

**Passing the Baton 44**  
**18<sup>th</sup> December 2010**  
**'The Challenge'**

*<sup>14</sup> But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.' Hebrews 5:14 NKJV*

Let's pray shall we before we begin:

*Father help us, here we are at the end of the year, we want to ask You to bring us to the place where Your love governs us and controls us in every area of our lives – where we walk in the love of God and give it away, where no one is safe from a blessing, where we carry the fragrance of Jesus wherever we go.*

*Reveal to us Father where this word is speaking to us to cleanse us and purify us, pursue us Father for Jesus sake, work in us so that when we face the pressures of life we choose Your will, not our own, that we become a people who desire to please You and live under Your smile above everything else.*

*That we may be ambassadors for You who celebrate You and show Who you really are in all Your brilliance and beauty, that the Gospel may again be put forth as the Good News, not the 'all right' news.*

*Deliver us from our weaknesses Father as we choose to co-operate with Your Holy Spirit, cause us to respond in such a way that you will be able to give us the nations as our inheritance as You so desire. May Jesus see the travail of His soul and be satisfied.*

*In Jesus name and for His sake.*

*Amen.*

Here we are then at the end of the year where we examined in detail God's intentionality, His purposefulness towards us and ours towards Him.

The word at the end of this year then, is for those who have decided that they want to count in the Kingdom; who want their lives to be a contribution; who have determined they want to be champions who run harder, go faster, climb higher and endure longer than those around them...lovers of the nature of God and carriers of His joy, this word is a challenge to us all to live life on a different plane.

This month we are looking at part of our inheritance in Christ; so first of all let me spell out a few of the things our inheritance contains –

- overcoming ourselves and our personal circumstances
- maturity in relationships one with another
- victory over the enemy
- living in Mt 6:33 - seeking first and only the Kingdom of God in our lives

- mental and emotional health and wellbeing
- physical strength, endurance and stamina
- spiritual growth fruitfulness and usefulness...
- finishing well

As we grow in these things, the **Kingdom** will be apparent in our lives – the reign and rule of the King of Love.

All the teaching of the past 12 months has brought us to this place – where we begin to make choices, decisions that define us, so this month we will begin looking at that most important of issues, our inheritance and specifically how **immaturity** in our relationships with one another affects this inheritance - because **immaturity** in this, or any other area affects our ability to come into Kingdom fullness and the abundance the Father wants us to enjoy.

It is our inheritance to live in the favour and blessedness that characterised Jesus whilst He walked on this earth – as He is, so are we in this life. That is the goal and the intention of the Father, to reproduce the Son in us. There is available to us a continuous promotion, an ongoing upgrade, in the Spirit, there is a Divine advantage to be had, into which we need to step...



The Prince has come, and kissed His Bride awake... the bride has got the dress; she's got the Prince, now she has to learn to **live** like a Princess...

Whilst there is division and strife among us we will not know fullness, abundance or divine favour – this is the challenge before us today and as we know crisis always leads to process, so if you find yourself having a crisis, rejoice and be exceeding glad, because you are about to enter process!

The process begins when God does something new in our lives – it is a series of steps that takes us from the place of challenge, to the place of completion – we are being conformed to His image – everything He does in our lives, is to that end.

God is totally, incredulously biased towards us – it is called favour. We are called to live in that favour and blessedness as much loved children, not to ponder on the pools of mediocrity which entangle the world...there is such an inheritance available to us that we need to be awakened as the sleeping beauty of God in order that we may come into all that He has for us in these days.

We are in a new era, a new **time** in God, a new dispensation, we are **not** in a new season...seasons come and go, we are in a new **time period** – *'the devils fear and flee because they know their time is at hand'*...we are in the dispensation of the **fullness** of time – the time of the end – it's now or never folks.

I love the book of Colossians – here Paul addresses the saints with love, thanksgiving and encouragement -

### **Colossians 1:1 – 12 NASB**

#### *Thankfulness for Spiritual Attainments*

<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, <sup>2</sup>To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. <sup>3</sup>We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, <sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; <sup>5</sup>because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel <sup>6</sup>which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; <sup>7</sup>just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, <sup>8</sup>and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

<sup>9</sup>For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup>so that you 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>11</sup>strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously <sup>12</sup>giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.'

*'...giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.*

God has brought us out of darkness into His wonderful Light, now He wants to **establish** that Light **in** us, and I echo Paul in asking *'that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that you will walk worthy of the Lord, increasing in the knowledge of God, pleasing him in all respects and bearing fruit...'*

Little phrase here *'pleasing Him in all respects'*...is all about being centred, centred on Jesus, not on anything else. We need to become those in whom the Father is pleased...and every branch in Him that bears fruit, He prunes...pruning is part of his care of us in order that we might be fruitful...

### **John 15:2 AMP**

*'Any branch in Me that does not bear fruit [that stops bearing] He cuts away (trims off, takes away); and He cleanses and repeatedly prunes every branch that continues to bear fruit, to make it bear more and richer and more excellent fruit.'*

If we are to grow up in **all things** in Christ, we will have to feel those pruning shears...whenever the pruning shears in the form of new truth comes to us it always makes us uncomfortable...for a season, but then the fruit comes again.

Part of our growth in understanding is coming to recognise afresh how God carries out His will in this world.

We may be the most significant generation, this may be the generation upon whom the ends of the world comes – if this is the case, we need of all people to be both alert and responsive to all He is doing in the earth at this time.

Individually and collectively we need to hear Him, respond to Him and adjust our lives accordingly.

The Father is very serious about the whole issue of inheritance and birthright - spiritually we stand to inherit the Kingdom, just as Israel was to inherit the Promised Land. Jesus told us –

#### **Luke 12:32 NASB**

<sup>32</sup> *'...your Father has chosen gladly to **give** you the kingdom.'*

Therefore it is part of our inheritance to **receive** the Kingdom as our inheritance and to walk in all the things Jesus walked in and do greater things than these. But as in everything else, receiving is not automatic, unforgiveness, bitterness and resentment, for instance, will block your ability to receive the good things Father wants to give you, so the **truth** of our inheritance can affect us positively or negatively. If it affects us negatively, it simply means there are things which yet need to be dealt with or healed.

When anything hits home in us, it is good, even if it doesn't feel good, and it is often the very catalyst for change which we need to move us from one place to another.

It is time, beloved, for us to grow up in the things of God and become a company of people who no longer need continual pastoring and counselling to keep us on track.

It is time for us to take responsibility for ourselves, our conduct and behaviour and grow up in all things, in Christ.

We have seen we cannot stay in the place of blaming others for our stagnation – it is entirely up to us to make the choices **and** follow through in order that we may grow up into the maturity that Father is looking for: seeing people as God sees them, loving what God loves and hating what He hates – having the mind of Christ.

Relational maturity essentially is learning firstly, to control **ourselves**, to not react to circumstances, situations and people, but to respond to God, keeping our mouths shut and our hearts open until love, mercy and compassion rise.

This is the essence of relational maturity – and it takes time – how long, depends entirely on your responses as God asks or challenges you.

Keep in mind as you follow this study that much of the **relational** battle is won by the miraculous control of the tongue!

Not what you did say, but what you didn't say!

When we learn to control our mouths, we may be surprised by the degree of maturity that follows – waiting for mercy and compassion to rise changes your heart's attitude to people and situations.

## The Missing Piece:

Walking the Spirit is about displacement – displacing your old nature with the nature of Christ...yielding constantly to the Spirit of God within, that He might increase and you might decrease.

God is in us *'both to will and to do'*, Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippian church, let Him, allow Him, to have His way in you.

The more God conscious you are, the less self-conscious you will be.

The more you focus on what you are not, the more irritable, joyless, anxious and miserable you will become.

This teaching is designed to cause you to see where you need an upgrade in your relationship with Him. Focus and intimacy are essential. He has designed this life so that you cannot do it alone! *'Without Me'*, Jesus said, *'you can do nothing'*, and I mean, nothing! Gottcha! Staying attached to that Vine is not an option.

So as you continue with this teaching remember that He only deals with us from our position in Christ, in the Vine, that He sees you in the Beloved, the beloved, in the Beloved, so relax and enjoy the journey.

He considers the 'old' you dead and buried.

His work is to establish ***His righteousness*** in you with abundant grace and joy.

Holiness is not about dealing with sin, beloved, it is about ***loving*** righteousness, loving to do the right thing, saying the right word, not loving to do the wrong thing or speaking a wrong word.

You will not desire to do the things you did if you become more and more captivated with Him – this is a love walk. When you spend your time focussing on what you are not, you become self-conscious; when you focus on your DNA in Christ you become God conscious.

When you try to put yourself right you become self conscious, you become involved with that dead thing, when you become involved with the righteousness of Christ, you become involved with Life – you become involved with the goodness and grace of all that Heaven allows.

Take responsibility for what God has done in Christ. Live from that place and the revelation will release powerful new experiences of love and grace which will eclipse the old and your heart will become filled and sing with celebration and Majesty.

The key is to learn to ***LOVE*** the process and embrace it with joy.

The goal of process as always in spiritual terms is displacement.

Everything is already yours, be overwhelmed – it guarantees your next upgrade.

Begin then to live there in the grace, favour, love, blessing and beneficence of God towards you.

Rejoice if this word reveals areas He wants to change, be exceedingly joyful – you are being transformed by His own hand into the likeness of Jesus. Willing co-operation is pivotal, you have been saved, you are being saved and you will be saved, conversion is an ongoing process – not a one off experience - it is the changing of the direction of your love from the temporal to the eternal and the joy set before you.

As you rejoice and give thanks in all circumstances upgrades become freely available to you. You are taking your place in Christ where your favour eradicates all the negatives in your life and you are in a continual state of upgraded experience, living from heaven to earth – brilliant!

In every circumstance there is an inbuilt summons to an improvement and an upgrading in our experience of Him, a call to *'come up higher'* so allow this teaching to challenge you and rise up, because it is that rising up within which will reveal what the Lord wants to be for you in this particular circumstance. He is always making overtures to us that demonstrate His love, joy and favour over our lives. He loves His people – what is it He wants to be for you right now?

Paul said in -

### **2 Corinthians 3:3 ASP**

*<sup>a</sup>You show and make obvious that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, not written with ink but with [the] Spirit of [the] living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.'*

Our **heart** always comes first.

Do not receive this as 'law' beloved, allow it to speak to your **heart** allow it to release you into His grace and favour.

This is an inwrought work and is the work of the Holy Spirit in your life to enable you to regain your inner territory and come into everything Jesus has won for you on the cross.

God never speaks to the head without first opening up our heart. The inner man has insight into the inner workings of God. Perception or awareness then leads to understanding, and as our mind is renewed it begins tracking with our heart.

Every situation we encounter involves a **relational** invitation to experience Him and know who He want to be for us in the **now** – He is the 'I AM' not the 'I was'.

Let us first take a look then, at what Paul lists as things that will prevent us from experiencing our inheritance – there are two lists as I see it, the first is in:

### **1 Corinthians 6:9 - 10**

*<sup>a</sup>Do you not know that the unrighteous and the wrongdoers will not inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived (misled): neither the impure and immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor those who participate in homosexuality, <sup>10</sup>Nor cheats (swindlers and thieves), nor*

*greedy graspers, nor drunkards, nor foulmouthed revilers and slanderers, nor extortioners and robbers will inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God.'*

Unrighteous, wrongdoers, impure, immoral, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, swindlers and thieves, greedy graspers, drunkards, foulmouthed revilers, slanderers, extortioners or robbers.

The second in -

### **Galatians 5: 19 – 21 AMP**

*<sup>19</sup>Now the doings (practices) of the flesh are clear (obvious): they are immorality, impurity, indecency, <sup>20</sup>Idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger (ill temper), selfishness, divisions (dissensions), party spirit (factions, sects with peculiar opinions, heresies), <sup>21</sup>Envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you beforehand, just as I did previously, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.'*

Immorality, impurity, indecency, (sexual sins) idolatry, sorcery (spiritual sins) enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, ill temper selfishness, divisions, dissensions, party spirit (false loyalty to someone or something other than Jesus), envy, (all fleshly sins) drunkenness, carousing and the like (sins of the carnal nature, satisfying the desires of the body).

At first I thought these were the same, but on closer examination I see that the lists only repeat themselves in immorality, impurity and drunkenness...when Paul says and the like, he means '*and anything else I haven't thought of!*'

So according to these lists, there are about 25 – 30 different behaviours which can affect our inheritance and prevent full entrance of the Kingdom into our lives - it is indeed remarkable how few of them are duplicated.

The truth has come!

Any of these can be a trap to any of us, what Paul is speaking about is not the occasional lapse into these behaviours, but a persistent, insistent, way of life but he also makes the point that we are no longer to live like this –

### **1 Corinthians 6:11**

*<sup>11</sup>Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.'*

If we are persistently involved in sexual misconduct, it is clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Kingdom is not being manifested in us or through us...the coming of the Kingdom brings authenticity, purity, honesty, integrity and transparency **within** us. We cease lying to ourselves.

**Relational maturity** is part of your inheritance...the things which will prevent or delay you from inheriting in this area are listed - and they all come from the inner man, the thought life and then the tongue – what is on the inside, will out!

- *Enmity – hostility, hate, antagonism, bad feeling*
- *strife - trouble, conflict, discord, contention, fighting, friction and rivalry*
- *jealousy – covetousness, resentment, suspicion, distrust*
- *anger - annoyance, irritation, rage, antagonism*
- *ill temper – bad humour, irritability, displeasure*
- *divisions (dissensions – making splits in the body) disagreements leading to open conflict*
- *party spirit- (factions, sects with peculiar opinions, heresies)*
- *envy – jealousy, greed, desire, spite*
- *foul mouth – needs no explanation*
- *slander – to insult, malign, libel, slur, smear, disparage, vilify and defame*

If I am ignorant of anything on this list, it does not excuse me. It is my personal responsibility to know what God expects of me and to do it.

We all know that ignorance of the law is no excuse.

If a policeman stops me when I am travelling at 70 mph in a 30 mph zone, he will not accept that I didn't know I was breaking the law – he will slap a ticket on me and fast!

We all know we can lose a battle without losing the war, if everyone who ever did one of these things lost their inheritance, there would only be you and me left!

I emphasise that which will cost you in Kingdom terms is allowing such a way of life to **continue** without check – we aren't talking about an occasional lapse.

The Father has given us the blessed Holy Spirit to take us through this minefield. We can come out on the other side as a people who understand something about the expectations of the Father that is not legalistic or based on a set of rules.

The heart of the issue is the issue of the heart.

'If you love me', Jesus said, 'you will do what I ask' – love is the foundation – if your love for Him is such that you choose avoid anything that would bring damage to that relationship, it won't be difficult beloved.

So we are back to focus, intimacy and abiding – and you have your 'come alongside Friend' to help you 24/7 – He loves to talk to you about Jesus.

This is what will keep you from doing evil...your love relationship with Him and your **fellowship** with the Holy Spirit.

**1 Peter 3: 10 – 12 NASB**



<sup>10</sup>For,

*"THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS,  
MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT.*

<sup>11</sup>*"HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD;  
HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.*

<sup>12</sup>*"FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS,  
AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER,  
BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL."*

The Holy Spirit is a genius at all this stuff.

As you co-operate with Him, He will enliven your conscience – your God consciousness – to be aware that what you are thinking and saying is not Kingdom ‘stuff’ and is endangering your ability to inherit – He is so for you beloved, He wants you to win, He wants you to inherit, He wants you to receive those eternal rewards.

Controlling ourselves in the area of our tongue is not an option – we can destroy with our mouths that which we have taken years to build.

Consider this cautionary tale – there was a missionary who had been on the field for some 26 years, he was attempting to build a church for the local people, the bugs were crawling on him, the helpers were few and not much help, the heat was intense...finally, anger built in him, he picked up a crowbar and he beat the wall, he beat the door and walked off. The people watching were stunned, later other leaders came to him and said ‘*we have lost confidence in you and your leadership...*’ He returned home a broken and disillusioned man.

Is there an historical parallel? There sure is, come with me to –

### **Numbers 20: 9 - 12**

<sup>9</sup>*So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him; <sup>10</sup>and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" <sup>11</sup>Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank.*

<sup>12</sup>*But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."*

Moses lost his inheritance through an uncontrolled outburst of anger.

There is no question about his salvation, it is not a matter of eternal loss, he was forgiven, but entry into the Promised Land which he had sought for so long was denied him, he had traded his inheritance for the gratification of telling the children of Israel exactly what he thought of them - rebels!

Beloved, these are serious matters and they are not for babes – this message is for those who are of full age – who are actively seeking to walk in the love, mercy and grace of God.

#### **Hebrews 5:13 – 14 NKJV**

<sup>13</sup> *For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.*  
<sup>14</sup> *But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.'*

*'Oh the joy of full salvation, glory, glory, to His Name... Don't stop beloved and miss His best.*

And -

#### **Romans 5: 1 – 6 NASB**

*'<sup>1</sup>Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; <sup>4</sup>and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; <sup>5</sup>and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. <sup>6</sup>For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.'*

We are justified by faith, we have peace with God, we stand in grace and we exult in hope – we have the goods.

Brilliant!

The more the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, the more we come into the fullness of our inheritance.

It is your inheritance to be both alive and free – and it does not mean doing as you please - it means living under the Royal Law of Love and it is a process that will last until Jesus comes.

#### **Romans 13:8 NIV 2010**

*'<sup>8</sup> Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.'*

Our behaviour, our conduct and our response to the expectations of the love of God **within** us is what determines the **extent** of our inheritance in this life.

The more we allow Him to love us and love through us, the more the Kingdom will be made manifest in us.

In and through, always the same – He cannot do through you what He has not been able to do in you.

Our promise from God is *'the nations for our inheritance'* – the frightening thing is that in our present condition, if He gave it to us, we would probably fight over it due to our lack of maturity in relationships!

If we want God to give us what He has promised, we must grow up enough to receive the promise.

It is not automatic; it depends on our choices, both breakthrough and follow through – a step by step - process.

If we harden our hearts to the process, we will eventually lose out on our inheritance – but not our salvation.

Jesus says in -

### **John 13:34 – 35**

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

So you prove whether you are a disciple or not by your love; it clearly states if you are a disciple, you **will** love others and men will know it by your **love**, not by your works, by your love.

### **John 15:17**

*"This I command you, that you love one another"*

And this is a commandment beloved, it is not a request!

Without growing up in true **love**, the agape of God, the church will never reach her high calling.

We must learn to agree to differ, but stay in covenant relationship.

We must learn to have differing views on all sorts of interpretations of the Bible and other things, without it affecting our covenant relationship – non-negotiable love, it doesn't depend on what you present to me, I have determined to stay in a covenant relationship with you.

Tough, you've got to be loved – hard one.

As I said last time when I have love for someone in the body, I have **determined** that I am going to stand with them, regardless of what they are displaying because I see who they can be. I am committed to them and in covenant relationship with them whether they return this covenant love or not.

Love does not need to be loved in return in order to love.

So we must come to the place where our **love** for each other is not negotiable; whatever difficulties we encounter in relationship terms, must be resolved with the foundation of love still intact. We can

agree to disagree and not break covenant with each other – when we break covenant, we are simply showing our immaturity, and we will have to go through the whole lesson again, at a higher level.

This is a challenge to us all.

God is in the process of taking us from insecurity, to vulnerability...you will get hurt again, so get up, get healed and continue to run the race -

In his book **'The Three Battlegrounds'** – Francis Frangipane says this -

*'Is your love growing and becoming softer, brighter, more daring and more visible? Or is it becoming more discriminating, more calculating, less vulnerable and less available? This is a very important issue, for your Christianity is only as real as your love.*

*A measurable decrease in your ability to love is evidence that a stronghold of cold love is developing within you.*

**Guard Against Unforgiveness!**

*"Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12). A major area of spiritual warfare that has come against the church is the sphere of church relationships. Satan knows that a church divided against itself cannot stand. We may enjoy temporary blessings and seasonal breakthroughs, but to win a citywide war, Jesus is raising up a united, citywide church. An earmark of this corporate, overcoming church will be its commitment to love. Yet, because of the increasing iniquity in the end of this age, true Christian love will be severely assaulted.*

*There is no spiritual unity, and hence no lasting victory, without love. Love is a passion for oneness. Bitterness, on the other hand, is characterized by a noticeable lack of love. This cold love is a demonic stronghold. In our generation cold love is becoming increasingly more common. It shuts down the power of prayer and disables the flow of healing and outreach. In fact, where there is persistent and hardened unforgiveness in a person or church, the demonic world (known in Matthew 18:34 as "torturers") has unhindered access.*

*The Scriptures warn that even a little root of bitterness springing up in a person's life can defile many (see Hebrews 12:15). Bitterness is unfulfilled revenge. Another's thoughtlessness or cruelty may have wounded us deeply. It is inevitable that, in a world of increasing harshness and cruelty, we will at some point be hurt. But if we fail to react with love and forgiveness, if we retain in our spirit the debt the offender owes, that offense will rob our hearts of their capacity to love. Imperceptibly, we will become a member of the majority of end-time Christians whose love is growing cold.*

*Bitterness is the most visible symptom of the stronghold of cold love. To deal with cold love, we must repent and forgive the one who hurt us. Painful experiences are allowed by God to teach us how to love our enemies. If we still have unforgiveness toward someone, we have failed this test.*

*Fortunately, it was just a test, not a final exam. We actually need to thank God for the opportunity to grow in divine love. Thank Him that your whole life is not being swallowed up in bitterness and resentment. Millions of souls are swept off into eternal judgment every day without any hope of*

*escaping from embitterment, but you have been given God's answer for your pain. God gives you a way out: love!*

*As we embrace God's love and begin to walk in Christ-like forgiveness, we are actually pulling down the stronghold of cold love in our lives. Because of this experience, we will soon possess more of the love of Christ than we had previously.*

*Love without commitment is not love*

*"And at that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold" (Matt. 24:10-12).*

*Allow me to be perfectly clear: there is no such thing as love without commitment. The measure of one's love is found in the depth of his or her commitment to others. How often we have heard people say, "I loved once, but I was hurt." Or, "I was committed to Christian service, but they used me." When someone withdraws his commitment to a relationship, he is withdrawing his love. It is not one's commitment that grows cold; it is their love. It may not seem like they have become cold—they may still attend church, sing and look "Christian"—but inside they have become hard and separated from others. They have withdrawn from love. Because their commitment is shallow, they will be easily offended.*

*Jesus said, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come" (Matt. 18:7). In your walk there will be times when even good people have bad days. As long as you live on earth, there will never be a time when "stumbling blocks" cease to be found upon your path. People do not stumble over boulders but over stones—little things. To stumble is to stop walking and fall. Have you stumbled over someone's weakness or sin lately? Have you gotten back up and continued loving as you did before, or has that fall caused you to withdraw somewhat from walking after love? To preserve the quality of love in your heart, you must forgive those who have caused you to stumble.*

*Every time you refuse to forgive or fail to overlook a weakness in another, your heart not only hardens toward them, it hardens toward God. You cannot form a negative opinion of someone (even though you think they may deserve it!) and allow that opinion to crystallize into an attitude; for every time you do, an aspect of your heart will cool toward God. You may still think you are open to God, but the Scriptures are clear: "The one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). You may not like what someone has done, but you do not have an option to stop loving them. Love is your only choice.*

*What do I mean by love? First, I do not merely mean "tough love." I mean gentle, affectionate, sensitive, open, persistent love. God will be tough when He needs to be, and we will be firm when He tells us to be, but beneath our firmness must be an underground river of love waiting to spring into action. By love, I mean a compassion that is empowered by faith and prayer to see God's best come forth in the people I love. When I have love for someone, I have predetermined that I am going to stand with them, regardless of what they are going through. I am committed.*

*We each need people who love us, who are committed to us in spite of our imperfections. The fullness of Christ will not come without Christians standing with each other in love. We are not*

*talking about salvation, but growing in salvation until we care for each other, even as Christ has committed Himself to us.*

*Many people will stumble over little faults and human weaknesses. These minor things are quickly pumped up by the enemy into great big problems. Oh, how frail are the excuses people use to justify withdrawing from others. In reality, these problems, often with a church or pastor, are a smokescreen which masks the person's lack of love.*

*We need to overcome our hang-ups about commitment, for no one will attain the fullness of God's purposes on earth without being committed to imperfect people along the way.*

*"Well, as soon as I find a church that believes as I do, I will be committed." This is a dangerous excuse, because as soon as you decide you do not want to forgive, or God begins to deal with the quality of your love, you will blame your withdrawing on some minor doctrinal difference. The kingdom of God is not based on mere doctrines, it is founded upon relationships—relationships with God and, because of God, with one another. Doctrines only help define those relationships. We are not anti-doctrine, but we are against empty doctrines which seem like virtues but are simply excuses that justify cold love.*

#### *The Greatest Commandments*

*An expert in the Law once asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment. His reply was wonderful: " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' " (Mark 12:30-31). Jesus said that the second commandment is like the first. When you love God, your love for others will actually be like your love for God. The more you unconditionally love God, the more you will unconditionally love others.*

*To those whose attitude is, "I am content with just Jesus and me," I say it is wonderful you found Jesus. But you cannot truly have Jesus and simultaneously not do what He says. The outgrowth of love and faith in Christ is love and faith like Christ's, which means we are committed, even as He is, to His people.*

*You see, the kingdom of God is most perfectly revealed in our relationships with one another. We are being perfected into a unit (see John 17). To have the kingdom, we must be committed to one another as individuals and as churches. If Christ accepts us while we are still imperfect, we must also accept one another. The people who possess the kingdom of God in its reality are people who overcome the obstacles of each other's faults. They help each other become what God has called them to be: the living body of Jesus Christ.*

*Remember, the goal of pulling down the stronghold of cold love is to see the oneness of Christ's body revealed. You will be challenged in this, but if you persist, you will discover the height and depth, the length and breadth of Christ's love. You will become a body filled and flooded with God Himself.'*

*By the time you get around to taking in this message the Christmas festivities will be behind you and you will be looking into the eyes of a New Year – just exactly what do you plan to do with it?*

The first four of the Ten Commandments are directed towards God, the rest have to do with how we relate to one another.

This tells us what a tremendous challenge maturity in our relationships with one another really is and how important it is to God.

Difficulties in the church always involve people!

Our relationship is first towards God, **then** toward man...

**Love** is the key that will open the door to relational maturity, to unity and true fellowship with one another.

In most marriages, the unsolvable problems are the result of being *relationally* immature. They are the result of one or other partner being selfish, demanding, dominating and lots of other things besides.

Wives, be good to your husbands and responsive to their needs. Husband, your wife, Peter says, is a fellow heir in your inheritance; if you injure her, you have injured your inheritance -

### **1 Peter 3:4 – 7 The Message**

<sup>4-4</sup>*Be good wives to your husbands, responsive to their needs. There are husbands who, indifferent as they are to any words about God, will be captivated by your life of holy beauty. What matters is not your outer appearance—the styling of your hair, the jewellery you wear, the cut of your clothes—but your inner disposition.*

<sup>4-6</sup>*Cultivate inner beauty, the gentle, gracious kind that God delights in. The holy women of old were beautiful before God that way, and were good, loyal wives to their husbands. Sarah, for instance, taking care of Abraham, would address him as "my dear husband." You'll be true daughters of Sarah if you do the same, unanxious and unintimidated.*

<sup>7</sup>*The same goes for you husbands: Be good husbands to your wives. Honour them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God's grace, you're equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don't run aground.'*

The thing which obviously suffers here, gentlemen, is that your prayers will go unanswered.

The love of which I speak is not soft love, it is the 'agape' of God, the kind of love that **provokes** you to love and good works.

It will not let you off the hook when you need to be nailed.

It will pursue you for your, own good, because to be sympathetic to you, would keep you in an immature state.

I find it quite remarkable that such is the immature state of the church in large proportion that although the apostle Paul could speak clearly about these things, we find ourselves having to pussy foot around such teachings in order that no-one be offended!

Paul put it this way in his letter to the Corinthians –

### **1 Corinthians 3:1 – 15 NASB**

*'<sup>1</sup>And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup>I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, <sup>3</sup>for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? <sup>4</sup>For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? <sup>5</sup>What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. <sup>6</sup>I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. <sup>7</sup>So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. <sup>8</sup>Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labour. <sup>9</sup>For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. <sup>10</sup>According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. <sup>11</sup>For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

*<sup>12</sup>Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup>each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. <sup>14</sup>If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.'*

Whether we like it or not, God will reward us and He speaks much about these rewards and also about what causes us to lose them, and our inheritance.

So a reminder of what Francis said when he defined love – the agape of God -

*'What do I mean by love? First, I do not merely mean "tough love." I mean gentle, affectionate, sensitive, open, persistent love. God will be tough when He needs to be, and we will be firm when He tells us to be, but beneath our firmness must be an underground river of love waiting to spring into action. By love, I mean a compassion that is empowered by faith and prayer to see God's best come forth in the people I love. When I have love for someone, I have predetermined that I am going to stand with them, regardless of what they are going through. I am committed.'*

So I will be gentle with you, but firm when He tells me, because the message is as strong as it needs to be and underneath this strength and firmness, to which incidentally you may or may not react, is a love for you which seeks the **very best** for you –

**Love** - is the answer to splits and divisions in the church.



**Love** is the key to true unity in the church.

**Love** is the cost

**Love** remains – it never fails

**Love** - never gives up – it will always think the best of you.

Everything else will pass away, but love is what holds the universe together.

The greatest of these is love.

There is coming a restoration of all things.

Somewhere along the line the church has lost her way.

Presence has given way to pomp, spectacle and display – everybody wants to be somebody, servant-hood has given way to being served, and the idea of being a slave to Jesus is considered passé –

The world is in the church and we do not recognise it.

So, the problem is not getting the church out of the world, but the world out of the church.

Inside every one of us is a giant whose name is – me, myself and I.

We are ambitious to be something, do something, prove something; we are insecure in our identity, security and belonging.

So, to suggest that God might require us to be a servant is anathema. *'I don't mind being called a servant Lord, just as long as you don't treat me like one!'* as someone said to us recently, it made us laugh but isn't that the truth?

Unless you have a right view of yourself your fallen drive will not have been harnessed to the will of God, submitted to the will of God, and damage will consistently be done to you and the body of Christ; people will leave fellowships and churches and continue to do so.

Basic stuff, you must **believe** what He says about you, you must believe where He has placed you – in Christ. You **are** the beloved of God on whom His favour rests – and then you will start living it, liking it, and **loving** like it.

Your will, will be harnessed and surrendered daily to the love and the will of God – this is not as onerous as it sounds, *'if you love Me'*, Jesus said, *'you will keep my commandments, and this is My commandment, that you love one another.'*

This is a 'test' command – *'I'm asking you to do this – I wonder if you will?'*

**John 13:34**

<sup>24</sup> *I give you a new commandment: that you should love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you too should love one another.'*

OK Lord, I love You, it's people I have the problem with...

### **John 14:15 AMP**

<sup>45</sup> *If you [really] love Me, you will keep (obey) My commands.'*

So we need to get back to basics.

Maturity in relationships – loving one another with the love that Christ has for us...we cannot love our neighbour; we cannot affect or influence the society around us, until this is flesh upon us.

The first four of the Ten Commandments are directed towards God but the remaining six have to do with how we relate to one another.

This tells us what a tremendous challenge relational maturity is and how important it is to God.

Unsolvable problems in the church always, but always, involve people!

We are all familiar with -

### **John 15:1 - 8 The Message**

<sup>1-3</sup> *"I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn't bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken. <sup>4</sup>"Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me. <sup>5-8</sup>"I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples".*

He's looking for fruit which will be produced, as we mature.

You can have much information and teaching – grow fat – but never mature – because that teaching has never become 'flesh' upon you.

It has not been worked in and worked out in your own personal experience. Thus we can see believers of 30 – 40 years, all leaf – no fruit, but they would protest that they are mature.

Not so.

There is a very important balance between growing up and being mature – especially relationally - the husbandman comes looking for fruit...He's looking under the leaves to see what fruit He can find...

For many years we have understood that John 15 is speaking only about our abiding in the Vine which is Jesus, this is true, but beloved there are branches other than you!

We can all live with a shotgun – to keep people away - and a bible under our arm! I love God but I can't stand people!

Jesus says in –

### **John 10:16 NASB**

*<sup>16</sup>"I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd".*

One flock, one Shepherd, one Bride, one Bridegroom – God sees us as one soul...ever thought of that?

The Lord expects us to include, embrace and learn properly to relate to other people in the body of Christ.

Back to basics.

Draw a circle right now around the people who have hurt and offended you, those to whom you do not speak in the church family – and include them in your love as an act of your will. You may be surprised at the outcome.

### **Ephesians 4: 3 – 5, 11 – 12**

*<sup>3</sup>being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism,'*

*<sup>1</sup>And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;'*

So far so good, then Paul gets over to verse 25 – and here we get into what I call relational difficulties...

### **Ephesians 4: 25 – 29 The Message**

*<sup>25</sup>What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretence. Tell your neighbour the truth. In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself. <sup>26-27</sup>Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life. <sup>28</sup>Did you use to make ends meet by stealing? Well, no more! Get an honest job so that you can help others who can't work. <sup>29</sup>Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.'*

If you have children, you know how cruel they can be to each other – the majority of Christians are like children, they have little or no compunction in being cruel and malicious to one another, they backbite, talk one against one another, gang up on one another, ostracise each other...and they curse one another with their thoughts and with their words...their tongues, James says -

### **James 3:6 The Message**

*5-6 It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.'*

There are things within the church which she finds acceptable, but which the Lord does not – He does not condemn but gently urges us to go back to our roots of love, holiness, obedience and purity to which we are called.

If we walk with compromise our feet will get very muddy, if we turn a blind eye long enough we will no longer be able to see...if we turn a deaf ear long enough, we will cease to be able to hear...if we persist in seeing things with our natural eye, we will lose the ability to perceive with our spiritual eye...

We are a heart with both eyes **and** ears, we need to both see and hear spiritually.

It's all about that walk of centredness, of focus, intimacy and abiding: everything to be discussed with Him in the company of the Father and the blessed Holy Spirit who is your personal trainer.

You are part of the community of heaven, enjoy the relationship.

When God placed Adam and Eve in the garden, He gave them just one command to test them – 'don't eat of that tree there in the middle of the garden'.

Just one command – but it was a test.

Is He cautioning you not to touch or get involved in something right now?

Is He asking you to lay something down – He may not give you a reason why – yours is simply to obey.

If so, how long are you going to play with it?

### **Luke 19:10 – 24 The Message**

#### *The Story About Investment*

*'11 While he had their attention, and because they were getting close to Jerusalem by this time and expectation was building that God's kingdom would appear any minute, he told this story:*

<sup>12-13</sup>"There was once a man descended from a royal house who needed to make a long trip back to headquarters to get authorization for his rule and then return. But first he called ten servants together, gave them each a sum of money, and instructed them, 'Operate with this until I return.'<sup>14</sup>"But the citizens there hated him. So they sent a commission with a signed petition to oppose his rule: 'We don't want this man to rule us.'<sup>15</sup>"When he came back bringing the authorization of his rule, he called those ten servants to whom he had given the money to find out how they had done.<sup>16</sup>"The first said, 'Master, I doubled your money.'<sup>17</sup>"He said, 'Good servant! Great work! Because you've been trustworthy in this small job, I'm making you governor of ten towns.'<sup>18</sup>"The second said, 'Master, I made a fifty percent profit on your money.'<sup>19</sup>"He said, 'I'm putting you in charge of five towns.'<sup>20-21</sup>"The next servant said, 'Master, here's your money safe and sound. I kept it hidden in the cellar. To tell you the truth, I was a little afraid. I know you have high standards and hate sloppiness, and don't suffer fools gladly.'<sup>22-23</sup>"He said, 'You're right that I don't suffer fools gladly—and you've acted the fool! Why didn't you at least invest the money in securities so I would have gotten a little interest on it?'<sup>24</sup>"Then he said to those standing there, 'Take the money from him and give it to the servant who doubled my stake.'

What we do and are here, determines both our **inheritance** and our **rewards**.

You can't get away from it – sowing and reaping and God **wants** to give you a reward, that is His stated desire...He rewards those who diligently seek Him –

#### **Hebrews 11:6 KJV**

<sup>6</sup>*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

#### **Matthew 6:33 AMP**

<sup>33</sup>*But seek (aim at and strive after) first of all His kingdom and His righteousness (His way of doing and being right), and then all these things taken together will be given you besides.*

And we are in process of receiving that Kingdom -

#### **Hebrews 12:28 AMP**

<sup>28</sup>*Let us therefore, receiving a kingdom that is firm and stable and cannot be shaken, offer to God pleasing service and acceptable worship, with modesty and pious care and godly fear and awe;'*

So there we have the criteria for receiving the kingdom...pleasing service, acceptable worship, pious care, godly fear and awe.

Not rocket science beloved, it's all there.

#### **Micah 6:8 NIV 2010**

*“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*

Do that and you will do well...

To walk humbly with God means the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, must become yours. If you know that you do not have a reverent respect and awe of Almighty God, ask the Holy Spirit to impart it to you, He will be very happy to do so, He will teach you the proper ‘fear of the Lord’ which is the beginning, just the beginning, of wisdom.

The Greek philosophers and ancients believed that someday there would come a golden age where mankind would be able to live together in true agape.

Paul, Luke and other New Testament writers believed that we could have true love and fellowship with one another **now**.

For years we as a church have put forth the message *‘come to Jesus if you are sad and lonely and find a Friend...’*

The problem with this is in finding Jesus, they also find people – and people who are still so much like the world that they can’t see the difference and as a consequence they still get hurt, they still get rejected and spoken evil of.

Again, we are enrolled in God’s school and in this class He wants to teach us to grow up relationally to the place where we love one another with the same love that He loves us.

We cannot ignore His desire any longer and stay in fellowship with Him.

I’m all right with God, it’s people I can’t handle – has got to go beloved, it has got to go.

That is the challenge – relational maturity.

But, thanks be to God, we are only responsible for ourselves, not the other fellow, so that makes it somewhat easier...

I’m not responsible for your reactions or responses, and you are not responsible for mine.

Yahoo!

So far, so good - sometimes not defending ourselves comes to the point of pain – we really do want to explain and defend ourselves and speak up, but we do two things –

- 1) we keep our mouths shut, and
- 2) we wait for compassion and mercy to rise.

When it does, the compassion, mercy, wisdom, goodness and love of God will come forth from us.

The same stream cannot bring forth bitter and sweet water, James says. We just have to keep it in mind that **God** is our vindicator and allow ourselves and our motives to be misunderstood.

We are training ourselves to **respond** to God in all circumstances – like everything else, it's a process, step by step...

People can only kill in you the things that need killing! They are there are your grace growers, so let them grow the grace that is appropriate, kindness in the face of unkindness, patience in the place of impatience, on and on it goes.

The devil is there to grow you spiritually, people are there to grow you in the fruit of the Spirit.

So if your flesh rises, it is a sure sign you need killing in that area.

Death speaks to death, flesh speaks to flesh.

Nasty speaks to nasty.

We can all retaliate, no problem, it's the old nature, but if there isn't anything nasty in you, you don't receive it as nasty and you don't retaliate!

If something reacts inside you, likely it was your flesh that attracted the observation in the first place, check it out, and begin to become aware of what is happening **inside** you – the Kingdom of God, is within you...like...

Two cats in a bag!

The flesh cries out to be killed by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit will go straight for the throat of your carnality. You know that the flesh and the Spirit are like two cats in a bag – be aware when you call out for more of the Holy Spirit, He will go straight for your flesh and He won't apologise! You are asking Him to kill you and do it quickly – correct me ruthlessly and deal with me severely, make it quick - please.

People can only kill in you the things that need killing, beloved, stop complaining, die quietly.

When you fail to bless those who persecute you, or criticise you, you are establishing whether you are free or still needing some attention in that area – it's so easy to see.

A corpse cannot be killed, it is already dead...so if nothing needs killing, nothing can harm you if you are dead, you can be kind, merciful and gracious under criticism or injustice or misunderstanding whatever and it won't have any effect – grace and mercy will be the response.

The church at Philippi much like the church today, had a basic problem – each one was going their own way. They had lost their unity and fellowship and some had even begun to preach Christ from envy and strife (Philippians 1:15). Paul said that these Christians were '*enemies of the cross of Christ*' (Philippians 3:18) they wanted to walk their own way and more, two of the problems Paul highlights are between women, Euodia and Syntyche whom he urges to live in harmony **in the Lord**.

Certain behaviours here were keeping them from walking in fellowship with one another – we can jokingly call these ‘Odious’ and ‘So touchy’ – one was a critical person, disapproving, high minded and difficult to please, the other was easily offended and upset – the type that everyone else in the group had to walk carefully around because she was so easily offended. So when these two got together it was a recipe for disaster, an accident just waiting to happen and sure enough it did...

Paul has to send from imprisonment imploring them to make up their differences.

These types of people tend to try to straighten everyone else out when **they** are the problem – they have strong views on how people should be behaving and what they should be saying.

That brings to mind someone who telephoned me a long time ago saying that she could see someone pushing frogs into my mouth, trying to make me say things that God wasn’t giving me – the interesting thing was that she was the person who was pushing in the frogs...

We must begin to take responsibility for fixing ourselves and stop worrying about getting everyone else straightened out – that is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit.

The challenge for us beloved is to stop being part of the problem and deliberately begin being part of the answer.

We cannot continue telling people that Jesus will give you peace and live on tranquilizers ourselves, nor can we say that we know the Prince of Peace and experience broken relationships with everyone around us.

It’s like setting our stall out and when someone walks through the door looking for something we say – sorry, out of stock.

The real thing will cost us.

God is asking that we come into a relationship and fellowship Him and with each other where ‘agape’ is so natural that we can reach out to those outside who really need to experience the love and compassion of Jesus, and when we bring them in, they find the whole place is filled with the love and compassion of Jesus.

We desperately need to ask God for this, even if it wrecks our carefully constructed lifestyle.

## **Philippians 2: 1 – 8 The Message**

### *He Took on the Status of a Slave*

*‘<sup>1-4</sup>If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care— then do me a favour: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.*



*<sup>5-8</sup>Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.'*

If you are wise, you will be reviewing what the past year has held, what you have learned, what you could have done differently; retrospective revelation – you are having an 'Aah' moment in retrospect...

Review must become a habit if we are to discover what our tests and trials are meant to produce.

Perhaps you will also be thinking about making some quality decisions to define who you are planning to become in the year 2011 – I am not talking about New Year resolutions, please hear me, I am talking about you, covenanting with God over issues in your life, to allow Him to change and refine you.

You may have prophetic words which have been spoken over you, or given to you by the Holy Spirit, dust them off beloved...ask the Lord just where you are with them and make decisions that will bring you into the fullness of those prophecies – not just 30%, not just 60% but 100%.

We are in perilous times – the church is the hope not only of the nation, but of the world.

Jesus is the light of the world we are His ambassadors, and we are clothed with Him.

Thinking about ambassadors then – how do you personally represent the Kingdom to which you belong?

Is there any mid-course correction which you need to make?

As this year comes to an end, stop and take stock of where you are; take a compass bearing to see if you are headed in the right direction.

Are you in alignment with God in your life?

Or are you following your own agenda?

Are you determined to be fruitful in the Kingdom?

Do you want to receive a reward on that day?

Just how intentional are you about your Christian walk and experience?

We have spent most of this year looking at the intentionality, the purposefulness, of God towards us and ours towards Him.

From that should have come some decisions that define us – by that I mean we will have made some choices that we are determined to follow through – there is no continued breakthrough without follow through. For example: how about deciding to be consumed with the Majesty of Heaven, the

Majesty and Sovereignty of God instead of being obsessed by the work of the enemy – that would be a good decision to make.

You should not be entering a new year in the same place you entered the last one if you are tracking with the teaching.

There are times when we just have to take responsibility for what we are not and determine to come into what God says we can be.

Personality and persona. Our personality is us in the natural our persona is who we are in Christ – how we stand before the Father and it is in our persona that the anointing is released. God never anoints the flesh!

To come into all that He says we are will mean choices, determination and grit. We will need to stand firm, not back down on our choices when the going gets tough, as it will. We will need to develop both stamina and perseverance to finish the race. Remember it is not how you start that matters, but how you finish and there are no short cuts...

And beloved, all this has a purpose, the purpose is that you might be equipped to rule and reign not only over your personal circumstances in this world, which is your inheritance here, but in the age to come.

The decisions you make now will define your future for eternity.

There we are then, the decision is yours – will you pay the price for relational maturity this year? Will you live in -

### **1 Corinthians 13: 1 – 13 NIV 2010**

*<sup>1</sup> If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

*<sup>8</sup> Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. <sup>12</sup> For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*

*<sup>13</sup> And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.'*

To finish then, let's remind ourselves about Amy Carmichael's poem -

### *'If'*

*"If I belittle those whom I am called to serve, talk of their weak points in contrast perhaps with what I think of as my strong points; if I adopt a superior attitude, forgetting "Who made thee to differ? And what hast thou that thou hast not received?" then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I find myself taking lapses for granted, "Oh, that's what they always do," "Oh, of course she talks like that, he acts like that," then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I can enjoy a joke at the expense of another; if I can in any way slight another in conversation, or even in thought, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I can write an unkind letter, speak an unkind word; think an unkind thought without grief and shame, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I do not feel far more for the grieved Saviour than for my worried self when troublesome things occur, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I can rebuke without a pang, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If my attitude be one of fear, not faith, about one who has disappointed me; if I say, "Just what I expected" if a fall occurs, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I am afraid to speak the truth, lest I lose affection, or lest the one concerned should say, "You do not understand," or because I fear to lose my reputation for kindness; if I put my own good name before the other's highest good, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I am content to heal a hurt slightly, saying "Peace, peace," where there is no peace; if I forget the poignant word "Let love be without dissimulation" and blunt the edge of truth, speaking not right things but smooth things, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I hold on to choices of any kind, just because they are my choice, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I am soft to myself and slide comfortably into self-pity and self-sympathy; if I do not by the grace of God practice fortitude, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I myself dominate myself, if my thoughts revolve round myself, if I am so occupied with myself I rarely have "a heart at leisure from itself," then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If, the moment I am conscious of the shadow of self crossing my threshold, I do not shut the door, and keep that door shut, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I cannot in honest happiness take the second place (or the twentieth); if I cannot take the first without making a fuss about my unworthiness, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I take offense easily, if I am content to continue in a cool unfriendliness, though friendship be possible, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I feel injured when another lays to my charge things that I know not, forgetting that my sinless Saviour trod this path to the end, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I feel bitter toward those who condemn me, as it seems to me, unjustly, forgetting that if they knew me as I know myself they would condemn me much more, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If souls can suffer alongside, and I hardly know it, because the spirit of discernment is not in me, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If the praise of others elates me and their blame depresses me; if I cannot rest under misunderstanding without defending myself; if I love to be loved more than to love, to be served more than to serve, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I crave hungrily to be used to show the way of liberty to a soul in bondage, instead of caring only that it be delivered; if I nurse my disappointment when I fail, instead of asking that to another the word of release may be given, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I do not forget about such a trifle as personal success, so that it never crosses my mind, or if it does, is never given room there; if the cup of flattery tastes sweet to me, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If in the fellowship of service I seek to attach a friend to myself, so that others are caused to feel unwanted; if my friendships do not draw others deeper in, but are ungenerous (to myself, for myself), then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I refuse to allow one who is dear to me to suffer for the sake of Christ, if I do not see such suffering as the greatest honour that can be offered to any follower of the Crucified, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I slip into the place that can be filled by Christ alone, making myself the first necessity to a soul instead of leading it to fasten upon Him, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If my interest in the work of others is cool; if I think in terms of my own special work; if the burdens of others are not my burdens too, and their joys mine, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I wonder why something trying is allowed, and press for prayer that it may be removed; if I cannot be trusted with any disappointment, and cannot go on in peace under any mystery, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If the ultimate, the hardest, cannot be asked of me; if my fellows hesitate to ask it and turn to someone else, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I covet any place on earth but the dust at the foot of the Cross, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

***That which I know not, teach Thou me, O Lord, my God."***

There is no place in the church for cross-less Christianity - let's echo Amy's prayer for 2011.

Next month we will look at the things that determine gain or loss as we look at **'Inheritance and Personal Responsibility'** and learn a few lessons from those who have gone before us.

God bless you, thanks for listening; see you in the New Year – don't forget to visit our upgraded website – [www.psalm131.com](http://www.psalm131.com) there's lots coming up in 2011.

For those of you receiving the notes, here is a reminder from the teaching in July last year entitled 'A more excellent way' – please scroll down at this point.

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### **Fellowship with God:**

- The knowledge of his will: Job 22:21; *'Acquaint yourself now with Him (agree with God and show yourself to be conformed to His will) and be at peace: by that (you shall prosper and great good shall come to you.'* John 17:3) *'And this is eternal life (it means) to know (to perceive, recognize, become acquainted with, and understand) You, the only true and real God, and (likewise) to know Him, Jesus (as the) Christ (the Anointed One, the Messiah) Whom You have sent.'*
- Agreement with his purposes. Amos 3:3 *'Do two walk together except they make an appointment and have agreed?'*
- Mutual affection. Rom. 8:38, 39 *'For I am persuaded beyond doubt (am sure) that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things impending and threatening nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'*
- Enjoyment of his presence. Ps. 27:4 *'One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek, inquire for and (insistently) require: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord (in His presence) all the days of my life, to behold and gaze upon the beauty (the sweet attractiveness and the delightful loveliness) of the Lord and to meditate, consider and inquire in His temple.'*
- Conformity to his image. 1 John 2:6 *'Whoever says he abides in Him ought (as a personal debt) to walk and conduct himself in the same way in which He walked and conducted Himself.'*
- Participation in his happiness. John 17:13 *'And now I am coming to You: I say these things while I am still in the world, so that My joy may be made full and complete and perfect in them (that they may experience My delight fulfilled in them, that My enjoyment may be perfected in their own souls, that they may have My gladness within them, filling their hearts.*
- 1 John 1:3,4 *'What we have seen and (ourselves) heard, we are also telling you, so that you too may realize and enjoy fellowship as partners and partakers with us. And (this) fellowship that we have (which is a distinguishing mark of Christians) is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (the Messiah). And we are now writing these things to you so that our joy (in seeing you included) may be full (and your joy may be complete).'*

### **Fellowship of the saints with one another, all scriptures taken from the Amplified Bible:**

John 13:14 *'If I then, your Lord and Teacher (Master) have washed your feet, you ought (it is your duty, you are under obligation, you owe it) to wash one another's feet.'*

John 13:34 *'I give you a new commandment: that you should love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you too should love one another.'*

John 15:12, 17 *'This is My commandment: that you love one another (just) as I have loved you. (17) This is what I command you: that you love one another.'*

Romans 12:5,10,16 *'So we, numerous as we are, are one body in Christ (the Messiah) and individually we are parts one of another (mutually dependent on one another). (10) Love one another with brotherly affection (as members of one family) giving precedence and showing honour to one another. (16) Live in harmony with one another: do not be haughty (snobbish, high minded, exclusive) but readily adjust yourself to (people, things) and give yourselves to humble tasks. Never overestimate yourself or be wise in your own conceits.'*

Rom. 13:8; *'Keep out of debt and owe no man anything, except to love one another: for he who loves his neighbour (who practices loving others) has fulfilled the Law (relating to one's fellow men, meeting all its requirements.)*

Romans 14:13,19 *'Then let us no more criticize and blame and pass judgment on one another, but rather decide and endeavour never to put a stumbling block or an obstacle or hindrance in the way of a brother. (19) So let us then definitely aim for and eagerly pursue what makes for harmony and for mutual up building (edification and development) of one another.'*

Romans 15:5-7,14 *'Now may the God Who gives the power of patient endurance, (steadfastness), Who supplies encouragement, grant you to live in such mutual harmony and such full sympathy with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may (unanimously) with united hearts and one voice, praise and glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah). Welcome and receive (to your hearts) one another, then, even as Christ has welcomed and received you, for the glory of God (14) Personally I am satisfied about you, my brethren, that you yourselves are rich in goodness, amply filled with all (spiritual) knowledge and competent to admonish and counsel and instruct one another also.'*

Romans 16:16 *'Greet one another with a holy (consecrated) kiss. All the churches of Christ (the Messiah) wish to be remembered to you.'*

1 Corinthians 11:33 *'So then, my brothers, when you gather together to eat (the Lord's supper) wait for one another.'*

1 Corinthians 12:25 *'So that there should be no division or discord or lack of adaptation (of the parts of the body to each other) but the members all alike should have a mutual interest and care for one another.'*

Galatians 5:13,15,26 *'For you brethren were (indeed) called to freedom only (do not let your) freedom be an incentive to your flesh and an opportunity or excuse for selfishness but through love you should serve one another. (15) But if you bite and devour one another (in partisan strife) be careful that you (and your whole fellowship) are not consumed by one another. (26) Let us not become vainglorious and self-conceited, competitive and challenging and provoking and irritating to one another, envying and being jealous of one another.'*

Galatians 6:2 *'Bear (endure, carry) one another's burdens and troublesome moral faults and in this way fulfill and observe perfectly and law of Christ (the Messiah) and complete what is lacking (in your obedience to it).'*

Ephesians 4:2,25,32 *'Living as becomes you, with complete lowliness of mind (humility) and meekness (unselfishness, gentleness, mildness) with patience, bearing with one another and making allowances because you love one another. (25)Therefore, rejecting all falsity and being done now with it, let everyone express the truth with his neighbour, for we are all parts of one body and members of one another. (32) And become useful and helpful and kind to one another, tender hearted (compassionate, understanding, loving hearted) forgiving one another readily and freely.'*

Ephesians 5:21 *'Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.'*

Philippians 2:3 *'Do nothing from factional motives (through contentiousness, strife, selfishness, or for unworthy ends) or prompted by conceit and empty arrogance. Instead, in the true spirit of humility (lowliness of mind) let each regard the other as better than and superior to himself (thinking more highly of one another than you do of yourselves).'*

Colossians 3:9, 13 *'Do not lie to one another, for you have stripped off the old (unregenerate) self with its evil practices. (13) Be gentle and forbearing with one another and, if one has a difference (a grievance or complaint) against another, readily pardoning each other; even as the Lord has (freely) forgiven you, so must you also (forgive).'*

1 Thessalonians 3:12 *'And may the Lord make you to increase and excel and overflow in love for one another and for all people, just as we also do for you.'*

1 Thessalonians 4:9,18 *'But concerning brotherly love (for all other Christians) you have no need to have anyone write you, for you yourselves have been (personally) taught by God to love one another. (18) Therefore comfort and encourage one another with these words.'*

1 Thessalonians 5:11,15 *'Therefore encourage (admonish, exhort) one another and edify (strengthen and build up) one another, just as you are doing. (15) See that none of you repays another with evil for evil but always aim to show kindness and seek to do good to one another and to everybody.'*

Titus 3:3 *'For we also were once thoughtless and senseless, obstinate and disobedient, deluded and misled (we too were once slaves to all sorts of cravings and pleasures, wasting our days in malice and jealousy and envy, hateful (hated and detestable) and hating one another.'*

Hebrews 10:24, 25 *'And let us consider and give attentive, continuous care to watching over one another, studying how we may stir up (stimulate and incite) to love and helpful deeds and noble activities (25) not forsaking or neglecting to assemble together (as believers) as is the habit of some people, but admonishing (warning urging and encouraging) one another, and all the more faithfully as you see the day approaching.'*



James 4:11 *'My brethren, do not speak evil about or accuse one another. He that maligns a brother or judges his brother is maligning and criticizing the Law and judging the Law. But if you judge the Law, you are not a practicer of the Law, but a censor and judge of it.'*

James 5:9,16 *'Do not complain brethren, against one another so that you (yourselves) may not be judged. Look! The Judge is (already) standing at the very door. (16) Confess to one another therefore your faults (your slips, your false steps, your offences, your sins) and pray (also) for one another, that you may be healed and restored (to a spiritual tone of mind and heart). The earnest, (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available (dynamic in its working).'*

1 Peter 1:22 *'Since by your obedience to the Truth through the (Holy) Spirit you have purified your hearts for the sincere affection of the brethren (see that you) love one another fervently from a pure heart.'*

1 Peter 4:9 *'Practice hospitality to one another (those of the household of faith). (Be hospitable, be a lover of strangers, with brotherly affection for the unknown guests, the foreigners, the poor, and all others who come your way who are of Christ's body.) And (in each instance) do it ungrudgingly (cordially and graciously, without complaining, but as representing Him.)'*

1 Peter 5:5,14 *'Likewise, you who are younger and of lesser rank, be subject to the elders (the ministers and spiritual guides of the church) – (giving them due respect and yielding to their counsel). Clothe (apron) yourselves, all of you, with humility (as the garb of a servant, so that its covering cannot be stripped from you, with freedom from pride and arrogance) toward one another. For God sets Himself against the proud (the insolent, the overbearing, the disdainful, the presumptuous, the boastful) – (and He opposes, frustrates and defeats them) but gives grace (favour blessing) to the humble. (14) Salute one another with a kiss of love (the symbol of mutual affection).'*

1 John 1:7 *'But if we (really) are living and walking in the light, as He (Himself is in the light we have (true, unbroken) fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses (removes) us from all sin and guilt (keeps us cleansed from sin in all its forms and manifestations).'*

1 John 3:11,23 *'For this is the message (the announcement) which you have heard from the first, that we should love one another (23) And this is His order (His command, His injunction): that we should believe in (put our faith and trust in and adhere to and rely on) the name of His Son, Jesus Christ (the Messiah) and that we should love one another just as He has commanded us.'*

1 John 4:7,11,12 *'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is (springs) from God; and he who loves (his fellowmen) is begotten (born) of God and is coming (progressively) to know and understand God (to perceive and recognize and get a better and clearer knowledge of Him) (11) Beloved, if God loved us so (very much), we also ought to love one another (12) No man has at any time (yet) seen God. But if we love one another, God abides (lives and remains) in us and His love (that love which is essentially His) is brought to completion (to its full maturity, runs its full course, is perfected) in us!'*

2 John 5 *'And now, I beg you, lady (Cyria) not as if I were issuing a new charge (injunction or command), but (simply recalling to your mind) the one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.'*

**Conscience:**

Job 27:6;

Acts 23:1;

Acts 24:16;

Romans 2:14, 15;

Romans 9:1;

Romans 13:5

1 Corinthians 8:7, 9–13;

1 Corinthians 10:27–32;

2 Corinthians 1:12;

2 Corinthians 4:2;

2 Corinthians 5:11;

1 Timothy 1:5, 19;

1 Timothy 3:9;

1 Timothy 4:2

2 Timothy 1:3

Hebrews 9:14;

Hebrews 10:22;

Hebrews 13:18;

1 Peter 2:19;

1 Peter 3:16, 21;