressing all sons of God who ever lived and who will ever live. We know this because he includes himself in the company of the sons of God. In the verses immediately following the one stated above, John refers to ‘we’ and ‘us’ when talking about the sons

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<sup>1</sup> 1Jn 5:18

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

of God.<sup>2</sup> This lets us know that everything he is declaring about how sons of God live, applies just as much today to us as sons of God as it did for sons of God at that time.

2. All sons of God *keep themselves*. To 'keep' something is to guard and watch over it with the aim of preserving it.
3. The result of sons of God keeping themselves is that *the wicked one does not touch them*.

A fourth point, which John does not explicitly state, is that when you keep yourself, the Lord will also keep you.<sup>3</sup> Keeping yourself is a participation in His life and love. A vital implication of this is that you will not only be concerned with keeping yourself, but you will also be your brother's keeper.<sup>4</sup>

As you grow and mature as a son of God, you will also grow in understanding the way of keeping yourself and all that this means.<sup>5</sup> It is fitting, then, for us to take some time to examine how we keep ourselves, and what this means for us as Christians.

In the natural sense, keeping yourself will mean that you will do your best to preserve your life. You will keep yourself safe from harm. When you drive in Australia, you will 'Keep Left' on the road. When you visit the zoo, you will keep out of the lion enclosure. This is all good advice and something you should give attention to, but it is not what John was talking about.

Similarly, keeping yourself is not self-control or self-regulation in the way that society in general understands it. That is to say, it is not a personal management system that helps you to control what you think, say, and do, so that you can be who you want to be. This would confine our understanding to merely natural stages of development from early childhood into adulthood, which ultimately shape our responses and life choices. Although it is still valid and important for each of us to develop in these areas of self-control and self-regulation, we need more: we need spiritual understanding. Otherwise, it would make no sense for Jesus to tell His disciples, 'Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it'.<sup>6</sup> The natural man would ask, 'How do you keep your life by losing it?'

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2 1Jn 5:18-21

3 Rev 3:10

4 Gen 4:9. 1Jn 5:2-3

5 1Jn 2:3. Rev 14:12

6 Mat 16:25

## Keep yourself

What is the spiritual understanding of ‘keeping yourself’? It begins with knowing that you are a son of God. You are in Christ and you know God, who is true.<sup>7</sup> When you know Him, you will fear Him and keep His commandments.<sup>8</sup> You will also know that you are not your own. Keeping yourself is not an independent or self-centred action. You belong to the Lord. You are a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup> In his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul wrote, ‘Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?’, ‘He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him’, and ‘Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.’<sup>10</sup>

The apostle Paul instructed Timothy, ‘Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.’<sup>11</sup> This is a key point. As a son of God, you are in Christ and you are to walk every day in faith and love by the Holy Spirit, who will help you to keep the word of God.

Jude exhorted ‘those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ’.<sup>12</sup> He wrote, ‘Beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life’.<sup>13</sup>

The apostle James wrote that pure and undefiled religion is to keep oneself unspotted from the world.<sup>14</sup> The Lord has separated you to Himself.<sup>15</sup> Keep yourself separate from the world.<sup>16</sup> Some practical ways by which you can keep yourself are: through simple obedience to the word of God; by keeping yourself in fellowship by an active choice rather than based on how you feel; through prayer, by the Holy Spirit; by walking in faith and love; and by presenting yourself as an offering to God, serving one another in love.<sup>17</sup>

You must keep your heart with all diligence.<sup>18</sup> This means that you are to be proactive in keeping yourself. Watch and pray so that you may be complete, thoroughly equipped and prepared for every ‘good work’.<sup>19</sup> You are accountable for how you use your time and what you do. Rather than trying to *find* time, instead

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7 1Jn 5:20. Col 3:3

8 Joh 14:21,23,24.  
Joh 15:9-10

9 1Co 12:27.  
1Co 6:15,19,20

10 1Co 6:15,19,20

11 2Ti 1:13-14

12 Jud 1:1

13 Jud 1:20-21

14 Jas 1:27

15 Lev 20:26. Gal 1:15

16 2Co 6:17

17 Gal 5:13

18 Pro 4:23. Deu 4:9

19 2Ti 3:14-17

*make* time to pray, to serve, to know God's will for your life, to study the word of God. Actively and deliberately bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.<sup>20</sup> Be guided by the Lord and not by how you feel. Be proactive, rather than reactive, in your Christian walk.

## The Lord is your Keeper

The psalms have much to say about the Lord keeping you. He will not allow your foot to slip. He keeps you day and night. He does not sleep or take a break from keeping you. 'The Lord will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul. The Lord will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever.'<sup>21</sup> The Lord is your Shepherd and Watchman of your soul.<sup>22</sup> He is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.<sup>23</sup>

Jesus prayed for His disciples and for each of us who believe in Him and who keep His word.<sup>24</sup> He said, 'Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are ... I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.'<sup>25</sup> The Lord is your Keeper. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the Lord (who is One).<sup>26</sup> Together, They keep you.

Do you have the same assurance and testimony as Paul expressed when he wrote to Timothy, 'I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day'?<sup>27</sup> The Lord is faithful to keep you. Jesus taught us to pray, 'Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'<sup>28</sup> He will keep you as you willingly obey and follow His lead. Being kept in God's life and love is not all up to you; nor is it all up to God. It is a participation. It is a fellowship.

## Keep one another

Armed with the assurance that you are safely being kept by God and that you are diligently keeping yourself, the practical result of this will be that you will also keep one another.<sup>29</sup> If you love God, you will love one another.<sup>30</sup> You will also know that there are many others who are keeping you in the love of God.

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20	2Co 10:5	26	Deu 6:4. Zec 14:9.	30	IJn 4:20-5:2.
21	Psa 121		Mar 12:29		Joh 13:34-35
22	Psa 23. 1Pe 2:25	27	2Ti 1:12		
23	Jud 1:24	28	Mat 6:13		
24	Joh 17:20. Joh 17:6	29	Php 2:3-4		
25	Joh 17:11,15				



*A son of God keeps himself*

Christian parents and leaders watch over you and pray for you, desiring that the seed of God's life in you is guarded and protected.<sup>31</sup>

Receive the exhortation of the apostle Peter: 'The end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins".'<sup>32</sup> When you are kept in the love of God, then nothing can separate you from God.<sup>33</sup> You will be delivered from all kinds of evil and wickedness. Your love for your brethren will be evident as you pray for them, bear with them, believe with them and show brotherly kindness, meekness and gentleness.<sup>34</sup>

The Lord bless you and keep you!<sup>35</sup>

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31 Heb 13:17

32 1Pe 4:8

33 Rom 8:35-39

34 1Co 13:4-7.  
Col 3:12-17

35 Num 6:24

## **Study Questions - A son of God keeps himself**

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- In what specific ways are you keeping the word of God? How has the word of God kept you unspotted from the world?

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- What is the evidence that you are keeping yourself in the love of God?

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- What is your testimony regarding how the Lord has kept you?

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- In what ways are you being your brother's keeper? Who are your brethren, and in what ways have they kept you?

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# GRACE TO CARRY OUR OWN LOAD

Ross Wills

The apostle Paul taught the Galatian Christians that each person will bear, or be accountable for, their own load.<sup>1</sup> We are not alive on this earth by chance. Our days have been planned for us by our heavenly Father, and we are important to Him. For this reason, we are also important to the people with whom He has joined us in the body of Christ. Each one of us 'counts', and we have things to do. This is a load that each person is to bear, meaning that God wants us to be responsible for the things that are ours to do at every stage of life.

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<sup>1</sup> Gal 6:5

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

God has given every son of God the opportunity to present themselves as a living sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that a dead sacrifice can only be offered once. In contrast, as a living sacrifice, we are to *continually* offer ourselves to the Lord - all of our self, for all of our life, in all areas of our life. This will be evident at home, in our employment and at church.

The understanding of this accountability will impact upon our daily lives. Paul was very clear in his instructions regarding the practicalities of our daily life. He said, 'If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat'.<sup>3</sup>

Paul also instructed the thief who had been converted to Christ to stop stealing.<sup>4</sup> This person was taking from others to provide for, and sustain, his own life. Having become a son of God, he ought to have been working with his own hands so that he had something to give to others.<sup>5</sup>

We have a propensity to be like this thief when we treat others as a resource for preserving our lives. We can even attempt to make others accountable for our life. For example, when things don't go well for us, we can blame others, such as our parents, teachers or friends, for the situations we find ourselves in. Sometimes we even demand that God rescues us from our difficult situations, even though we have caused them.

A person who bears their own load will also be accountable for their sin. King David understood this. He had disobeyed God by taking a census of the people of Israel. When the anger of God was directed toward him, he refused to be rescued and would not accept the gift of a threshing floor and the resources to make an offering. Instead, David purchased it with his own resources, declaring that he would not offer to 'the Lord my God' that which cost him nothing.<sup>6</sup> The Lord sent the plague because of David's sin. The plague continued until David took account for his actions. He understood that he was accountable for his disobedience. We, too, must bear our accountability when we miss the mark.

Paul was a great example of a person who was carrying his own load. When he visited the Thessalonians, he did not eat anyone's bread free of charge, but laboured night and day so that he would not be a burden to them. He then preached the gospel to the Thessalonians and left them with an example to follow.<sup>7</sup> As a person bearing his own load, he was prepared and able to give to others.

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2 Rom 12:1

3 2Th 3:10

4 Eph 4:28

5 Eph 4:28

6 2 Sa 24:24

7 2Th 3:8-9

## *Grace to carry our own load*

There is an obvious progression in the size of the load that we carry in life as we grow and mature in our sonship. The load that we carry will increase in our homes, in our work life, and in our life at church. We grow from being children who are supported and trained by parents, to carrying our own load and finding provision for our life. This is true in the body of Christ.

We read in Paul's letter to the Corinthians that 'God [the Father] has placed the members - each one of them - in the body, just as He desired'.<sup>8</sup> This means that there is no-one else like you, and no-one else to do the works that have been given to you. Every part needs to do its share. We grow and mature to carry our load. This can happen now as you support the meetings that you are involved in. For example, in contexts such as the teenage or young adult meetings, or our communion meetings, you can be supporting through cleaning and set-up, leading, playing music, singing, praying, sharing, etc. By participating in this way, we are supporting and encouraging one another. This causes the growth of the body of Christ for the building up of itself in love.<sup>9</sup>

God's grace is sufficient for us to carry our load throughout our life, even though we may feel limited in our ability to do so. When Paul was suffering what he referred to as 'a thorn in the flesh', he pleaded with the Lord three times for it to be removed. The Lord's reply was, 'My grace is sufficient for you for My strength is made perfect in weakness'.<sup>10</sup> Abundant grace was available to Paul to continue, even though great difficulty was upon him. He wrote to the Corinthians, encouraging them with the truth that no difficulty or trouble had tested them that is not common to man, but God is faithful and will not allow us to be tested beyond what we can bear. He will provide us with all the capacity we need to bear the burden that we are being given.<sup>11</sup>

God's grace is available for us to carry our own load.

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8 1Co 12:18

9 Eph 4:16

10 2Co 12:7-9

11 1Co 10:13

**Study Questions - Grace to carry our own load**

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- How are you practically carrying a load in your home and in the local fellowship where you are planted?

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- What is your testimony regarding the faithfulness of God in not allowing you to be tested beyond what you are able to bear?

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# OVERCOMING INJUSTICE

Luke Pomery

## Suffering unjustly

Every person in this world will face suffering, hostility and injustice throughout their lifetime. Some people will readily acknowledge that it is right for them to accept the consequences of their own mistakes. However, most people will find it much harder to accept the *injustice* of suffering because of *someone else's* mistakes. Without the Lord's help, none of us would be capable of coping with injustice.

An 'injustice' is simply something that happens to us, which we think should not have happened. Injustices are wrongs, hurts or injuries inflicted upon us by others. It is important to realise, however, that every Christian needs to learn how to overcome injustice as a part of the trial of faith that God allows for their salvation.<sup>1</sup>

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1 1Pe 1:5-7

What does it mean to *overcome* injustice? It does not mean that we escape unjust situations. Nor does it mean that we are vindicated, justified or compensated when we suffer wrongly. Rather, to overcome injustice as a Christian means that the life of God is manifest in our flesh as we suffer. His life is triumphant *in the midst of our suffering*. As such, the Lord is faithful to teach us *how* to endure through the injustices we face.

## Jesus endured all hostility

The Scriptures exhort us to observe how Jesus overcame injustice.<sup>2</sup> Jesus suffered hostility, opposition and contradiction against Himself from ‘the hands of sinners’.<sup>3</sup> It would be true to say that the cross of Christ was the *most unjust* event in history. According to the law, Jesus would have had every ‘right’ to defend His innocence and be acquitted of the false accusations against Him.<sup>4</sup>

Instead, however, in the humiliation of His sufferings, He was being deprived of His right to justice.<sup>5</sup> And, critically, we note that He made no attempt to retaliate against the perpetrators of His injustice.<sup>6</sup> Concerning Jesus, the apostle Peter observed that ‘While being reviled [that is, ridiculed], He did not revile in return’.<sup>7</sup> He did not use His ‘rightness’ according to the law as a means to defend Himself.

Jesus *allowed* His right to justice to be taken from Him. He humbled Himself to the point of death.<sup>8</sup> We marvel at how anyone could so willingly accept such extreme humiliation and wrong-doing. Yet the secret that Jesus understood was that *the will of God* was being revealed through His obedience.

Throughout the events of the cross, the Father was laying upon Jesus the contradiction of the whole world. Every injustice, every competing ‘right’ to survive, every violation and every unresolvable grief was being laid upon Him.<sup>9</sup> Through His obedient work on the cross, Christ had the power to resolve all of the conflict and contradiction that is experienced by every person on account of the fall of man.

For this reason, the only hope we have of finding peace amid the conflicts and contrary circumstances that we face throughout our life is by joining Christ in the fellowship of His sufferings. As we meet Him in each situation, we are learning ‘the way of the cross’ with Him. We do not even need to resolve, in our thinking,

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2	Heb 12:3	7	IPe 2:23
3	Heb 12:3. Mat 26:45	8	Php 2:8
4	Luk 23:2,10	9	Isa 53:6
5	Act 8:33		
6	Act 8:32		



'how' or 'why' such situations could transpire! Instead, like Christ, we can have the peace of God that *surpasses* all comprehension.<sup>10</sup>

## Mistreated for being Christian

As Christians, we will suffer opposition, contradiction, hostility, persecution and false accusations. Jesus said this would be so.<sup>11</sup> We will be disliked and defamed because we are followers of Christ.<sup>12</sup> Thus, suffering will be a part of our experience.

Even so, it is important to realise that there is *no inherent value* in suffering. For this reason, we do not deliberately put ourselves in suffering's way as a means of gaining some kind of spiritual benefit. This is *not* what 'suffering with Christ' is all about! The Scriptures clearly point out that this kind of 'self-abasement' is of no benefit to us whatsoever.<sup>13</sup>

Rather, like Christ, our focus is on doing *the will of God* in our lives. And when we suffer according to the will of God, then the experience *will* be of benefit to us.<sup>14</sup> Through prayer, we are strengthened by the Father to join Christ's sufferings. By His grace and capacity that is given to us, we will be able to refrain from defending ourselves or retaliating when we are treated poorly. We will have no need to respond 'in like manner' or to appeal to the systems of this world in order to regain our justice. Instead, we will entrust ourselves to God who judges righteously.<sup>15</sup>

When we suffer according to the will of God, our assurance is that we are, in fact, in the hands of our heavenly Father, and not in the hands of those who mistreat us. The Father is well aware of our circumstances and we know that no-one is able to 'snatch us out of the Father's hand'.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, because we are 'in His hand', we are confident that every difficulty we encounter is *not apart from His will* for us.

## Our response to suffering

Our faith as sons of God is that *every* contrary circumstance we come across is from the chastening hand of God upon our lives.<sup>17</sup> When we suffer hostility from others, even though they are intending it for evil, God is working in it *for our good*. This was Joseph's response to the hostility he experienced at the hands of his brothers.<sup>18</sup>

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10	Php 4:7	15	Psa 7:11. 1Pe 2:23. 1Pe 4:19. 2Ti 1:12
11	Mat 5:11		
12	1Pe 4:14	16	Joh 10:29
13	Col 2:23. 1Co 13:3	17	Heb 12:5-7
14	1Pe 4:19	18	Gen 50:20

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

As we meet the Lord, we will not despise, nor be discouraged by, the chastening of the Father coming to us through those who contradict us.<sup>19</sup> As we endure His discipline, the Lord is teaching us obedience, and He is dealing with our ‘other law’.<sup>20</sup> Whenever we experience injustice, our other law is the mechanism that rises up within us, causing us to want to defend ourselves.

However, Jesus gives us His own life in the midst of our suffering. And His life enables us to overcome injustice and to refrain from responding according to our other law.<sup>21</sup> In this way, Christ’s life is prevailing in us through the adverse circumstances.

All of the contrariness can be resolved as we walk and pray in the Spirit.<sup>22</sup> We ‘talk the situation through’ with the Lord, asking the Lord to take note of what is happening.<sup>23</sup> And even though we may feel like retaliating to those who cause us harm, as we pray in the Spirit we can put off our self-defending attitudes. Walking in the Spirit enables us to put off our other law.<sup>24</sup> Then we can love those who humiliate us.<sup>25</sup> This is proof that the life of Jesus is in us, overcoming injustice.<sup>26</sup>

As we meet the Lord and one another, we learn how to process our responses to suffering.<sup>27</sup> In the first instance, it is helpful to acknowledge that our responses to grief or trauma, such as shock, denial, anger or resentment are *not* necessarily an indication of our unwillingness to accept the sufferings of Christ. This simply shows us that we *are* suffering! Inevitably, there is an emotional, mental or physical impact upon us when we experience a violation or grief.

The apostle Paul made some helpful statements in his letter to the Corinthians concerning our responses to suffering. He said, ‘We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.’<sup>28</sup> Like the apostle Paul, we will be perplexed at times and may not know how to proceed in the midst of our suffering. Yet we do not despair as people without hope.<sup>29</sup> Even though we feel perplexed, we find resolution because we know that the Lord will lead us through every circumstance.

The Lord teaches us to ‘walk with Him’ through every step. He helps us to work through our various responses and emotions. The contrariness of our circumstances can only be truly resolved as we fellowship with the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. If, however, we neglect to meet the Lord in this way, we will have no means

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19	Heb 12:5	25	Mat 5:44
20	Heb 5:8. Rom 7:23	26	Ijn 3:14
21	2Co 4:11	27	2Co 4:8-9
22	Rom 8:4,6	28	2Co 4:8-9
23	Act 4:29. 2Ki 19:4	29	Rom 5:3-5
24	Rom 8:2		

of finding peace and resolution. And, as such, any unhelpful reactions to injustice that we hold on to, instead of resolving, will become an issue for us. That is, these repressed or ingrained reactions will impact upon our ease of relating with others.

## A share in His sufferings

Whenever we suffer contradiction, injustice or hostility, *we are to rejoice!*<sup>30</sup> We should not be ashamed to suffer as a Christian, even though we may be ridiculed for being ‘weak’ when we do not defend ourselves.<sup>31</sup> We humble ourselves in the midst of suffering, knowing that the power of God is being revealed in our weakness.<sup>32</sup> This demeanour that we carry, as followers of Christ, is foolishness to the world.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, it is important to realise that the purpose of our sufferings is *not just to deal with our ‘other law’*. Yes, we are ceasing from sin and overcoming as sons of God.<sup>34</sup> But, much more than this, we are also bearing in our bodies the living and dying of Jesus Christ.<sup>35</sup> Our sufferings are for the sake of *others*, and not only for our own benefit. We are revealing *the life of Christ* in the midst of our sufferings.<sup>36</sup>

## Let us not grow weary or lose heart

Let us not grow weary or lose heart throughout the various trials and injustices we face.<sup>37</sup> Nor should we let bitterness or resentment rise up if we suffer over long periods.<sup>38</sup> We can be encouraged that, as we wait on the Lord, He will give us His strength so that we do not grow tired in each season.<sup>39</sup> As we relate with our brethren, they will encourage us to continue in the good works of our sonship.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, ‘Let us not grow weary while doing good’.<sup>41</sup>

We know that the Lord is bringing forth fruit in our lives, even in the midst of the difficult circumstances we face. May we continue to ‘look unto Jesus’.<sup>42</sup> He is faithful to teach us how to endure and overcome every injustice.

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30 1Pe 4:13. Mat 5:12.  
Act 5:41

31 1Pe 4:16. 2Co 13:4

32 Rom 1:16. 2Ti 1:8.  
2Co 12:9

33 1Co 1:23

34 1Pe 4:1. 1Jn 5:4

35 2Co 4:10

36 2Co 4:11

37 Heb 12:3

38 1Co 13:5.  
Heb 12:15

39 Isa 40:30-31

40 Heb 10:24

41 Gal 6:9

42 Heb 12:2

## Study Questions - Overcoming injustice

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- What is the evidence that the life of God is enabling you to overcome in the midst of injustices?

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As we meet the Lord and one another, we learn how to resolve our responses in difficult circumstances.

- List several ways in which your responses to injustice have been immature or unresolved?

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- How can you find resolution in relation to each of these responses?

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- List the problems that could occur if we neglect to meet the Lord in this way.

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We will all face suffering and injustice throughout the seasons of our life. In every season, we are not to grow weary or lose heart.

- What does it mean for you to *not grow weary* in the current situations that you are facing?

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# COMMUNION IS FELLOWSHIP

Kane McNally

## First love fellowship

The apostle Paul described the communion as a fellowship of the love of God.<sup>1</sup> The love of God is also described as *first love*.<sup>2</sup> First love is the unique love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which Christians are given by the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> As sons of God, we are receiving this love so that we may live by it, finding fellowship with God and our brethren.

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1 Eph 3:17-19

2 1Jn 4:19

3 Rom 5:5

The Holy Spirit is continually pouring God's love into our hearts.<sup>4</sup> This impacts upon the way we live, relate and fellowship together as members of the body of Christ. We are being 'rooted and grounded' in God's love, meaning that our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ are being established and strengthened in God's love.<sup>5</sup> We now live together in first love *because we are* members of one another.<sup>6</sup>

Paul further explained that as we fellowship with 'all the saints' we are able to apprehend the breadth, length, height and depth of the love of God.<sup>7</sup> What a reason to gather together! As we come to the communion, gifts of the Spirit are ministered and we are illuminated for the season ahead.<sup>8</sup> Each person is ministered to so that they can fulfil God's will. In this way, we are apprehending the amazing diversity of God's love with our brethren.

As sons of God, each of us is enabled to show forth and minister God's love and life to one another. Collectively, we are being *filled up to all the fullness of God*.<sup>9</sup> We could say that we are being filled up with the love and life of God when we meet together.

### **Communion is a fellowship of giving and receiving God's life**

Motivated by God's love, we meet together for communion every week. This is the highpoint of our fellowship with one another and with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our communion services are a *fellowship of giving and receiving*. We don't only come to receive of God's life; we also come to participate in the giving of God's life to one another. Every one of us, including young people, can be confident that we are fully equipped to join this fellowship of giving and receiving. God's love compels us to also leave aside all personal complexity regarding our participation at the communion. We can participate to the fullest as we follow the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit.

As we sing with the Spirit and participate in the gifts of the Spirit, we are strengthened by one another with the Spirit and life of God. Through the ministry of the Spirit, the body of Christ builds itself up in love.<sup>10</sup>

The apostle Paul used the functioning of the human body to illustrate the operation of the body of Christ. He emphasised that each part of the body is necessary for the

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4 Rom 5:5                      10 Eph 4:16

5 Eph 3:17

6 Rom 12:5

7 Eph 3:18

8 Eph 4:16

9 Eph 3:19

proper functioning of the whole body.<sup>11</sup> Every believer in the body of Christ has the Spirit and life of God. They are able to participate in body ministry. Through each person's particular expression the body of Christ is built up in love by that which every person supplies.<sup>12</sup>

The love of God motivates us to join the fellowship of the communion. As we all participate together, the life and love of God are multiplied to every member of the congregation. The gifts of the Holy Spirit give us illumination and direction so that we know how to walk as sons of God during the week ahead.

### **First love fellowship is with us every day**

Because we have joined the fellowship of giving and receiving at the communion table, we can proceed full of faith. We can be confident that, even though we will join the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, we will also know the power of His resurrection.<sup>13</sup> We know that we have been fully equipped by God in the fellowship of first love.

Moreover, it is precious to consider that we continue to participate in this fellowship throughout the week. Paul exhorted the Corinthian church, saying, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God (the Father) and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all'.<sup>14</sup> Significantly, this fellowship is *with us all* as we go from the communion.

Additionally, it is most helpful to remember that the fellowship of first love is with us every day. We are not just left alone to negotiate the difficulties of life, equipped with a kind of 'supernatural survival kit' which we received at the communion. Rather, because we are continuing daily in a fellowship of first love, we can be confident that God will lead and guide us through even the most difficult circumstances. He will help us to access the grace and life that was spoken to us at the communion. How does this happen?

During the week, we pray to our Father, and He hears our prayers.<sup>15</sup> Jesus Christ is our Saviour and Friend, who walks with us every moment of the day. We pray and fellowship with Him through the day in the assurance that He is with us.<sup>16</sup> The Holy Spirit is the Helper sent to lead and guide in the truth of our name and works

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11 Eph 4:16                      16 Mat 28:20

12 Eph 4:16

13 Php 3:10

14 2Co 13:14

15 Mat 6:6, Luk 11:2.  
1Jn 5:14-15

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

as a son of God.<sup>17</sup> He continues to pour the love of God into our heart, reminding us of God's word to us in the season.<sup>18</sup>

Not only are we to fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit throughout the week, but we also fellowship with our beloved brethren in Christ. We proceed through the week in a culture of first love as brothers and sisters together.<sup>19</sup> We devote ourselves to studying God's word. We fellowship with one another as households together. We break bread together, sharing the testimony of God's word in our lives. We pray individually and as households, abiding in the fruit of the life we have received.

### Conclusion

In this season, the Holy Spirit is bringing our attention to the need to grow in our understanding of, and participation in, communion. It's a precious understanding we are receiving. We meet together at the communion table, where we are being filled up to the fullness of God's love. We then proceed from the table to the week ahead, and God is with us; and so are our brethren. As we continue in the culture of first love, we will return to the communion table the next week, full of faith, ready to participate again as a member of the body of Christ. Let's be encouraged to continue in this fellowship of first love together!

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17 Joh 16:7. Joh 16:13

18 Rom 5:5

19 Act 2:42



## **Study Questions - Communion is fellowship**

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First love is the unique love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which we as sons of God have been given by the Holy Spirit. Having received His love, we can love one another as He loved us.

- Outline what you are currently understanding first love to be, how we receive it and how we are established in it.

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- What has been the impact of this understanding of first love - the way God loves - upon the way you live and relate among God's people?

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- Describe how you are giving yourself to participate confidently in the fellowship of giving and receiving in the communion service.

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- How are you giving attention to fellowship with the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and your brethren during the week so that you come to the communion service prepared to give of God's life in the meeting?

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## **This is Communion (Song)**

The song 'This is Communion' outlines the key elements of our communion gathering and celebrates the precious fellowship we enjoy with our brethren and with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### *This is Communion*

(Kane McNally)

#### VERSE 1

We've come together today as members of Christ  
To eat and drink in remembrance of Christ's death which we've joined.  
Now we eat the bread and drink the wine full of faith  
To join His offering and His sufferings, we share in the life of God.

#### CHORUS

This is communion as one body,  
Precious communion with our God.  
Here we are strengthened by each other  
With the Spirit and life of God.

#### VERSE 2

Gifts of the Spirit abound we're built up in love  
Illumination direction we receive, now to walk.  
For the season ahead we're given strength to endure  
To join His offering and His sufferings, we share in the life of God.

## This is Communion

Kane McNally

## A VERSES 1&amp;2

**Bb7**  
Swing (♩ = 120)

**Eb** **Ab** **Eb**

*mf* We've come to - geth - er to - day as mem - bers of Christ  
Gifts of the Spir - it a - bound we're built up in love\_

4 **Bb** **Bb7** **Ab** **Bb7** **Eb** **Ab**

To eat and drink in re - mem - brance of Christ's  
Il - lum - in - a - tion dir - ect - ion we re -

7 **Eb** **Bb** **Ab**

death which we've joined. Now we eat the bread  
-ceive, now to walk... For the sea - son a - head\_

10 **Bb** **Bb7** **Ab** **Bb7** **Eb** **Eb** **Ab** **Eb**

and drink the wine full of faith To  
we're giv - en strength to en - dure

13 **Fm7** **Eb** **Cm7** **Fm7** **Bb**

join His off - 'ring and His suff - 'rings, we share in the life of God\_

## B CHORUS

16 **Eb** **Ab** **Eb7** **Ab** **Bb7** **Eb** **Ab**

This is com - mun - ion as one bo - dy\_

21 **Eb7** **Ab** **Bb7** **Eb** **Ab** **Eb7**

Pre - cious com - mun - ion with our God\_ Here we are

26 **Ab** **Bb7** **Gm7** **Cm7**

strength - ened by each oth - er With the

30 **Fm** **Bb7** **Eb** **Ab** **Eb**

Spir - it and life of God.

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# MAKE YOUR CALL AND ELECTION SURE

Michael Hall & Peter Hay

## Born of precious seed

Many of you have been raised in Christian homes. On account of your parents' faith, you were *gifted* with the divine nature. The precious seed of God's life germinated within you at the point of conception in your mother's womb. This is the same seed that a person from the world receives when they meet Jesus and are 'born again'. However, receiving the incorruptible seed of God does not guarantee that a person will be a son of God forever. Why is this so?

In the parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus likened a person's birth 'from above' to a seed that had germinated and begun to sprout. This parable teaches us that the seed of the divine nature does not grow to fruitful maturity within us *by default*.

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

The vitality of the emerging shoot of our sonship is affected by the condition of the ground in which it has been sown. The ground, in this parable, is speaking about our heart.

Does this mean that we cannot *know* whether we will receive an eternal inheritance as a son of God? Certainly not! We recall that the apostle John wrote his first letter ‘to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life’.<sup>1</sup> The implication of Jesus’ parable is that it is *our responsibility* to join the process that Christ established to deal with the condition of our hearts. Knowing the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is the key to enduring in this process and growing in the assurance of our salvation.

### Knowing the Lord

The apostle Paul said that he had *counted* all his earthly riches as rubbish in view of the amazing treasure of *knowing* Christ Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Do we treasure the blessing of our sonship and our relationship with God? If it is not precious to us, then we will not be diligent to take hold of the life that He wants us to have.

Paul had already met Jesus on the road to Damascus.<sup>3</sup> However, he *continued* to suffer the loss of all things to *know the Lord*.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, Paul wanted to know the Lord more deeply. This relationship was the foundation of a process through which he would receive the hope of the resurrection. The fellowship of Christ’s suffering, and the power of His resurrection are the means by which the seed of God’s life can flourish within us.

Paul encouraged believers to be filled with the knowledge of God’s will so that we will ‘walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, *bearing fruit* in every good work and *increasing in the knowledge of God*’.<sup>5</sup> Paul was describing the characteristics of a *mature Christian*. They are bearing the good fruits of the Spirit and knowing God more and more.

### Maturity and firstfruits

Christian maturity does not just mean being ‘grown up’. More specifically, it means that a person’s expression of the divine nature is *appropriate* for their age and stage of life. This is what Paul meant when he said that ‘as many as are perfect’ have the

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1 1Jn 5:13

2 Php 3:8

3 Act 9:3-6

4 Php 3:10

5 Col 1:9-10

attitude of ‘pressing on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus’.<sup>6</sup> These are people who are bearing the fruit that God requires of them, at the time that He requires it. Obviously, the expression of God’s life is going to be markedly different for a seven year-old in comparison with a Christian who is seventeen! Likewise, the opportunities and responsibility for making offering will change as a young Christian ages.

The Scriptures use agricultural symbols to describe the life and culture of God’s people. Drawing on this language, we can liken Christian maturity to the principle of ‘firstfruits’. The firstfruits were an offering that the children of Israel made to God. They offered the first grains that ripened from their harvest each season.<sup>7</sup> This offering was made in faith for the full harvest, believing that it all belonged to the Lord. Notably, the term ‘firstfruits’ is based on the same Hebrew word for ‘firstborn’. The firstborn was the heir of a covenant household, and the Lord said that the firstborn *belonged to Him*.<sup>8</sup>

A Christian should exemplify the principle of firstfruits. This is a person who has believed the word that calls them to be a son of God, and has been established in the culture of offering. By not drawing back from participating in Christ’s sufferings, they demonstrate respect and the fear of God in relation to the processes of the cross. They accept that these processes are necessary to enable them to partake of the divine nature. The life of offering that they live in their mortal flesh is the life they will live forever in an immortal body.

As we follow the themes of ‘firstfruits’ and ‘the firstborn’ through the Scriptures, we see that God gives a specific mandate, or capacity, to those who are like firstfruits. This is the capacity to *reign in life* and to function in the *ministry of reconciliation*. These firstfruits capacities were exemplified in the life of Joseph.

In every situation in which Joseph found himself, he trusted God and was faithful in the work that was set before him. As he believed God’s word about himself, he found grace for every circumstance. This is how he reigned in life. Joseph demonstrated the capacity of reconciliation when he forgave his brothers and helped them to recover to the name and destiny that God had for them. God had called and chosen them to be the firstfruits of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel.

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6 Php 3:14-15

7 Exo 23:19

8 Exo 13:1-2

## The foundations of sonship

We are all firstfruits Christians as long as we '*hold fast* our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end'.<sup>9</sup> To be assured of receiving our full inheritance as a son of God, Paul exhorted believers to be '*imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*'.<sup>10</sup> To imitate those who inherited the promises of God through faith, we must first consider to whom the promises were made.

The promise of sonship was first spoken to Abraham.<sup>11</sup> We recall that God made an 'everlasting covenant' with Abraham and his descendants.<sup>12</sup> The Everlasting Covenant communicated God's desire to bring forth a multitude of sons who were born of His own life. This was the promise of eternal life. This promise was given to Abraham and was passed on to Isaac and then Jacob as a blessing. Through His interactions with these three men, the foundations of God's covenant promises were fully established.

## The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

When Peter proclaimed the message of the New Covenant to the Jews at the portico of Solomon, he said, '*The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus*'.<sup>13</sup> Why would Peter use this description of God to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ? It is because we must come to know the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob if we are to inherit the promises of God that have been made available to us in Christ.

To meet the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is to know God in relation to His dealings with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Everything that God revealed of Himself to each of the three fathers, He became to them. This why He is called, for example, 'the God of Abraham' and 'the fear of Isaac'. Everything that was established by God through His interactions with Abraham was then encapsulated in His identification as 'the God of Abraham'. This principle was the same for Isaac and Jacob.

Although Isaac and Jacob had received the blessing of Abraham as a *birthright*, their faith for this blessing was *tested* through specific life experiences and their *personal* encounters with the Lord. Through each of these encounters, they were

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9 Heb 3:6

10 Heb 6:11-12

11 Gal 3:16

12 Gen 17:7

13 Act 3:13



established in what their fathers had received, and something *further* of God's covenant blessing was established in their lives.

This is important to understand. What was passed on to the heirs of the blessing was *necessary* for receiving what God was wanting to establish next. For example, Jacob testified to Laban, 'If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, *and* the fear of Isaac, had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed'.<sup>14</sup> Jacob understood that his appropriation of the blessing of God through the season of his tribulation was because he knew the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac. He had received the *faith* of Abraham and the *calling* of Isaac to be a son of the promise. Following his departure from the house of Laban, *election* was then established with Jacob when he wrestled with the Lord and received his new name, Israel, which means 'Prince with God'.<sup>15</sup>

### **Faith, calling and election**

Paul described Abraham as 'the father of *all* who believe'. These are those who follow in the steps of his *faith*.<sup>16</sup> The faith of Abraham was that he believed God, 'who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist'.<sup>17</sup> Abraham had faith because he received and believed God and His word. And, because of this, God accounted it to him as righteousness.<sup>18</sup> To know 'the God of Abraham' is to know the fatherhood of God in our life, and to live by the faith of Abraham.

The *calling* that we receive is the call to be sons of God.<sup>19</sup> Joining the fellowship of Christ's offering is the crisis for the person who has received the call to be a son of God. The covenant of sonship was confirmed to Abraham and Isaac through participation in the offering of the Lamb that God provided for Himself. In the same way, the assurance of our sonship will only be found as we are conformed to the death of Christ. The true believer takes up his cross and receives the inheritance of sonship by joining the circumcision of Christ, which is the fellowship of His sufferings. This is what establishes believers as sons of God, and demonstrates that they know 'the fear of Isaac'.

The foundation of *election* was established by God with Jacob.<sup>20</sup> The elect are those people who, like Jacob, patiently endure the testing of the Lord. Through this process they are being delivered from the propensities of their fallen nature. Like

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14 Gen 31:42

15 Gen 32:28

16 Rom 4:11-12

17 Rom 4:17

18 Gal 3:6

19 IJn 3:1

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

the apostle Paul, they desire to *know* the Lord all the more as they apprehend their *name and works* as a son of God. This is within the community of believers who are being built together as a holy temple for the Lord.

### **In summary**

To be properly established as a Christian on the pathway of sonship, we must *know God*. God wants to know us and for us to know Him. We obtain our inheritance by growing in our knowledge of, and relationship with, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is how we receive faith, make our calling and election sure, and grow as a firstfruits believer. We must *continue* to live by the faith that we have received from God, and make our *calling and election sure*. The apostle Peter said that if we do this, we will not stumble and will gain entrance into the everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

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20 Isa 45:4

21 2Pe 1:10-11

## **Study Questions - Make your call and election sure**

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Consider the amazing blessing of being born again! A person can know God and receive the seed of His nature. Paul considered this a great treasure for which he had suffered the loss of all things.

- How are you fostering your relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

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- What has been the cost to you of being a Christian?

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God expects us to bear the fruit of sonship that is appropriate to our age and stage.

- In what ways have your opportunities and responsibility for making offering changed over the last two years? Give practical examples.

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The life of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph demonstrates that we need to believe God's word and endure seasons of trial and testing in order to inherit the promises of God.

- In this current season, what are the points of maturity that God wants to establish in your life? How do you know this?

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# KNOWING THE FATHER

## *The reward of sonship*

Tim Maurice

‘But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.’<sup>1</sup>

This instruction from Jesus is one of the foundations of the Christian life. Without the Father, there would be no sons of God. Without the Father, there would be no fellowship of Father and Son in the Godhead. Indeed, we must be clear that we cannot be a Christian without the fatherhood of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Mat 6:6

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This may seem an obvious thing to say. If you have been raised in a Christian home, it will seem as natural as night following day for you to have a relationship with the Son *and* the Father. At the same time, we all need to be encouraged to continue in and deepen our relationship with our heavenly Father. So let's look more closely at what we mean by relating to God as our Father.

### **True in us**

We know that Jesus said, 'If you have seen Me you have seen the Father'. So, doesn't this mean that if we have the Son we also automatically have the Father? Well, of course that is true at the moment of believing. But like so many things in the Christian life, what is true as an initial statement of faith must become true as an ongoing course of action. What is true *for* us must become true *in* us.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the way we live must begin to reflect what we profess to be true. For example, the Bible tells us that we are holy; but unless we sanctify ourselves daily to the Lord, we will not remain holy. We may be filled with the Spirit once; but it is the daily in-filling of the Holy Spirit that determines whether we are conducting our time on earth in the fear of the Lord.

When we meet the Father daily, partaking of fellowship with Him, entrusting our lives to Him, these qualities will shine forth in our lives. We will bear fruit. And, as Jesus said, the bearing of much fruit is what brings glory to the Father. This is because the fruit of a son of God is a true reflection of the glory of the Father. The fruit is the evidence that we are living as the Father has predestined us to live. We are really being the sons and daughters He intended us to be - doing the things He planned for us to do.

### **The spirit of adoption**

An important point needs to be made here. We can only have true relationship with the Father if it is the spirit of adoption which motivates us. This is God's motivation at work in us, and this is very important to understand. If we were to lay hold of the promises of Scripture by the zeal of our own spirit - to ward off evil, to avoid suffering or because we are afraid of death (to name but a few), we would not relate to the Father properly at all.

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2 1Jn 2:8

Returning to the issue of identity: in coming to know the Father, we come to know ourselves. Think about a child for a moment. A two year-old does not have to ask her daddy who she is. Her reassurance is in knowing that she is guarded by the constant and far-reaching love of her parents. The filling out of the question of 'who she is' takes place over time, within the safe boundaries of obedience to those parents.

We can see the failure of this parent-child relationship in every area of modern life. Without boundaries or proper love, self-knowledge is impossible. Instead, we find young people asserting the right of self-definition: 'If I can define myself, then I have a clear course of action before me. Through my actions I can create my own reality. I can make myself.'

This imagined 'self' is the work of Satan, who was the first to imagine a self (his own) apart from fellowship with God. It was with this fantasy that Satan tempted Adam and Eve - 'You can be like God, and live apart from Him'. This is impossible; nevertheless, human beings continue to try to forge their own future from the raw material of their own imaginations.

## **A personal name**

But we have no future unless we know the One who gave us our destiny - the Father. And if we desire to find Him, He will be found. This is why Jesus' words at the top of this article are so important. When we meet the Father in secret, He rewards us. What might be the nature of this reward? The greatest secret for every son of God is the secret of their name:

'To the one who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'<sup>3</sup>

The possession of a personal name is the inheritance that awaits our full adoption as sons. We may *do* many things in this life, but one thing we will *be* for all eternity is a son of God with a unique name. Our heavenly Father has named us, and it is in knowing Him that we are granted the honour of knowing ourselves. This self-knowledge does not consist in mere psychology, but in the depth of God's

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3 Rev 2:17

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

knowledge about us.<sup>4</sup> Proceeding from the knowledge that He has - He who is completely One - we are able to be at one with Him, our brethren and ourselves.

Consider the apostle Paul. Toward the end of his life, shut up in a Roman prison, he was able to write to Timothy about why he suffered. From the beginning of his ministry he had been shown that he would have to suffer for the sake of Christ. And as he matured as a son of God, he came to understand why this was so - why there was a particular thorn inflicted upon his flesh. Paul did not entrust his life to God in some vague and general way. He lived daily in the presence of God, growing in understanding as he submitted himself to the Father's training.<sup>5</sup>

### The chastening of the Father

In other words, Paul accepted the chastening of the Father. He willingly accepted the beatings and imprisonments, because he knew that the sufferings of Christ were working for him an eternal weight of glory. He learned this from Jesus Himself. As Jesus had said to His disciples:

'Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.'<sup>6</sup>

Paul learned how to walk in a lowly manner before God and men. He learned how to carry in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus. And he brought the fellowship of this dying wherever he went, offering it as the pathway to life. He found the full sufficiency of the grace of God in the weakness of his flesh.

### The Father's help

We can all find this grace. Remember, if we ask our Father for bread, He will not give us a stone.<sup>7</sup> When you approach the Father, asking for help, He will not ignore you. If you lay yourself bare before Him, crying out to meet Him, He will not turn you away. His desire from before the world was created was that we should love one another as the Godhead loves. That what is true in Them might become true in us.

Your heavenly Father will reward you in secret with the blessing of His fellowship. In knowing Him, you will receive His knowledge, and with it the steadfast

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4 Pro 9:10

5 Act 9:16, 2Co 12:7,  
2Ti 1:12

6 Mat 11:29-30

7 Mat 7:9



## *Knowing the Father*

reassurance that He is guarding your name until the day of its full manifestation. As Paul said towards the end of his life, 'I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me'.<sup>8</sup> May we all grow in knowing the One whom we have believed, and entrust ourselves completely to His guiding hand.

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8 2Ti 1:12

## Study Questions - Knowing the Father

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- Why is it so important to be motivated by a spirit of adoption, and not just by our own zeal?

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- What do you think Jesus meant when He encouraged us to go into 'the secret place' to pray to the Father?

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- Describe how it encourages you to know that the Father is guarding your name.

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- In what ways could you further invest in your relationship with the Father?

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# RECEIVING ASSURANCE FROM JESUS

Nadine Pomery

## What is our assurance?

Our *assurance* is that Jesus Christ *will* give us the nourishment we need in order to endure in every season. He has promised to share *His own life* with us. Jesus' words were, 'Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you'.<sup>1</sup> His life, given to us, is 'the food

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<sup>1</sup> Joh 6:27

which endures to eternal life'. It nourishes our soul and spirit. We simply need to come to Jesus, and know Him, so that we may receive it.<sup>2</sup>

### Receiving the 'food' of His life

We are nourished each week as we gather at the communion table. This is where He gives us the 'food' of His life. When we come to communion, we know that Christ has an imperative towards His church. *He has something to say!* Jesus said, 'The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life'.<sup>3</sup> And so, we come believing that He will speak His words which are spirit and life to us.

How do we know what Christ is saying? He speaks through the members of His body. This is His 'body ministry', in which we all have a participation. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, members of the body of Christ are enabled to articulate the word of God. This word lights up the 'pathway', or direction, that belongs to us as the sons and daughters of God.

As we believe and obey the truth of God's word, we are proceeding on the pathway that has been illuminated. This is how we come to Jesus. We fellowship with Him at the communion table, where He imparts His life to us. We receive the 'food' of His life as we eat and drink the elements of the communion. His life is not in the physical bread of the communion. Rather, He told us that *He* is 'the bread of life'.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus said that if we eat and drink of His life, He lives in us and we live in Him as a member of His body.<sup>5</sup> As we meet Him by faith at the communion, and continue to abide in Him, we know with assurance that we have eternal life!<sup>6</sup> Moreover, when Christ is in us, it affects the way that we live.<sup>7</sup> We are enabled to love others in the same way that He loves us. As we love others in this way, our hearts are *assured* and we know that we have His life.<sup>8</sup>

We can be confident that we *have* been 'fed' with Christ's life simply because we hear His word and *we are following Him!*<sup>9</sup> We follow Him as our Shepherd. We believe His word and are encouraged that He is giving us the very capacity to obey Him, and thus fulfil God's will for our lives!<sup>10</sup>

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2 Joh 5:39-40. V Hall with P Hay, D Baker, 2015, *Assurance of Eternal Life*. Page 16.

3 Joh 6:63                      8 1Jn 3:18-19

4 Joh 6:48                      9 Joh 10:27-28

5 Joh 6:56                      10 Heb 5:9

6 1Jn 5:13

7 Gal 2:20

## Living by faith throughout the week

Because we have received His word, we are enabled to *continue* to live by faith during the coming week. We have the assurance that what God has said *will* come to pass. 'For He who has promised is faithful.'<sup>11</sup> It is *God's faithfulness* towards us, which gives us the assurance of our eternal life with Christ. And this assurance gives us great encouragement.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the week then, we continue to meet Jesus and know Him *personally* as our Helper.<sup>13</sup> We fellowship with Him personally as we join with Him in prayer. We continue believing the words of life which He has spoken to us. With the help of Christ, and the help of the Holy Spirit, we are strengthened to do the works of faith which God has given us to do each day. These are the works of faith that come from the word which we have received from Christ.

## Assurance for the times ahead

We know that we live in an era of history when the love of most Christians will grow cold. Jesus told us this would happen.<sup>14</sup> Yet we do not need to become unsure in our spirit when we face these difficult seasons.<sup>15</sup> Naturally, we will feel perplexed and grieved by the loss and betrayal we will encounter, but we *need not despair!*<sup>16</sup> Our assurance and faith do not waver in response to the circumstances around us. How is this possible? It is because *assurance comes from Jesus Himself.*

We have *assurance* through *faith* in Jesus.<sup>17</sup> The apostle Paul made it clear that our faith is not dependent upon the wisdom or actions of mankind. Our faith rests entirely on the power of God.<sup>18</sup> Through every contrary circumstance, we are enabled to 'hold fast our confidence' because our adequacy comes from God, and not from ourselves!<sup>19</sup> This assurance, which we have through faith in Christ, cannot be shaken by the difficult times ahead.<sup>20</sup>

Jesus has promised to give us the food which *endures* to eternal life. He is our great Shepherd. We come to Him and hear His voice, knowing that He will feed us in every season.<sup>21</sup> The nourishment we receive from Him will not perish. And the love of God poured into our hearts will not 'grow cold' within us!<sup>22</sup> His love enables us to 'believe all things, hope all things and endure all things' for the sake of our brethren.<sup>23</sup>

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11	Heb 10:23	17	Heb 10:22. Heb 11:1.	20	Heb 10:22-25
12	Heb 6:18		Eph 3:11-12	21	Joh 10:27-28
13	Heb 2:16. Heb 13:6	18	1Co 2:5	22	Rom 5:5
14	Mat 24:12	19	Heb 3:6,14. 2Co 3:5	23	1Co 13:7
15	Heb 12:3. Eph 3:13				
16	2Co 4:7-8				

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Our eternal life with Him is assured as we remain in *communion with Him and His people*; and as we remain in *fellowship with Him personally* in our prayerful relationship with Him day by day. He is faithful to minister His own life to us. In this, we have assurance of eternal life. He will strengthen us to persevere with Him all the way through our pilgrimage here on this earth, and will bring us safely into His heavenly kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Rev 3:10. 2Ti 4:18

## Study Questions - Receiving assurance from Jesus

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Despite the difficulty of the times ahead, our *assurance* is that Jesus Christ, our Shepherd, *will* nourish us with the food that enables us to endure in every season.

- What is the spiritual food that endures to eternal life? See John 6:27,48,63.

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- How are we fed with the life of Christ at the communion table?

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- How do we continue meeting and knowing Christ as our *Helper* throughout the week?

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- Think of times when you have received *clarity* and *capacity* to do 'the works of faith' that God has for you, because of the *word and life* you received from Christ at communion. Can you describe one example of this?

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SONS OF GOD WHO ARE  
PRIESTS TO GOD  
*Anointed to minister the life of God*  
Keren McNally

**Light and life**

As sons of God, it is wonderful to be assured of the truth that we have Christ's life growing up in us. We are assured that we have *received* His life, and we can also be sure that we can *minister* His life. As we consider this, let us first appreciate that it is God's word that is making us increasingly sure of this truth. God's word is a light that shines on us. His word shines so that we can *see* and *apprehend* the amazing provision of God's life coming *to* us and growing *in* us. The light of God's

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word reveals His life to us. In fact, His light is His very life!<sup>1</sup> We can minister God's life and light as we walk together as sons of God.

Having received Christ's life, we know that we belong to Him and we are members of His body. Many of us were born into believing households and therefore we received the seed of sonship life *while in the womb of our mother*. What an amazing provision! Wonderfully, this means we have been a son of God and a member of Christ's body from the womb. Others of us were born of God at a later stage in life, having come out of the 'world'. Whichever way we came to receive Christ's life, we appreciate the tremendous love of the Father toward us to set us in the body of Christ so we can 'grow up' into the fullness of God.<sup>2</sup> A vital aspect of growing up into His fullness is to be an active and participating member of Christ's body by ministering the life of God.

### Priests through baptism

As sons of God, we are called to be priests to God and to *minister*, or share, the life of Christ with others. 'Priesthood' is the work of ministering God's life. We are each responsible for our particular work of priesthood. We each carry our unique load and work; however, we don't do this on our own.<sup>3</sup> We carry our load as a particular member in the body of Christ, and we are able to bear each other's burdens.<sup>4</sup> Our priesthood is our sanctified work which is fulfilling the will of God in our lives. The apostle Peter wrote, 'His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness'.<sup>5</sup> We can be assured that we have everything we require to be a priest.

Our baptism enabled us to be a priest. Through baptism we have received the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as an ointment, or oil, poured out on us.<sup>6</sup> This oil has anointed us, or ordained us, to be a priest. His name, which is His anointing, has given us the full *capacity* and *authority* of priesthood.

Paul clearly said of baptism, 'For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ'.<sup>7</sup> Baptism joins us to Christ's priesthood and clothes us with a priestly garment. We are clothed as a priest with our great High Priest. Every member of the body of Christ – younger and older – can receive this capacity of priesthood which uniquely belongs to Christ. If we were baptised as

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1 Joh 1:4                      7 Gal 3:26-27

2 Eph 4:15

3 Gal 6:4-5

4 Gal 6:2

5 2Pe 1:3

6 Son 1:3. 1Jn 2:20

a child, we received our own 'little ephod'. This is just as the Scripture described Samuel, the son of Hannah and Elkanah, who served in the temple as a young child wearing a little robe.<sup>8</sup>

### **Alight with a sevenfold flame**

We receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a fire. John the Baptist said of Christ, 'As for me, I baptise you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me ... will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire'.<sup>9</sup> When the oil of Christ's name is ignited by the fire of the Holy Spirit, we are alight as with a flame! This flame, or light, is not the Holy Spirit. Rather, it is the sevenfold Spirit of God (or Yahweh). The Spirit of God was able to be physically seen as 'tongues as of fire' upon the heads of one hundred and twenty disciples when they were filled with the Holy Spirit as they gathered on the Day of Pentecost.<sup>10</sup>

The term 'sevenfold Spirit of God' is referring to 'the fullness' of God. It is the Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is the power of all three Persons of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit is bringing to us the power of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is enabling us to function as priests and to minister the life of Jesus to others. The very same power that enabled Jesus's priesthood is given to us for *our* priestly service. What an enabling we have received!

Jesus Himself was strengthened to be a priest by the Spirit of God. He received anointing by the Holy Spirit bringing the sevenfold Spirit of God.<sup>11</sup> This strengthened Jesus to make offering and to priest His life to us.<sup>12</sup> We can clearly see that baptism is not a formula or an empty ritual. Neither does it make us a member of the body of Christ. Rather, baptism has given us a substantial anointing *with power!* We have received oil and a priestly garment.

### **Revealing the light**

From our baptism, we continue to grow up and mature as sons and daughters of God as we priest His life. We are priests who are part of a kingdom of priests!<sup>13</sup> We are now an *active* and *participating* member of the body of Christ. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we have the power of God upon us. We understand that we have everything we need to express the light of the Spirit of God in the body of Christ. We are participating in Christ's priesthood in the midst of the church.

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8 1Sa 2:18-19

9 Mat 3:11

10 Act 2:1-4

11 Psa 133:1-3

12 Heb 9:14

13 Rev 1:6

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

This means that as we come to the communion table we are fully equipped to participate in the ministry of the body that is building up each member. We are coming in the faith and assurance that we are able to speak a word that is reflecting, or focusing, the light of the Spirit of God. This is the very life of God.

In this way, we are not seeing each other's divine nature being revealed. We are seeing Yahweh Himself being revealed through us and among us. As sons of God, we have received the authority of priesthood, the authority of Christ's name. We note that we are also confirmed in the authority of *our* name. In Christ's name is every other name, which includes the name of every son of God. When we minister as a priest, we do so according to our name. We cannot be 'someone else'. We present *ourselves* as a living sacrifice. This is our reasonable priestly service.<sup>14</sup>

We are reflecting the light of Yahweh in the body of Christ by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God has been brought to us, with power, by the Holy Spirit. We are all able to reflect the light of the Spirit of God in the body of Christ, younger and older together! This light is lighting up the pathway of sonship so that we can walk in it as individuals and as a people together. This light is ministering to every son of God in the household of God. In this way, we know how to fulfil the will of God in our lives, each week and in the season ahead.

As we walk in the light that is shining, we are growing up into the fullness of God's life. We are receiving the power of Yahweh to grow up in His life and to fulfil His will. Wonderfully, this power of God strengthens us to *continue* to offer and to keep presenting ourselves to God.

### A kingdom of priests

Let's be strengthened in the knowledge that we have received the authority and capacity to be a priest to God. This is because we are joined to Christ and His priesthood through baptism. We are priests and we belong to a kingdom of priests. We have entered the priestly service of the kingdom. Christ who loves us 'has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father – to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.'<sup>15</sup>

We know that we can minister life and present ourselves, because we have received capacity *by the Spirit of God*. In this regard, Paul wrote, 'Not that we are sufficient of

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14 Rom 12:1

15 Rev 1:5-6

*Sons of God who are priests to God*

ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the New Covenant'.<sup>16</sup> The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all committed to making us sufficient as priests.

As sons of God together, we are growing up in our capacity to reflect the light of the Spirit of God that is shining on us. This is so we can all be gathered up together in His light. This light that is shining is imparting life to us! And we are receiving the substance of this life as something new that we did not have before.

We can have great confidence that we are indeed part of the priesting function of the church. This is because we are ignited by the Holy Spirit with the power of the Spirit of God. We are assured that we are shining with the light of the sevenfold Spirit that is resting on the church. We are walking in light on the pathway of sonship as priests together to our God and Father.

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<sup>16</sup> 2Co 3:5-6

## **Study Questions - Sons of God who are priests to God**

- Through history, baptism has been diminished to a formula or a ritual. The truth is that baptism is a substantial anointing. What have you received through baptism?

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- God has given us everything we need to participate as a priest to God. What do you understand that you have received?

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- How has this changed the way you think about your participation and the participation of others at the communion table?

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- What is your testimony of receiving from others the light of the Spirit of God ministered at the communion? How did this light become life to you?

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# UNDERSTANDING WHY WE SUFFER

Kaylene Hall

The apostle Paul explained that, as believers, we are to share in the sufferings of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Not only that, we are also to *rejoice* in these sufferings, knowing that they are producing an eternal glory for us.<sup>2</sup> This eternal glory is our unique inheritance of God's life for eternity.<sup>3</sup> We can certainly rejoice at the opportunity to receive God's life. However, rejoicing *when we suffer* is not generally our natural tendency! This is because we have an inbuilt desire to avoid suffering and to minimise its pain.

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1 1Pe 4:13

2 Rom 5:3. 2Co 4:17

3 1Pe 1:4

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

The experience of suffering on its own will not enable us to receive God's life. We could endure all manner of difficult circumstances throughout our life and end up no different from those in the world who do not know God and who also experience suffering in their lives. Simply 'gritting our teeth' to get through the tough times will certainly not produce any eternal glory in us. This approach only reinforces our natural desire to save ourselves and to cope with difficulties in the best way we can.

### **Our approach to suffering**

So, how does suffering produce an eternal glory in us? The answer is in our mindset when we are faced with suffering. Will we turn to the Lord and rely completely upon Him to strengthen and train us through the situation? Or will we turn to our own way of perceiving and coping with the circumstance?

Often our first response when we are faced with suffering is to ask, 'Why is this happening to me?' Perhaps more specifically, we ask ourselves, 'What have I done wrong?' We fear that God is punishing us for our shortfalls. We measure what we feel is the success or failure of our life, so that we can make logical conclusions about the reason for our suffering. 'Maybe it was because I did this?' 'Maybe it was because I should have done that?' We hope that if we can work out what we have done wrong, then we will be able to fix the problem and promptly put an end to our suffering!

### **The mind set on the flesh**

This response highlights our underlying motivations. There is a principle within us that believes we can 'do well' by ourselves. We believe that we can determine what is the best way for us to get through life successfully, cope with difficulties and serve God acceptably. This reasoning, which is according to our self-centred motivations, will never allow us to make sense of our suffering. Suffering will be an offence to us, particularly at times when there seems to be no logical reason for our suffering. This way of thinking only causes us to become disheartened. We become preoccupied with the circumstances of life and the desire to make things turn out better for us. This is what the Bible describes as setting our minds on the things of the flesh.<sup>4</sup>

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4 Rom 8:5



Paul explained that the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God because those who are in the flesh cannot please God.<sup>5</sup> This way of living isolates us from God and from His life. Clearly, our minds need to be renewed so that we are no longer bound by living and reasoning according to our flesh. Paul rejoiced that when we are joined to the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, we receive the capacity to overcome the motivations of our flesh.<sup>6</sup>

## **Joined to Christ's sufferings**

Christ experienced the most unjust suffering in the history of the world. Through every difficult circumstance, He committed Himself into the hands of His Father, to walk the pathway which the Father had set for Him. Through prayer, Christ was able to overcome the temptation to turn to His own resources to cope, even though He had every reason to save Himself. The Father strengthened Him to endure the suffering in His physical body, which led Him all the way to death on the cross. The same power from the Father that strengthened Christ in His suffering, also raised Him from the dead and gave Him a resurrection body. Christ walked this pathway of suffering for our sake, so that we could be given the same power and resurrection life He was given.

We need to be joined to Christ's sufferings so that we can be set free from the desire to live by our own resources, apart from God. Practically, we are joined to Christ's sufferings when our heavenly Father allows us to experience times of difficulty, injustice and even physical suffering. These sufferings are not a penalty for our sin. Christ paid the price for our sin. Rather, they are specific circumstances which provide an opportunity for us to stop relying on our own coping mechanisms, and turn to the Lord. The Lord uses our suffering to train and enable us to live by His life. As we pray, the Father is able to strengthen us in the day to day trials and difficulties of life. He helps us to endure these circumstances with grace and strength that is beyond our natural capacity. This is because we are receiving the resurrection life and power that Christ made available to us.

## **Our minds renewed**

Christ walks with us and leads us through every circumstance of life. He understands everything we are facing because He has walked this way before

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5 Rom 8:7-8

6 Php 3:9-11

us. He is able to teach us to walk as He walked, and to commit ourselves to the pathway that the Father has planned for us. As we embrace the suffering which is ours to carry according to the will of God, our mind is renewed so that we think differently about the circumstances we face. We are not motivated by our desire to make things easier or to justify ourselves in the midst of the difficulties. Christ encouraged us that when we learn from Him, we will find rest for our souls.<sup>7</sup> We will know a peace that surpasses all our human understanding, even if our contrary circumstances never change.<sup>8</sup>

We can be content that we may not always understand the reason we experience particular difficulties. We know that God is doing a work, even if we don't yet fully comprehend everything He is doing. He is freeing us from our own reasoning which seeks to define what is 'good' or 'not good', 'just' or 'unjust' for us. We are not afraid of the mistakes we have made. We know that we have all sinned and fallen short of what God has planned for us.<sup>9</sup> We no longer see our suffering as the consequence of us doing something wrong. Rather, as we entrust ourselves to God in every circumstance, we know He is giving us the capacity to turn from our self-centred striving and fulfil His will in our lives.<sup>10</sup>

### The love of God poured into our hearts

The apostle Peter encouraged us not to be surprised when we encounter various trials, as though some strange thing is happening to us.<sup>11</sup> Rather, we can rejoice that, in the midst of difficult circumstances, the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup> God's perfect love casts out fear.<sup>13</sup> As we begin to understand the true meaning of suffering with Christ, His love replaces our anxieties. Instead of being consumed by our own difficulties, we are motivated by the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the love of God toward others. This is how we know we are receiving His life.<sup>14</sup>

We are joined together in Christ, as members of His body, and we walk with one another through the various seasons and stages of life. At times, we will observe those whom we love, experience their own portion of suffering from the hand of the Father. We do not need to become offended at the nature of their suffering or make our own judgements about the reason for their specific trials.

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7 Mat 11:29                      13 1Jn 4:18

8 Php 4:6                        14 1Jn 3:14

9 Rom 3:23

10 1Pe 4:19. 1Pe 4:1-2

11 1Pe 4:12

12 Rom 5:5

## *Understanding why we suffer*

Instead, we join one another in faith, that we may overcome the temptation to revert to the ways of our flesh. We can pray for one another and encourage one another to believe God in the midst of every circumstance of life. We can delight with one another as we are strengthened by the Father and receive the grace and peace that He gives us. We can rejoice, as the apostle Peter did, that after we have suffered 'for a little while', the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish us.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> 1Pe 5:10

## **Study Questions - Understanding why we suffer**

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We need to be joined to the sufferings of Christ so that we can be set free from the desire to live by our own resources, apart from God. This provides us with an opportunity to stop relying on our own coping mechanisms and turn to the Lord.

- How are you practically joining Christ's sufferings?

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- Consider the way you have felt when you have faced difficult or unjust circumstances. Can you identify how you may have handled these situations according to your own reasoning?

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- How is your mind being renewed so that you are able to think differently about the difficult circumstances you are facing?

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The Lord uses our suffering to train and enable us to live by His life.

- How do you know that you are receiving Christ's life through the sufferings you are experiencing?

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# FINDING PEACE IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE

Lisa Hay

In all the contexts of our daily lives, we interact with people who live by the principles of the world. Separated from the life of God, these people live according to the desires of the flesh, the desires of their eyes and the pride of life.<sup>1</sup> To live according to these desires is to live by what the Bible calls 'the other law'.<sup>2</sup> The 'other law' is simply 'my law'. Living this way means making decisions on the basis of what people perceive is best for themselves. This involves striving to make a

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1 1Jn 2:16

2 Rom 7:23

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

name for themselves, and avoiding things that make them uncomfortable or which cause them pain and suffering.

While these attempts may provide a person with some short term satisfaction, security and happiness, their efforts cannot be sustained. We read in the book of Ecclesiastes that all a man gets from his labour and his striving is pain and grief, and his mind does not rest.<sup>3</sup> Anxiety, uncertainty and fear are never far from the minds of those who do not know God. There is no peace for those who are separated from God.<sup>4</sup> The peace of God passes all human comprehension and understanding.<sup>5</sup> It cannot be obtained by any human endeavour, no matter how hard a person tries!

Wonderfully, the gospel that we are receiving is a gospel of peace.<sup>6</sup> It is equipping us to live a life that is not motivated by fear and anxiety. Our feet can be prepared with the gospel of peace as 'shoes' on our feet.<sup>7</sup> When we are prepared with the gospel of peace, the word and the Spirit are directing our paths, so that we walk according to God's will for our lives. We know where to walk and how we are to get there. There is no longer any obligation to strive after the things of the flesh.<sup>8</sup> We are secure because we know the Father and we know Jesus Christ. We know our name and the works that the Father has prepared for us to walk in. His grace and peace are multiplied to us in this knowledge, and the Holy Spirit leads us in this truth.<sup>9</sup>

Through His perfect obedience to the Father, Jesus pioneered the pathway of sonship. It is a new way to live, think and function. It is not according to the principles of the world. Jesus didn't live in the pursuit of satisfying His own desires. Rather, He was completely obedient to the will of His Father, even to the point of death on the cross.<sup>10</sup> He was strengthened by the Spirit of God to walk the pathway set before Him.

By obedience to His word we are enabled to put away our fleshly desires and to set our mind on the things of the Spirit. We bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.<sup>11</sup> It will be clear what our specific obedience is, as we live by the proceeding word and partake of the elements at communion on Sundays. Each week, we can be confident that His word will light our path.<sup>12</sup> The Spirit leads us on this path and strengthens us to endure every difficult circumstance. If

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3	Ecc 2:22-23	9	2Pe 1:2. Joh 16:13
4	Isa 48:22	10	Php 2:8
5	Php 4:7	11	2Co 10:5
6	Eph 6:15	12	Psa 119:105
7	Eph 6:15		
8	Gal 5:16		

we walk by the Spirit, our lives will demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control will be evident in our lives.<sup>13</sup>

As Christians who have received the Spirit of Christ, the temptation for us is to revert to walking according to the flesh and the principles of the world. This temptation is the motivation within us to do things our own way, to strive according our own perspectives, to live by our other law! We can strive to feel accepted by our peers, to excel at school, university or work, to be independent, to acquire money and possessions to shore up our future, or just to get things right! These motivations are not aligned with the will of God for our life. Rather, they are indicative of the anxious pursuit of what we think is good for our flesh. When we live by the other law, we are without peace. This is because the flesh and the Spirit are in opposition to one another.<sup>14</sup>

In preparation to walking according to the Spirit, we need to pray in the Spirit.<sup>15</sup> Practically, this will mean having a regular prayer time at the beginning and end of each day. In prayer, we make our requests known to God, and commit every circumstance to Him.<sup>16</sup> As we walk through the course of the day, we know the Spirit's leading, and His peace guards our hearts and our minds.<sup>17</sup> We find that we are no longer striving or anxious, even though we may be facing difficult circumstances.

Let us be encouraged by the words of Jesus when He said, 'Peace I leave with you; My peace, I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.'<sup>18</sup> As we are obedient to His word, we can be confident that His peace is available to us in every circumstance of our lives. He will answer our prayers and strengthen us to walk each day by His Spirit.

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13 Gal 5:22

14 Gal 5:17

15 Eph 6:18

16 Php 4:6

17 Php 4:7

18 Joh 14:27

## **Study Questions - Finding peace in every circumstance**

The apostle Peter's encouragement to every Christian was for 'Grace and peace to be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord'. 2Pe 1:2. He was saying that grace and peace abound toward us as we get to know the Father and the Son better. We also have peace in the Holy Spirit. Rom 14:17.

- What are you doing to better get to know the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?

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- What is your testimony of receiving grace and peace in specific circumstances as you have pressed in to know God better?

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- How are you preparing yourself each day with the gospel of peace on your feet?

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# UNDERSTANDING TEMPTATION

Andrew Hay

The subject of temptation has featured often in the thoughts and writings of Christians since the earliest centuries of the church. Many conclude that Satan is the source of temptation. Others suggest that temptation is simply an aspect of fallen human nature. Some even propose that God designs specific trials of temptation to give Christians an opportunity to learn how to overcome, and thereby prove their righteousness. A number of modern churches have taken a different approach, viewing temptation as a self-management issue. Leaders teach practical strategies to help young people to avoid sin. Many will remember that it became popular for young Christians to wear silicone wrist bands imprinted with the letters WWJD. This was to remind the wearer in times of temptation to consider ‘What Would Jesus Do?’ Unfortunately, none of these methods adequately equip Christians to understand and overcome temptation.

## Freewill and temptation

By way of introduction, we understand that God named and predestined us before the foundation of the world. God also created humankind with a 'free will'. This means that we are free to choose to receive the will of God and be obedient to His plan for our lives; or we can exercise our own will and live as we wish.

'Temptation', of itself, is not sin but is an element of mankind's free will. Because we have a free will, we can be tempted to turn from God's way to 'the way that seems right to a man'.<sup>1</sup> Eve faced temptation in the garden before she even knew what sin was. The writer to the Hebrews explains that Jesus, who was 'made like His brethren in all things', was 'tempted as we are, yet without sin'.<sup>2</sup> The apostle Paul made a similar point to the Christians in Corinth, noting that 'no temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man'.<sup>3</sup> The implication is clear. We all face temptation. We cannot simply try to manage the difficulties that arise because of it. We must understand how temptation works in us and be spiritually equipped to overcome it.

## Our own desires

James gives us a helpful starting point. 'But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.'<sup>4</sup>

James dispels the notion that Satan is the source of our temptation. We are 'drawn away by our own desires and enticed'. The book of Romans identifies this problem as a mindset which is preoccupied with the issues of our individual life and existence. 'For the mind set on the flesh is death.'<sup>5</sup>

A 'mind set on the flesh' lives from its own perspective rather than God's. The apostle Paul calls it 'another law'.<sup>6</sup> We recall that before Satan deceived Eve with a lie, Eve had become open to temptation by setting her mind on the flesh. She delighted in the law of God on the one hand but, at the same time, she became impatient to realise her predestination to be 'the mother of all the living'.<sup>7</sup> Her mind decided that there was a problem, and stirred in her another law which created turmoil within her heart. Satan recognised this unhappiness and promoted an alternate word - a lie that targeted Eve's vulnerability. So it is that Satan works

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1 Pro 14:12                      7 Gen 3:20

2 Heb 2:17. Heb 4:15

3 1Co 10:13

4 Jas 1:14-15

5 Rom 8:6

6 Rom 7:23

by advantage, suggesting that the law of our mind can achieve the same outcome as God's way.

## **Our law and offence**

Temptation is also mentioned in the parable of the sower. Jesus spoke of ones who become offended and fall away because of temptation. 'Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.'<sup>8</sup> Reactions arise when our mind set on the flesh is confronted by the way of the Spirit. Paul noted in his letter to the Romans that the flesh will seek to justify 'the law written in our heart' and result in us 'excusing' our responses or even 'accusing' others based on our perspective.<sup>9</sup> James also wrote of 'the passions within' us being the source of 'conflicts and quarrels'.<sup>10</sup> So it is that some joyfully receive salvation, only to fall away offended because they succumb to the temptation to live by their other law. Unable to bridge the cultural disparity between their mode and that of their Christian friends, they walk away from the very context in which they had found life.

Of course, God is committed to helping us to resist temptation. Peter wrote that 'the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation' whilst Paul, in the first epistle to the Corinthians, noted that 'God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it'.<sup>11</sup>

## **Sonship**

The first key for us in overcoming temptation is a commitment, before all else, to our sonship. Sonship describes the way someone who has joined Christ in His death, burial and resurrection through baptism, lives. A son of God is focused on living by the power and life of God. In this way, we are enabled to obey the heavenly Father's will and lay down our lives for others.

Jesus, our forerunner on this pathway, was confronted by various temptations but overcame them all by maintaining His commitment to the Father's will.<sup>12</sup> His obedience led Him on a journey that included suffering and bloodshed; however, His faithfulness also released the power of God that overcame sin and death. As

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8 Luk 8:13

9 Rom 2:14-15

10 Jas 4:1

11 2Pe 2:9. 1Co 10:13

12 Heb 6:20.  
Luk 22:42

we join the fellowship of His sufferings, we also know the power of that blood and overcome temptation, cease from sin, and manifest His life.<sup>13</sup> The writer of Hebrews tells us that His blood actually cleanses our conscience.<sup>14</sup> We further note that every temptation on the pathway of suffering that Jesus experienced, became a point of sanctification. In the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed to His Father, ‘For their sakes, I sanctify Myself.’<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Jesus said that our sufferings in this world as a son of God are part of the disciplining hand of God upon us.<sup>16</sup> They process and purify our responses in relation to the temptations and injustices that we experience in life. As such, God does not remove us from every difficult situation. Rather, He strengthens us by His power so that we can endure the trial or hardship, without succumbing to the temptation of setting our mind on the flesh. In this way we grow up in our name and work as children of God.

### Watch and Pray

The most important response we can make to temptation is prayer. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told the disciples that they should ‘keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation’.<sup>17</sup> We also remember that the Lord taught His disciples to pray to the Father, ‘Lead us not into temptation’.<sup>18</sup> When we are being tempted to exercise our own law because of our sufferings, our first response should be to humble ourselves and go to prayer. Temptation and the other law cannot be overcome by human determination. Yes, we are called to be diligent and proactive in relation to ‘watching’<sup>19</sup> and ‘guarding ourselves’ and even ‘resisting’ the devil. Jesus Himself taught the disciples that ‘if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you’.<sup>20</sup> Yet, only God is the source of the grace and strength that will enable us to do these things. And prayer is how we access this capacity.

### Fellowship

Finally, we also recognise that fellowship is a key to overcoming temptation. When we feel ashamed or isolated, we are much easier to deceive. Our adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, and the most vulnerable are those who are cut off from the sheepfold.<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note that Eve was deceived when she was on her own. So it is that God has placed us in families and given us a church context where we can ‘know as we

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13 Php 3:10                      19 2Jn 1:8. 1Jn 5:21.  
 14 Heb 9:14                      Jas 4:7  
 15 Joh 17:19                    20 Mat 18:8  
 16 Joh 17:18, Heb 5:8        21 1Pe 5:8  
 17 Mat 26:41  
 18 Luk 11:4

## *Understanding temptation*

are known'.<sup>22</sup> We can and should speak regularly about our way, and even the most practical issues of temptation, with those who care for our souls, knowing that God Himself will help and encourage us through these interactions. As the apostle John wrote, 'If we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> 1Co 13:12

<sup>23</sup> 1Jn 1:7

## Study Questions - Understanding temptation

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- Why would God allow us to face temptation?

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- Using your personal experience, describe the difference between temptation and sin.

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- How do we activate God's help in relation to overcoming temptation?  
Answer by way of testimony.

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- What does fellowship around issues of temptation look like for you?

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# STAND FIRM IN YOUR FAITH

Stuart Gale

The final phase of the history of the world is referred to in the Scriptures as ‘the fullness of the times’.<sup>1</sup> We are now living in this phase. In churches all over the world there is a great falling away from faith and fellowship as Christians forsake the truth of the gospel. They are listening to and believing other ‘gospels’. These other messages are in opposition to the word of life that calls every person to be a son of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Eph 1:10

## SONS WITH ASSURANCE

In our Western society, the truth of God's word is being challenged from many different directions. Babylon is one of these powers, competing for the hearts and minds of men and women. Motivated by Satan, Babylon was established by men as an *alternative* way to life. It is in opposition to the way that God's purposes for every individual, family and nation are achieved. God's desire is to bring many sons to glory.<sup>2</sup>

A fundamental message of the spirit of Babylon is that a person can only be free when they are in charge of their own life. This message proposes that 'You can do what you want and be whatever you want to be'. There are supposedly no limits to what a person can achieve, nor boundaries to who they can be.

At schools, universities and work places, young people are being fed the proposition that they can be 'the captain of their own ship', and that they can, and should, determine the course of their own life. They are taught that this is true 'freedom'. However, the promise of being truly free is the great lie of Babylon.

We learn from God's word that if we choose our own way, we don't actually become free. We simply become captive to whatever it is we are pursuing. This may include career ambitions, the pursuit of knowledge, wealth and material possessions, prestige and status. The apostle Paul asked, 'Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?'<sup>3</sup> We are either slaves of righteousness leading to life, or we are slaves of sin leading to death. In the end we are the slave of whomever we obey.

It is a great privilege to be a follower of Jesus and to live according to His word to us. To the world, this kind of thinking is complete foolishness, but to those who hear and believe, it will bring life, peace and security. We don't need to be anxious about what job we will have, what courses we will study at school or university, or how we will make enough money to get by. Our priority is simply to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and He will set our paths straight.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, as we believe and obey His word, Christ Himself will keep us from being deceived and falling away in these days when God's word and purpose for us is being so fervently challenged.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Heb 2:10

3 Rom 6:16

4 Mat 6:33

5 Rev 3:10



## *Stand firm in your faith*

In the Father's great love, He sent His Son, so that we might live through Him.<sup>6</sup> Through His obedience, He pioneered the pathway of sonship.<sup>7</sup> Jesus' only priority during His time on earth was to do the will of the Father and to reveal the Father's heart for us.<sup>8</sup> The Father's desire is for us to be His sons.

Jesus demonstrated how to be a son when, in the face of false accusations and hostile pressures, He refused to deviate from doing the Father's will. He held His eyes firmly on the Father's will for Him. This is the example for us. We, too, can hold fast to our faith as we look to God in all circumstances of our lives.

Through our education or training, we diligently apply ourselves to gain head knowledge and work skills. In contrast, the training that the Father brings to us establishes His knowledge in our hearts. The word of God is our textbook for training. Jesus said, 'If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'.<sup>9</sup>

The word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.<sup>10</sup> It is only when we allow the word to define what that path is, that we can be free. In the word is the power to be the son He has called us to be. As we participate at the communion table, we are joined to a fellowship of believers. It is in this context of the body of believers that we can find who the Lord has named us to be.

No matter how much we strive to find peace and rest, we will never find it without knowing God's will for our lives. We will only know true rest when we submit our will to the Father and allow His loving hand to guide our lives. In contrast to the message promoted by Babylon, we will only find our predestined identity as a son of God by receiving and obeying the word of God for our lives.

Throughout your life, you will know trials, temptations and difficulties. As the spirit of Babylon inevitably becomes stronger in the world, the pressure for you to conform to its ways will also become more intense. In the middle of all this, you can know rest and peace. You can be free from anxiety and worry when you place your life into God's hands. With great confidence you can trust Him and, in doing so, you can know the great joy that He has set before you. This is the joy of being a son of God.

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6 1Jn 4:9

7 Heb 2:10

8 Joh 5:30

9 Joh 8:31

10 Psa 119:105

## **Study Questions - Stand firm in your faith**

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- In what ways have you noticed the spirit of Babylon becoming more obvious in your school, university or workplace?

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- What other pressures or expectations from the world do you experience from day to day?

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- What is your testimony of how you are coming to know God's will for your life?

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- How are you able to help your Christian brothers and sisters to maintain their Christian walk in the face of pressures to live in a different way?

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# GLOSSARY

## Keywords

### Ashamed

We can feel ashamed of our actions, with the result that it leads us to repentance. More often, however, when we speak of someone being ashamed, we mean that they are stuck in a state of shame and disappointment. In other words, they feel ashamed because they have a conscience, but their conscience must, in fact, be cleansed so that they may find true repentance.

### Assurance

Our assurance is that what God has said will come to pass. This assurance gives us great encouragement. Heb 6:17-18. We know that the Lord is faithful concerning His promises toward us. Heb 10:23. We have assurance because God is unfailingly faithful.

### Communion

The precious fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which we are joined to as members of the body of Christ. We gather together each week to eat and drink the elements of the New Covenant. We eat and drink the bread and wine of the communion in faith for participation in His offering and His sufferings. The communion is a

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fellowship of giving and receiving in every congregation where we gather together to minister the Spirit and life of God to one another.

### Contradiction, or contrary circumstance

Any situation, relational interaction, or hostile behaviour from others, which is in opposition to, or in competition with, our personal prerogatives or initiatives. As Christians, this is any circumstance which appears to be in opposition to the will of God being outworked in our life. However, we can find resolution to every contradiction as we join the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. And God is able to work all contrary circumstances for our good. This is what it means for us to 'suffer according to the will of God'.

### Cornerstone

In ancient times, a cornerstone was used as both the foundation and standard upon which a building was constructed.

### Father's will

The Father has a unique name and predestination for each son of God. This plan is walked out daily through the various circumstances we encounter. These experiences will include suffering 'for righteousness' sake'. 1Pe 3:14. Suffering according to the Father's will is not futile, but addresses our propensity to sin. We do not seek to deviate from the Father's will when we encounter such trials, remembering that Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, 'Not My will, but Thine, be done.' Luk 22:42.

### Fellowship

The basis of all fellowship is the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This fellowship is based upon the offering of each member of the Godhead to the other two members. It was to this fellowship that the apostles called believers - proclaiming that the fellowship of the Godhead was the context of life for every believer. If we walk in the light of this fellowship, we are able to have fellowship with one another; to love as God loves; and to lay our lives down for our brethren.

### First love

The unique love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which Christians are given by the Holy Spirit. He pours this love into our hearts as the witness that we have 'passed from death to life'. This love enables us to lay our lives down for the brethren.

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<b>Food which endures</b>	‘The food which endures to eternal life.’ Joh 6:27. This is Christ’s own life, shared with us. It is not physical bread; rather, Jesus said, ‘I am the bread of life’, and ‘The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life’. Joh 6:48,63.
<b>Free will</b>	The capacity, dignity and freedom to possess and express our own lives.
<b>Gospel</b>	Derived from a Greek word which simply means ‘good news’. The gospel is described as ‘the power of God to salvation’, because it is the total statement of salvation to every person.
<b>Humanism</b>	Promotes the practice of ‘reason’, or the logical thinking of mankind; scientific enquiry; and human fulfilment in the natural world. It has no regard for the word of God.
<b>Injustice</b>	Something that happens to us, which we think should not have happened; wrongs, hurts or injuries inflicted upon us by others. The sting of injustice hits us because we fail to identify Christ as the true recipient of all suffering.
<b>Obedience</b>	A capacity given to us by God so that we can obey Him. This capacity is not resident in our flesh, but it is an essential quality of the new creation. Christ manifested miraculous obedience as He fulfilled the will of the Father in His flesh. We are able to manifest this same miraculous obedience when we commit ourselves to fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. In so doing, we are strengthened by Eternal Spirit to do the will of God.
<b>Old man</b>	A term used by Paul to describe the mode of fallen humanity, but particularly applied to Christians who live by the responses of a mind set on the flesh. Eph 4:22 NKJV.
<b>Other law</b>	An underlying principle or attitude that compels us to want to go our own way. It is simply our own desires and the things that seem ‘right’ to us. Whenever we experience injustice, the other law is the mechanism that rises up within us, causing us to want to defend ourselves. Described in Romans 7:23 as ‘another law in my members’ that desires to live from my own reference rather than by obeying God. It is best characterised by the statement: ‘I can do what I want to get what I want.’

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<b>Overcoming injustice</b>	We are enabled to endure sufferings by the life of God, which He gives to us. He gives us the capacity to persevere through injustices without retaliating 'in like kind' to those who mistreat us. As sons of God, every contrary circumstance that we encounter is gathered up into 'the will of God' for our lives. In this regard, what was intended to harm us, God purposes for our good.
<b>Participation</b>	Our participation is in the offering of Christ. In church life, this is most evident when we join the fellowship of the communion table. The apostle Paul put it this way: 'The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a [participation] in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a [participation] in the body of Christ? 1Co 10:16.
<b>Pathway of suffering</b>	An expression that describes the walk of every Christian who is taking up their cross daily to follow Christ and join His sufferings. Luk 9:23. Php 3:10. 1Pe 4:13.
<b>Priest</b>	Someone who ministers God's life and fulfils the will of God through offering. A priest is strengthened by the Spirit of God to make offering.
<b>Self-management</b>	The employment of only practical, self-directed strategies to mitigate temptation.
<b>Suffering</b>	There are different types of suffering. All humanity suffers as a result of the fall of man, and this suffering serves no eternal purpose. In fact, God does not like this form of suffering. Christ suffered for all humanity and made provision for us in His sufferings through the cross. In these sufferings, He gathered up all human suffering and granted us the privilege of having fellowship with Him in His sufferings. These sufferings become a discipline for us, and work for us an eternal weight of glory.
<b>Sonship</b>	The unique name, calling, experience of suffering, and works of each son of God. The right to become a son of God is granted to all who believe; however, only those who walk in obedience to their predestination will inherit it. Until Christ returns, we are attaining to our sonship by faith, knowing that its full manifestation is yet to come. Nevertheless, we rejoice each day in the same faith as the apostle John, who said, 'Now we are sons of God!'

## *Glossary*

<b>Spirit of God</b>	The Spirit of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the strength and capacity of Their one life given to us. Also called Eternal Spirit and the Spirit of Yahweh.
<b>'The synagogue of Satan'</b>	This term describes a group of like-minded, disaffected people who become embittered and empowered against the brethren who bring God's word to them. The term describes people who are captive to a religious mindset which is the result of the deception of Satan.
<b>Temptation</b>	The enticement to choose our own way over and against obedience to God. Even Jesus was tempted, so temptation is not sin. Temptation is an attempt by Satan to appeal to the propensity to sin within us.
<b>Zion</b>	The city of the living God. Heb 12:22-24. The destination for every son of God.

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