

The patience of the saints

We are living in the season that the Scripture calls ‘the fullness of times’. In these days, the spirit of antichrist is rising up to rule over many 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 the spirit of antichrist is to replace faith in God with humanism.

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’. They display the capacity to endure through opposition and to continue to believe. In this way, the church in Philadelphia was commended for keeping the word of His perseverance in the face of great opposition from the synagogue of Satan. Christ encouraged them to remember their faith, love and hope in order to enter His rest and overcome opposition, even through suffering. They needed to keep God’s word and not capitulate to the attitude of lawlessness which opposes the predestination of every son of God.

How do we demonstrate 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. 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 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.

References:

Eph 1:1

Rev 14:9-13 NKJV

Rev 13:10 NKJV

Rev 2:2-5

Act 14:22

Jas 1:12

Further Study: Revelation 3

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 28

Faith to persevere

We learn the patience of the saints when we reject lawlessness, and commit to persevere in faith, hope and love. 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, with patience, we endure hostility, temptation and suffering, we will possess, or save, our souls.

We express faith when we align ourselves to God's will and purpose for our lives. Faith makes us accountable, responsive and active. 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. 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. 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 to take root as bitterness within us.

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.

References:

Luk 21:19 NKJV
 Rom 15:4-7
 Joh 1:12
 Luk 8:15
 1Jn 3:1-4
 Jud 1:21

Further Study: 2 Thessalonians 1

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 29

Persevering in faith, love and hope

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, toward the prize of the upward call in Jesus Christ.

We are now able to abide, or live, in faith, love and hope. 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.

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. 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, love and hope will give us the 'rest' of our sonship. In patience we will possess our souls.

Our work now is a labour of love to put off unbelief and enter into rest. 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.

References:

Php 3:14 Luk 21:19 NKJV
1Th 1:3 NKJV Luk 8:15
Mat 24:13 Heb 3:14

Further Study: Hebrews 4**Daily Proverb:** Proverbs 30

Not ashamed of the gospel

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul declared, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes'. 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*'. 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'. 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'. 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.

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'. 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. 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.

References:

Rom 1:16
Pro 25:25
Mat 11:4-6

Eph 2:20
Isa 28:16
Act 4:11-12

Further Study:

1 Peter 2

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 31

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'. 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.

The psalmist wrote that this same precious Cornerstone is 'the chief Cornerstone', rejected by 'the builders'. Jesus declared in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke that the psalmist's words had found their fulfilment in Him. 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.

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! And whoever believes on Him will not be ashamed! 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.

References:

Isa 28:16 Psa 118:22
 IPe 2:6 Mat 11:6
 Isa 30:15 Isa 53:3

Further Study:

Romans 9

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 1

A rock of offence

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 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'. 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. To him, the gospel of Christ was *life-changing*.

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'.

References:

Rom 1:16 1Pe 2:8
Rom 9:33 Luk 2:34
Psa 25:2-3 2Co 2:15-16

Further Study: 1 Corinthians 1

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 4

The cross of Christ

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. This is the way that seems right to them.

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. 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 shame brings. Because they have no capacity to fulfil the will of God, their unbelief causes them to be ashamed of the cross of Christ.

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!'

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'.

References:

1Co 1:17-18

1Pe 2:6-8

Pro 14:12

Mat 27:54

Psa 118:22

Further Study:

 1 Corinthians 2

Daily Proverb:

 Proverbs 5

The problem of offence

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. 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. This is God's will for us.

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'. James was helping us to avoid particular responses to one another that 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 become 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*. It motivates the deeds of our flesh, including such actions as outbursts of anger, disputes, divisions, betrayal, and brings us into slavery to sin.

References:

Luk 8: 11,15-16

Jas 1:18-20

Rom 7:23

Eph 4:31

2Ti 2:24-26

Col 3:13

Further Study:

Galatians 5

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 6

No root of bitterness

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.

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*.

In place of the seed of God's life, something else takes root in the heart of 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. 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 grumbings 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. We can, of course, encourage our friends to seek restoration with their brethren at church. 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.

References:

Mat 13:21

Luk 8:18

Ijn 1:6-7

Heb 12:15

ITh 4:11

Gal 6:1

Further Study: Deuteronomy 29

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 7

Dealing with offence

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*’. 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. 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. As we do this, we are joining ourselves to Jesus’ prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. 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.

References:

Heb 12:15 Luk 22:41-44
Jas 4:6 Mat 24:12
Heb 4:16 1Pe 2:20

Further Study:

Matthew 5:1-16

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 8

Raised with Him

When we are baptised, we are planted in the likeness of Christ's death. However, we are also raised with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. We are raised by the glorious working of the Father to walk in a new way. This knowledge transforms how we live and how we relate. We can live in a way that gives glory to the Father. We are always in His hand, and He is always working to form and to conform us into the image of His Son. Having been raised to walk in newness of life, we are walking according to the Spirit and not according to the pattern of this world. We can set our mind on the things from above and possess a wisdom that is free from jealousy, selfish ambition and evil.

From the garden to the cross, Jesus established a blood-sprinkled way that could take us all the way from being 'dead in sin' to being 'made alive to God with Christ'. He was pouring out the blood of the New Covenant and establishing a new and living way through His blood. With every drop of His blood, He was being brought back from the dead as the great Shepherd of the sheep, and was bringing us back with Him!

As a Son, Jesus learned obedience from the things that He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for those who obey Him. We also learn obedience when Christ hands us the cup that is filled with His blood and says, 'Drink it. This is the New Covenant in My blood.' The point of our obedience is clear. Christ has invited us to join Him in the fellowship of His sufferings, where His blood is powerful and effective. In this fellowship we find redemption and receive life.

References:

Rom 6:4-5

Rom 8:29

Jas 3:15-18

Mat 26:26-29

Heb 13:20-21

Heb 5:7-9

Further Study: Colossians 3

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 11

The faith of communion

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.' In this context, the apostle Paul said that we will only be glorified with Christ if we have suffered with Him. As Christians, suffering with Christ becomes our way of life. As we eat and drink at communion each week, we are receiving life from Christ. If we are to be raised at the first resurrection when Jesus returns, we have to possess His life when we die. The only life that will be raised in that day will be the life of Jesus Christ. If the life of Christ is not in us, there will be nothing to be raised.

Baptism into Christ's death and the new way of living that it provides, is a treasure that we hold dearly in the frailty of our human flesh. It demonstrates that the power we live by must be from God, because it most certainly cannot be from ourselves; such is its surpassing greatness. It is no longer us 'doing our best'. Rather, Christ is living in us with resurrection power! We are living by Christ's faith. This faith comes to us every time we hear the word of God spoken. As we fellowship at communion each week, we will know a carrying about in our body of the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus can be fully revealed in us. The life revealed is one that has conquered death and now demonstrates its power as we participate in the fellowship of His sufferings. We live assured, as part of the new creation in Christ, knowing for certain that the Father will raise us up with Jesus in the resurrection.

References:

Joh 6:53 Eph 1:18-19
Rom 4:25 Gal 2:20
1Co 15:58 Rom 10:17

Further Study: 2Corinthians 4

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 12

Not wearied by the sufferings of Christ

When we walk in newness of life, we are not led into temptation, and nor are we wearied by the sufferings of Christ. 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. We will be tempted to disobey when Christ speaks to us. If we do so, we will be refusing the cup that Christ is offering to us. Obedience to Christ connects us to the fellowship of His sufferings, where His blood was poured out for us. If we disobey, instead of receiving the life of new creation, we 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. When we obey Christ's command to watch and pray with Him, we will be strengthened, comforted and enabled by this same power. We will also know the power of resurrection life that gives us 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'.

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 we have one, we have the other! When we suffer with Christ, we 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.

References:

Mat 26:36-46 Heb 9:14
Luk 22:42-44 2Co 4:10-13
Rom 8:11 Heb 12:3

Further Study: Philippians 3**Daily Proverb:** Proverbs 13

Suffering according to the will of God

When we are raised to walk in newness of life and we participate in the sufferings of Christ, the Lord is able to do a miraculous work in us and in the lives of others. We receive strength to endure in the trial so that the Spirit and power of God can be given to another. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God, so any suffering we experience is now reckoned to be according to the will of God. It is no longer simply the natural consequence of our sinful behaviour. Knowing that our suffering is according to the will of God, we can accept that all things are from His hand. In every circumstance, we continue to learn obedience so that we can be made perfect, like Christ. As such, we resist the urge to defend ourselves, to define ourselves, to excuse ourselves and to accuse ourselves. We reckon ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God.

At times, we will face fearful situations and we will look to the Lord for direction and help. When He says, 'Fear not, I am with you', then our obedience is to walk without fear, knowing that He is with us, even though there is the threat that something might cause us pain. We can trust, knowing that, as we obey Christ's command and are delivered from fear and anxiety, we will demonstrate the surpassing greatness of His power. 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. We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and are precious in His sight.

References:

1Pe 4:19

Col 3:3

Joh 9:1-4

2Co 4:7,15

Php 3:14-15

Isa 43:1-4

Further Study:

Hebrews 5

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 14

Attaining to the resurrection

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, the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. He wanted to be conformed to His death in order that he might attain to the resurrection from the dead. 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. 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. 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.

The Scriptures teach us 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.

References:

Php 3:10-11 Tit 1:2
Act 17:32 1Co 7:14
Act 23:6-8 Pro 22:6

Further Study: Luke 20:26-47

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 15

The cross of Christ

The cross of Christ was the entire provision of God through which He gives us eternal life. Baptism joins us to the process of the cross. It first joins us to the death of Christ. 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'. Because we have been delivered from sin, we are now no longer under condemnation. Our sufferings in life are not the evidence of our eternal death. They are now the context in which the Father is disciplining us as His sons.

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

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. The light that John was speaking of is the illumination that comes from the word of life. As we remain faithful within the fellowship of His sufferings, and in 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.

References:

Rom 6:3-7
 Php 3:10
 1Jn 1:7

1Co 1:18
 1Co 2:2
 Gal 6:14

Further Study: 1 John 2

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 18

The fellowship of His sufferings

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

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 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?' 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 people who 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.

References:

Heb 9:13-14

1Pe 4:12

IJn 1:7

Heb 12:11, 24-25

1Co 10:16

Further Study: Mark 10:35-52

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 19

Dealing with sin

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.’ He was describing the well-worn path of best intentions being completely hijacked by ‘another law’ within us. 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?’ In other words, ‘Who will free me from this body controlled by sin that is leading to death?’

Many of us will have asked the same question and, like Paul, we must understand the amazing provision we receive through baptism. Baptism joins us to Christ’s death so that we are set free from sin. We are given resurrection life, which is the capacity to join the fellowship of His sufferings. We are given access to His blood as we participate in this fellowship. His blood is now cleansing the conscience of dead works, bringing us back from the death of sin. It’s giving us capacity to obey the Father’s will. This enables us to ‘fulfil the righteous requirement of the law’.

Further to this, 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’.

References:

Rom 7:15, 23-24 1Jn 2:15-17
Col 2:11 Luk 12:15
Col 3:2, 5 Heb 9:14

Further Study:

Romans 8

Daily Proverb:

Proverbs 20

Joining Christ's obedience

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 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.

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.

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 *fellowship of the communion* 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*.

References:

Heb 5:8

Isa 50:5-6

Rom 12:2

Heb 10:7

Heb 12:25

1Pe 2:8

Further Study:

Daily Proverb:

1 Peter 4

Proverbs 21

A son of God keeps himself

The apostle John wrote, ‘He who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him’. We recognise three main points in this statement. Firstly, 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 of God. 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. Secondly, all sons of God *keep themselves*. To ‘keep’ something is to guard and watch over it with the aim of preserving it. And, thirdly, 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 we keep ourselves, the Lord will also keep us. Keeping ourselves is a participation in His life and love. A vital implication of this is that we will not only be concerned with keeping ourselves, but we will also be our brother’s keeper. As we grow and mature as sons of God, we will also grow in understanding the way of keeping ourselves and all that this means. We are reminded of Jude’s exhortation, ‘Beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, *keep yourselves* in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life’.

References:

Rev 3:10

Gen 4:9

1Jn 2:3

Rev 14:12

Jud 1:20-21

Joh 14:21

Further Study:

Daily Proverb:

1 John 5

Proverbs 22

Knowing we are sons of God

In the natural sense, keeping ourselves will mean that we will do our best to preserve our lives. We will keep ourselves safe from harm. When we drive in Australia, we will 'Keep Left' on the road. When we visit the zoo, we will keep out of the lion enclosure. This is all good advice and something we should give attention to, but it is not what John was talking about. Similarly, keeping ourselves 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 us to control what we think, say, and do, so that we can be who we want to be.

This would confine our understanding of 'keeping ourselves' 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'. The natural man would ask, 'How do you keep your life by losing it?'

What is the spiritual understanding of 'keeping ourselves'? It begins with knowing that we are sons of God. We are in Christ and we know God, who is true. When we know Him, we will fear Him and keep His commandments. We will also know that we are not our own. Keeping ourselves is not an independent or self-centred action. We belong to the Lord. We are members of Christ and our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit.

References:

Mat 16:25 Joh 14:21, 23-24
 1Jn 5:20 Joh 15:9-10
 Col 3:3 1Co 12:27

Further Study: 1 Corinthians 6

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 25

Our accountability as sons of God

As sons of God, we are in Christ and we are to walk every day in faith and love by the Holy Spirit, who will help us to keep the word of God. Jude exhorted 'those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ'. 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'. The apostle James wrote that pure and undefiled religion is to keep oneself unspotted from the world. The Lord has separated us to Himself, so we must keep ourselves separate from the world. We practically keep ourselves by continuing to obey the word of God; by keeping ourselves in fellowship by an active choice rather than based on how we feel; by continuing to pray in the Spirit, by walking in faith and love; and by presenting ourselves as an offering to God, serving one another in love.

The wise man said that we must keep our heart with all diligence. This means that we are to be proactive in keeping ourselves. We need to watch and pray so that we may be complete, thoroughly equipped and prepared for every 'good work'. We are accountable for how we use our time and what we do. Rather than trying to *find* time, we need to *make* time to pray, to serve, to study the word of God, and to know God's will for our lives. We are called to actively and deliberately bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. We can be guided by the Lord and not by how we feel so that we are proactive, rather than reactive, in our Christian lives.

References:

2Ti 1:13-14 Lev 20:26
 Jud 1:1, 20-21 Gal 5:13
 Jas 1:27 Pro 4:23

Further Study: 2 Timothy 3

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 26

The Lord is our Keeper

The Psalms have much to say about the Lord keeping us. He will not allow our feet to slip. He keeps us day and night. He does not sleep or take a break from keeping us. '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.' The Lord is our Shepherd and the Watchman of our soul. He is able to keep us from stumbling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

Jesus prayed for His disciples, and for each of us who believe in Him and who keep His word. 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.' We recall that Jesus taught us to pray, 'Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil'. The Father will keep us as we willingly obey Him. Being kept in God's life and love is not all up to us; nor is it all up to God. It is a fellowship.

We can 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'. The Lord is faithful to keep us. Armed with the assurance that we are safely being kept by God and that we are diligently keeping ourselves, the practical result of this will be that we will also keep one another. If we love God, we will love one another. We will also know that there are many others who are keeping us in the love of God.

References:

Psa 121
 IPe 2:25
 Jud 1:24

Deu 6:4
 2Ti 1:12
 Php 2:3-4

Further Study:

Daily Proverb:

John 17

Proverbs 27

Each of us have a load to carry

The apostle Paul taught the Galatian Christians that each person will bear, or be accountable for, their own load. 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.

God has given every son of God the opportunity to present themselves as a living sacrifice. 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'.

Paul also instructed the thief who had been converted to Christ to stop stealing. 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. 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. However, the Scripture is clear. 'Each one of us will give an account of himself of God'.

References:

Gal 6:5 Rom 14:12
Rom 12:1 Mat 12:36
Eph 4:28 1Pe 4:5

Further Study: 2 Thessalonians 3

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 28

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'. This means that there is no-one else like us, and no-one else to do the works that have been given to us. Every part needs to do its share. We grow and mature to carry our own load.

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. As a person bearing his own load, he was prepared and able to give to others.

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'. Abundant grace was available to Paul to continue, even though great difficulty was upon him. We know that God will provide us with all the capacity we need to bear the burden that we are being given.

References:

1Co 12:18 1Co 10:13
 2Th 3:8-9 Eph 4:15-16
 2Co 12:7-9 2Co 3:5

Further Study: Jeremiah 1

Daily Proverb: Proverbs 29