

Restoring my Soul

A five day devotional guide

AUGUST 2016

Contributing Authors:

Victor Hall

Simon Laidley

Restoring My Soul – No. 106 – August 2016

ISSN: 2201-7542

Published by RFI Publishing

© RFI Publishing Inc. 2016

10 Old Goombungee Road

Toowoomba QLD 4350

Phone: +61 1300 885 048

Email: info@rfipublishing.org

For a full catalogue of our Christian music & publications,
please visit www.christianresources.co

Restoration
PUBLISHING

Contents

WEEK 1

Monday	Suffering and death
Tuesday	When did sin enter the world?
Wednesday	The knowledge of good and evil
Thursday	Enslaved by corruption
Friday	Released from bondage

WEEK 2

Monday	Training a child
Tuesday	The difference between sin and wickedness
Wednesday	Not presuming upon God's mercy
Thursday	Worldly morality
Friday	The illusion of freedom

WEEK 3

Monday	God made life a limited resource
Tuesday	Like one of Us
Wednesday	Reconciliation and salvation
Thursday	Saved by baptism
Friday	Conformed to His death

WEEK 4

Monday	The ministry of reconciliation
Tuesday	Not serving by the flesh
Wednesday	Becoming a love slave
Thursday	Gentleness and weakness
Friday	Serving by the newness of the Spirit

Suffering and death

In his letter to the Romans, Paul said that ‘through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned’. Suffering and death came upon all creation because Adam and Eve were disobedient and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We understand that, because of this, we are all subject to the curse of sin and its penalty, which is death. We know that suffering is part of the curse of death. Nature shows us that our pain is a ‘reaction in protest’ to an activity that is damaging us. It’s telling us that, if we don’t intervene, then, eventually, that activity will bring about death. We can also see that suffering is the judgement that occurs when the law that governs a particular situation is violated. For example, when the law that says I should not hit my finger with a hammer is violated, then the resulting judgement is suffering.

Further to this, as a result of the fall, there are a multitude of laws that are in conflict with each other. There are as many ‘other laws’ now in the world as there are creatures. By way of a simple example of how these laws conflict, consider this: what is good according to the law of the lion is not very good according to the law of the zebra. Once the Fall brought about disharmony, some creatures, which were previously sustained by what grew out of the ground, now needed to hunt their fellow creatures in order to obtain sustenance. Using the example of the law of animals is an easy way to understand how the conflict of these laws brings about suffering and death. This same conflict occurs amongst mankind, who live under the illusion that they are free, because of their capacity to temporarily survive in a fallen world.

References:

Rom 6:21

1Co 15:21

Jas 1:15

Mic 2:1

Gen 3:17-19

Further Study:

Romans 5

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 1

When did sin enter the world?

Why did Adam's disobedience have the effect that it did? We recall that God declared His judgement upon the serpent, man and woman, and creation itself, as a result of the Fall. It could appear that God's judgement at this point, was the primary reason for sin's impact on creation. However, the consequences of sin actually began from the moment when both Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The curse of futility which God invoked upon creation when He sent mankind out of Eden, was an action of His mercy, not His vengeance. It was not the primary reason for the death of Adam and Eve. God had already declared to Adam what would happen if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - they would surely die. He did not say this as a warning of the terrible punishment that He would enact upon them if they didn't do what He wanted. It was a statement of complete reality. From the moment that they both ate of that tree, they were immediately separated from His covenant life. They could no longer remain in the fellowship of the Spirit where their mortality was sustained by God's life. As a result, they died.

When we understand this, we see that God's statement that they would surely die, had nothing to do with a vengeful punishment. Not only this, but the cursing of the ground, and the exclusion of mankind from the garden of Eden, were completely consistent with God's intention toward mankind. His mercy, right from that point, was to establish what was needed to commute the suffering and death that came as a result of sin, to a chastening that would ultimately bring salvation from sin through Jesus Christ.

References:

Rom 3:24-25 2Ti 3:12
Psa 71:19 Joh 15:19
1Co 12:18 1Co 11:32

Further Study: Genesis 3

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 2

The knowledge of good and evil

Even before Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it was the decision to give consideration to *another principle* that gave credibility to the temptation offered to them. Eve received the word of Satan, looked at the tree, and saw that it was good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and desirable to make her wise. This was a deception. Satan presented them with an alternate principle that was different from what they had previously known in their fellowship with Yahweh. The alternate principle was to make decisions according to what they saw was good, rather than according to what God had said.

The *knowledge* that came as a result of acting on this temptation, ratified this other principle as a law within their flesh. Adam and Eve became aware that if they did not strive to attain what was 'good' for them, then the outcome would be 'evil' for them. This was the knowledge of good and evil. However, it wasn't *just* knowledge; they became *slaves* to that knowledge. It was an irrevocable law in their flesh that brought about corruption. It was no longer an *alternate* principle for them, but became the *only* law by which they could now live. They became enslaved to the relentless pursuit of what is good and not evil, as they saw it, in the vain attempt to preserve their own lives.

Once Adam and Eve's eyes were opened, they knew that God would see them exactly as they were. They became immediately aware of their nakedness and the shame of their disobedience. They could no longer bear to be in the presence of Yahweh because of shame. While they *gained* the knowledge of good and evil, they *lost* the capacity to know Yahweh, and to remain in fellowship with Him, which was the very thing that was sustaining their spiritual lives.

References:

Joh 10:1
Mat 7:13-14
Pro 4:26-27

Jer 6:16
Psa 14:2-3

Further Study:

Daily Proverb:

Romans 7

Proverbs 3

Enslaved by corruption

As the father and mother of all mankind, Adam and Eve were to bring up their descendants in the ways of the Lord. Additionally, God's work for Adam was to name and have dominion over all the animals of the earth. It was by this means that every creature was connected to the life of Yahweh, through Adam, in the same order of headship that provided grace for Eve, until the point when Adam committed his offence. All things lived in perfect harmony under this order of headship. The animals did not kill one another to survive. However, as soon as Adam disobeyed God, this order was thrown into disarray. Now, every creature began living by its own law – 'what is good for me' – and the outcome was suffering and death.

God created mankind in a sinless state; nevertheless, we were made of corruptible flesh. Adam and Eve were made innocent of the law of the knowledge of good and evil, and were sustained in their mortality by the life of God. They could eat of any tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This was a protection for them, because the knowledge of good and evil would cause their flesh to be enslaved by sin; that is, enslaved by corruption. Adam and Eve disobeyed God as a result of their choice to live by what they perceived to be 'good', rather than by God's word. Every descendant of Adam and Eve now inherits this knowledge of good and evil in their flesh, even though we did not all sin in the same way that Adam did. The intention of God for mankind was that they were to dwell in the fellowship of Yahweh, as sons of God. The immediate impact of the Fall meant that Adam and Eve were unable to remain in His fellowship.

References:

Gen 1:30 Rom 5:14
Gen 2:16-17 Hos 4:3
1Ti 4:4

Further Study:

Romans 8

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 4

Released from bondage

Every child born since the Fall, regardless of their heritage, and though innocent of the sin of Adam, has inherited the 'other law' in their members. The operation of this law prevents all mankind from fulfilling the righteousness of the will of God and becoming who they have been named to be by the Father. This is because, when conflict comes between what is 'righteous' and what is 'good for me', the other law prevails. Corruption occurs and, eventually, even the law of the mind is overcome. We do the thing that we don't want to do.

If an individual is enslaved by that mode of living, then they are enslaved by sin. This is the case for any person who is outside of the New Covenant, right from their birth. In contrast, children born to believing parents under the New Covenant, receive the gift of righteousness in the womb. It is important to comprehend that this righteousness is a gift and is imputed because that person is 'in Christ', just as it is for the new believer who comes to Christ. It is a 'gift' because it is not earned by works. It is an 'imputed' righteousness because the person is 'in Christ'; not because, at that point, they no longer have any sin.

When this gift is received by a child born under the New Covenant, they are enabled to grow up in the word of their name, because they are made free from the enslavement of sin, and connected to that word through their believing parents. All believers, whether born into a covenant household or saved from the world, have been released from their captivity to the law of sin. Of course, if a believer reverts to walking by the flesh, then they return to the bondage of sin.

References:

Rom 7:15-16 Col 2:18-19
Gal 4:10 Psa 22:9-10
Joh 8:34

Further Study:

Romans 6

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 5

Training a child

A child who has been born into a 'new covenant house', will still have 'another law' and the 'law of sin' at work in their flesh. Every human shares this in common. Inevitably, this means that, as both Paul and the apostle John tell us clearly, all of us *have* sin. Children born into a covenant household are fallible, corruptible, and prone to live by the flesh, rather than by the Spirit. What is true for children born under the New Covenant (and for all of us who have come into Christ) is that we are no longer *slaves to sin*. We have received the gift of righteousness because an incorruptible seed of new life has been planted within our heart. Children born into covenant households inherit this freedom within their mother's womb.

If Christian parents are walking together by the Spirit in their marriage, it will mean that their prayers will not be hindered and they will be able to train and nurture their children in the Spirit. The goal of all Christian parents is to nurture the incorruptible seed of God's life within their children, so that it grows and bears fruit through all the various stages of life. We know that parents have been given the mandate by the Lord, to train up their children in the way that they should go. This means that they will be training their children to live by the Spirit, not by the flesh. When godly parents train their children in this way, their children will not depart from it. As children are obedient to their parents, they learn to be subject to their heavenly Father and grow up in their sonship. They grow by hearing and obeying the word of their name, and most importantly, they grow by learning to walk by the Spirit.

References:

Rom 3:23

1Jn 1:8

Pro 22:6

1Pe 3:7

Gal 6:8

Further Study:

Daily Proverb:

2 Timothy 1

Proverbs 8

The difference between sin and wickedness

There is a difference between 'sin' and 'wickedness'. We could think of 'wickedness' as the promotion or pursuit of evil. Thus, we can understand that amongst the unsaved, there are 'good' people and 'evil' people. Regardless of whether a person is 'good' or 'evil', if they remain unsaved, their sin will exclude them from life with God. As corruption increases, wickedness also increases. This is true in the world today, with a degree of sophistication that has never occurred before, where there are powerful agendas promoting evil as 'good', and actively seeking to increase sinful behaviour within society. Wickedness is more than just missing the mark. In the same way that the Lord saw the wickedness of man in Noah's time, and determined to destroy every living thing by water, the Lord will also judge the world we live in because of its wickedness - this time by fire.

God's judgement of wickedness is in stark contrast to how He responded when Adam and Eve fell. Although the consequence of death was invoked, God established offering as a means for Adam and his family to recover fellowship with Him. In this way, we could say that both Cain and Abel were born as 'covenant children', as it was applicable for that time. That is, Adam and Eve had recovered as a family, through offering. Why would God say to Cain that he should 'rule over his sin' if Cain could not be enabled to do so? We know that Cain did not do this and, consequently, killed his brother. Understanding the difference between sin and wickedness is not only relevant to God's judgement on the world. We know that, in the New Testament, there are examples where God brought judgement on His people for their wickedness. We will also be aware of circumstances in our own lifetime where this has occurred.

References:

Isa 5:20 Gen 4:4-5, 7
Rev 19:20 2Th 2:11-12
Isa 34:4

Further Study:

Acts 5:1-11

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 9

Not presuming upon God's mercy

We know that God promised Noah that He would never destroy the earth again by flood. However, we also know that this present heavens and earth will be judged by fire at the end of the age. The apostle Peter declared that 'the Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance'. In the Lord's mercy, He has made provision for us to deal with our sin in this lifetime. He doesn't immediately judge the wickedness of the world, because He is allowing time for repentance. He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The positive implication of this is that the mercy of God is great toward us. However, if we are carnal, we may presume on the mercy of God. It is important to comprehend that the absence of God's judgement, does not equate to the imputation of righteousness.

When the Lord brings judgement among His people because of wickedness, the fact that many of us may escape *specific* judgement in the matter, does not, therefore, mean that the Lord is not also addressing us about the same issue. However, if we are carnal, we may quickly take the position where we are happy to join in the condemnation of others, but not willing to note our own accountability in the matter. If we become aware of the Lord's judgement, and are illuminated to our own accountability in that matter, we will take the attitude that we are only spared from judgement by the grace of God. We will thankfully receive the training of the commuted chastening of the Lord, as He brings this to us according to His will, which will bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

References:

Gen 9:15
2Pe 3:7, 9
1Ti 2:4

Rom 2:4
Heb 12:11

Further Study:

Psalms 50

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 10

Worldly morality

The prevailing morality of the seventh world kingdom could be stated as, 'As long as I don't do anything that hurts anyone else, then I should be free to do what I want'. This ideal of supposed individual freedom is beginning to govern the world and the laws it makes, and makes the claim that all moral judgement should be left to each individual, because this is the ultimate freedom. The pursuit of this philosophy is the world's final, sophisticated attempt to make the principle of living by 'the law in my members' a viable alternative to the life of God. The lie that the world espouses is that this, therefore, means there is no external moral code or law, other than to not cause suffering for another, and that this will be the pathway to the resolution of conflict.

It is obvious that there will be an inevitable conflict between one person's exercise of freedom, preventing another person from being free to do what they want. If that person is now living completely by their 'own law of freedom', then having that law broken will be regarded by that person as 'suffering', as determined by the law to which they are bound. The only way for society to resolve this is to enforce a moral judgement, so that the promoted philosophy of 'individual freedom' is actually overruled by what is determined to be good or evil by the prevailing rule of the time. And so, a moral judgement is made as to whose freedom is more important. We know that the increasingly wicked world in which we live, is now making more and more of those moral judgements in favour of evil, rather than good. That is, it is judging that which is good, to be 'evil', and that which is evil, to be 'good'. The whole world does not comprehend that it is under the sway of the wicked one.

References:

Col 2:8

Rom 7:23

Rom 13:13-14

Gal 5:1, 13

2Pe 2:18-19

Further Study:

1 Peter 4

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 11

The illusion of freedom

The illusion of freedom according to the flesh, will ultimately fail at both a societal and an individual level. The illusion does not gain its credibility from reason; it holds exactly the same power as the temptation from the beginning. Individuals perceive that this will be 'good for me, and good for mankind'. Daniel described the weakness of the seventh world kingdom that is governed according to this principle, and its ultimate failure. Despite this, it is the same lie that was proposed to Adam and Eve, worked to the most sophisticated level in history, that is causing this ideal to be established as the governing world principle. It is Satan's final effort to establish an alternative to God's life.

If we are living a religious life by the flesh, then, although we may appear to live by a moral code other than our own, we are still functioning in this same mode, under our version of the law of good and evil. A carnal Christian, operating by the flesh, will usually look very different from the person in the world who pursues the freedom of whatever they want to do. However, both actually function in the same mode. In spite of espousing the thought that they are submitted to the higher moral code of God, the fleshly, religious person actually determines what they believe God requires, based on their own judgements of good and evil.

The world has many religions, and there are many different 'religions' now under the name of Christianity, some of which hold beliefs that are completely opposite to the word of God. If we return to living by the flesh, the greatest deception is that we will believe that we are living according to the word of God, because that is the mode of life that we have judged as 'good' according to our own perspective.

References:

Dan 2:41-43 Luk 11:39-40
1Pe 2:16 Mat 6:23
Mat 23:26-27

Further Study:

2 Peter 2

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 12

God made life a limited resource

Before the Fall, every creature lived within the parameters of the perfect laws of God, where they were effectively sustained under the authority of Adam. While every living creature was continually sustained, there was no competition. Following the Fall, every creature exercised its right to be fruitful and multiply as it had done prior to the Fall, but to do so, it needed to compete for the limited resource of life. Every creature was now under time and chance, fighting for their survival. Because all would eventually die, this became an exercise in futility.

The apostle Paul declared that God subjected creation to futility *in hope*. He subjected creation to futility, and made life a limited resource for our sakes, because of His mercy. The Hebrew word translated into the phrase 'for your sake', in the passage where God said, 'Cursed is the ground for your sake', does not just mean 'because of you'. It could, equally, be translated as 'cursed is the ground for you'.

Because the knowledge of good and evil brought about corruption in our flesh before we were birthed of an incorruptible seed, it was the mercy of God to subject creation to this futility. The law of Moses was a tutor to teach mankind to come to Christ, so that they would be justified by faith, rather than by law. So, too, the subjection of creation to futility was the mercy of the Lord, so that mankind would come back to seek fellowship with Him, rather than continuing in the deception of trying to live by an alternate principle. It is evident that Abel learnt this lesson, but Cain did not. Cain's offering was unacceptable because it represented his own striving according to the flesh. Abel's offering was accepted because it demonstrated his understanding that redemption of the flesh was required to join the fellowship of Yahweh.

References:

Gen 3:17

Ecc 9:11

Rom 8:20

Gen 4:4-5

Gal 3:24

Further Study:

Galatians 3

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 15

Like one of Us

When Yahweh sent Adam and Eve out of Eden, They said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil'. To prevent man taking from the tree of life, which would enable him to sustain his biological life, Yahweh sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground. In this way, the Lord clearly indicated His intention to restrict life as a resource. It was the mercy of the Lord to prevent mankind from being continually preserved in a sinful state. Jesus described 'hell' as the condition where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched'. That would have been the state for mankind on earth, had they been able to preserve biological life indefinitely, with no capacity to die with Christ and be set free from the law of sin and death.

When the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit said, 'Behold, the man has become like *one of Us*', it also gives us remarkable insight into the knowledge of good and evil, and its place in the fellowship of Yahweh. It is evident that each Person in the Godhead, individually, has the knowledge of good and evil. It is amazing to understand that the knowledge of good and evil alone is not the thing that separates us from the fellowship of God. Rather, it is the fact that we have attained it while corruptible, and so, have been corrupted.

We are not delivered from the knowledge of good and evil when we come into Christ. Rather, we are delivered from our bondage to sin. This is a very different thing. We are now enabled, with full freedom and sight, to live by offering and to lay our lives down for one another, which we were not able to do while enslaved by sin. This is the way the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live together in a fellowship of giving, offering, and worship.

References:

Gen 3:22-23 Rom 7:14
Mar 9:48 Rom 8:2
Isa 66:24

Further Study:

Galatians 2

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 16

Reconciliation and salvation

We recall that God pronounced judgement on all flesh because of the wickedness of man in the days of Noah. However, Noah's experience also reveals the reconciliation that we receive through Jesus Christ. In the one action of the flood, God passed judgement on every living thing and demonstrated His mercy by delivering Noah and his family. He also reaffirmed that, through Noah, the Everlasting Covenant would continue.

The writer to the Hebrews declared, 'By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith'. Noah received the gift of reconciliation, not because he was perfect, but because he 'walked with God'. Like us, he had sinned and fallen short of God's glory. It was because Noah presented himself to have fellowship with God that he received the gift of righteousness. We believe that Noah did this, practically, by making offering at the gate of Eden. This is where Noah heard both the message of reconciliation and the message of the impending judgement coming upon the earth.

It was because of his faith and godly fear that Noah was obedient, and so salvation came to him and his household. He became an heir of righteousness according to faith. Noah did have to do the works of righteousness given to him (i.e. building the ark), but his righteousness came as a gift. The gift included the works given to him, and the capacity to do them. Practically, by obediently doing the works prepared for him, he and his family were physically saved. Yet, he did not earn his salvation as a result of his works. Noah's righteousness came as a gift, and his works and the capacity to do them, along with the sovereign intervention of God to complete the works, were all part of that gift.

References:

Gen 9:16-17 Gen 6:9
Heb 11:7 Rom 4:13
2Ti 1:9 Php 3:9

Further Study:

Titus 3

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 17

Saved by baptism

The message of reconciliation is not just that we can be saved. It is the message that, because we are reconciled to God, we can be saved by Christ's life as we are conformed to His death through baptism. If we believe the message of reconciliation, then we accept that we must suffer and die with Christ, for this is the very thing that will deliver us from the law of sin and death. For this reason, the apostle Peter declared that 'baptism now saves us'. Baptism is not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God. When a believer is physically baptised, they are testifying of their obedience to the word of the gospel that calls us all to repent and be baptised. However, more than this, they are testifying of their personal faith to join the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As the Spirit leads, each believer will make this response at the point in their pilgrimage where this is appropriate. For a child growing up in a covenant household, this may be as young as six or seven years old. For a new adult believer, it may be very soon after they first hear and respond to the gospel. The Ethiopian is a good example of this when he received the word from Philip and immediately exclaimed, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptised?'

It is important to recognise that baptism is not a 'one-off event'. The apostle Paul declared that the goal of the Christian life is to know the power of Christ's resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings throughout our entire life. It is our goal to be continually conformed to Christ's death so that we can know His resurrection life, which is 'life out of death', in every season of our life.

References:

1Pe 3:21

Rom 5:10-11

Act 8:36

Php 3:10-11

Rom 6:17

Further Study:

 2 Corinthians 5

Daily Proverb:

 Proverbs 18

Conformed to His death

It is not just the physical loss of our life that means we are conformed to Christ's death. It is only *His death* that can save us, not ours. If it were not so, then all who die physically would be free from the judgement of law. The point is not that our death occurs, but that we are conformed to 'His death', which is an offering of love in complete obedience to the perfect will of God. It was only Christ's death of pure offering that could bring the multiplication of God's life to mankind. He died in the flesh, but He was not motivated or empowered by the flesh.

In one sense, every human being's death 'fulfils God's law', in that God's law requires that sin cannot dwell in God's presence, and so must die. However, no other human death, except Christ's, could save the one dying, nor anyone else, in a spiritual sense. This is so, even if a person gives their life, physically, to save the physical life of another person. Though a person's spirit remains in existence, every person who dies in sin, not having been conformed to Christ's death, is still in a sinful state, and cannot dwell in the presence of God.

Christ's death was unique in that it both fulfilled the law, and occurred within the fellowship of Yahweh, bringing human flesh into that context of Everlasting Life. Often, Christians believe, in the wrong way, that Christ's death was needed to appease God's wrath. This misses the point that Christ died, condemning all sin in the flesh to death, not so that He could fulfil God's righteous requirement. Rather, He did so, pouring out His Spirit to us so that the righteous requirement of the law is now fulfilled in us as we walk according to the Spirit.

References:

Rom 8:3-4 Joh 6:40
Rom 5:10 Gal 5:16
Heb 10:4

Further Study: 2 Corinthians 4

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 19

The ministry of reconciliation

The ministry of reconciliation that we have received, is vastly different from a gospel that offers salvation by adherence to some religious law, or by giving credence to a set of beliefs. Unfortunately, the true gospel has often not been the one preached. It is imperative for all Christian leaders and believers to consider these questions: Are we ministers of reconciliation, or are we ministers of some other gospel? Are we ministering the Spirit or the law?

We need to be comfortable with the truth that it is impossible to please God in our flesh. We should also realise that our flesh is capable of the worst trading practices. If we walk according to the flesh, we can easily use the gospel to trade for our own version of 'good', and even impose this 'good' on others. We need to be converted from a culture that tries to make a good showing in the flesh. Instead, we must become completely free to confess, as Paul did, that we are 'chief among sinners' according to the flesh. We can say this with no condemnation if we understand what it is to live by the Spirit.

If we live and walk by the Spirit, then the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead also brings life to our mortal bodies. Just as Noah did, we receive the gift of salvation, which includes our works and the capability to do them by the Spirit. This means that the righteous requirement of the law, which is the law of love, is fulfilled in us, here, in our mortal bodies. This is true because, even though our bodies are dead as a consequence of sin, we are made alive by the Spirit. Our conformity to Christ's death will be evident, because we continue to do this through a pathway of sufferings.

References:

2Co 5:18-20

Mat 5:24

Rom 8:6-8, 11

Gal 6:12

Further Study: Colossians 1**Daily Proverb:** Proverbs 22

Not serving by the flesh

We know that a fallen man attempts to obtain freedom through independence and rebellion against God. This is a result of blindness to the reality that fallen flesh is already enslaved to sin. However, we need to remember that we, who have been freed from the bondage of sin, can return again to its bondage, by seeking a gospel that wants to be saved by His life without being conformed to His death. The profile of such a person is not necessarily someone who is not willing to 'serve'. In fact, it can be the complete opposite.

When we hear the message of the gospel, we may acknowledge that living by independence and rebellion is not 'good for us'. Therefore, we may try to be a better person by living according to the law that is our interpretation of the gospel. This is to live by religious obligation, with the motivation still being to pursue what is 'good for me'. The antidote to independence and rebellion is to not adopt religious servitude as the alternative. That would merely be redefining what law we will try to live by. If we seek to minister to others in this way, we will only encourage them to conform to our particular version of 'good', and not minister the Spirit in any way.

When the message of reconciliation comes, calling us to be conformed to Christ's death, and to become a slave of righteousness, we must hear it properly. A slave of righteousness can equally be described as a person who has complete liberty. Religion, corrupted by law, has no difficulty in enslaving people, but becoming a slave in this way does not equate to being a bondsman of the Lord. We need to have the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, so that this becomes our sole motivation for Christian service as we lay down our lives for one another.

References:

Rom 6:20 2Pe 1:10-11
Rom 10:5 Rom 5:5
2Pe 3:17

Further Study: Philippians 3

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 23

Becoming a love slave

When we operate by religiously motivated law, we may determine that the most important thing is to be willing to be a slave. That is not actually the issue. We are already slaves, either of sin or righteousness. We need to be slaves of righteousness because we are constrained by love. This is what true liberty is. As we continue in that liberty, not using it as an occasion to the flesh, we continue to freely say, 'Not my will, but Yours, Lord'.

The defining issue is not whether we simply 'do the will of another', but whether it is the will of the Lord, motivated by His Spirit. For each of us, the key is our motivation. Are we motivated by the flesh or by the Spirit? When we live by the Spirit, we are free to lay our lives down because of the constraint of love, not because we are bound by our 'other law'. In this regard, we are reminded of the significance of a Hebrew 'love-slave'. Having served their tenure, a Hebrew slave was no longer bound by law to be a slave. They needed to make a decision whether to stay or leave, and they were 'completely free' to make that choice. The love-slave chose to stay and serve his master because *he loved his master*.

If we genuinely receive the message of reconciliation, then the love of the Lord will be poured into our hearts. If we set our minds on this, then serving the Lord will follow, and we will be saved by Christ's life. When our mind is set on the flesh, then our activity may look very similar, but it will bring no fruit of righteousness. We are truly free when we are released from the bondage of our other law and motivated solely by the love of God to be His bondsman and lay down our life for one another.

References:

Rom 6:16 Exo 21:5-6
Gal 5:13 Isa 26:13
Luk 22:42 Joh 13:37-38

Further Study:

John 10

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 24

Gentleness and weakness

The apostle Paul, even when bringing correction to those for whom he cared, said that he came by 'the meekness and gentleness of Christ'. He also described the gospel as being 'the foolishness and weakness of God'. This is completely consistent with the Everlasting Covenant. The weakness of God is demonstrated by the fact that God never overpowers us or forces us to accept His life, even though it would be 'good for us'. We observe the love of God to mankind right 'from the beginning'. Yahweh made us in His image and gave us the gift of free will. He created man with the capacity to choose, and presented man with the word of His life, but He did not force man to accept it.

When we are living by the Spirit, our ministry and offering to those around us will be in this same mode. We will come 'in gentleness and weakness', not by the strength of our flesh. While the word of the Lord comes with power, it does not come to overpower. Ministering the Spirit has nothing to do with our personality type or individual expression, which vary according to each one's unique identity. We should not try to adopt some approved common demeanour in the way that we function. When we function according to the Spirit, we will be overflowing with the love of God. We are called to love as Christ loved and serve as Christ served. Christ compels us to take His yoke upon us and learn from Him because He is gentle and lowly in heart. The fruit of someone who does this, will be the fruit of the Spirit, shown forth in the midst of suffering. Our willingness to love in the midst of injustice and all forms of suffering, grows as we live according to the Spirit.

References:

2Co 10:1 1Pe 2:18-19
Mat 11:29 Luk 6:35-36
1Co 1:21

Further Study:

Galatians 5

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 25

Serving by the newness of the Spirit

For many of us, the issue the Lord is addressing is not whether or not we want to serve Him. Rather, the issue before us is whether we are serving Him in the newness of the Spirit or trying to serve Him according to the flesh. The apostle Paul was clear that ‘the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those *who are in the flesh cannot please God*’.

When we try to live as a Christian by the flesh, even though our fleshly motivations may be ‘good’, our mode and practices will always be controlling, and will attempt to overpower our fellow servants, both ‘for their good’ and ‘for our good’. We will define ‘love’ according to our assessment of what is ‘good’. We can be convinced that our motivations are ‘for another’s good’ and, therefore, are an expression of God’s love. Yet, we need to be illuminated to the reality that God does not love that way, and has never done so. The commandment from Christ to us is not merely that ‘we love one another’ but, rather, that we love one another *as He loves us*.

If we have set our mind on the things of the flesh, then we have returned to the weak and beggarly elements. The motivations of the flesh to ‘trade’ for a good outcome becomes the way by which we live, rather than by offering through the Spirit. In contrast, when we function according to the Spirit, we will understand what it means to daily put to death the flesh, so that we do not function that way. Once we have been released from our own law by dying with Christ, we are free to serve in the newness of the Spirit. We are able to learn what it means to be a minister of the New Covenant.

References:

Rom 7:6 2Co 3:5-6
Rom 8:6-8 Heb 10:24
Gal 4:9-10 1Ti 1:5

Further Study:

John 13

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 26