

## THE PASSAGE OVER

Conversion from death to life

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# 1. The passage



Any traveller who has made a dangerous crossing will know the feeling of making it to the other side. Some readers would describe their conversion to Jesus Christ in these same terms. Reaching a place of relationship with God, through Christ, is indeed the high point of a journey.

In another sense, the whole of life is a 'passage', as when we book a ship's passage to a foreign shore. The seas and their variable faces, traversed by stalwart vessels, provide a storehouse of symbols to describe the voyage of life.

This is a book about Christian conversion, in which we describe the journey from death to life as 'the passage over'. Is conversion a short, overnight transition, or is it a lifelong expedition? We shall need to approach this question slowly, but can begin by saying that it is both – and yet neither is completely true, if we examine the Scriptures closely. Certainly, there is often some kind of crisis meeting with

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Christ – a moment in time when the soul of a man passes from darkness to light. Many of us will recall the conversion experience of Saul – who became the apostle Paul – struck down from his mount by a bright light from heaven. In one sense, he made the passage over on that very day. Is this the whole truth of salvation? Is this what we all need to pursue? Or must we endure the whole passage of life before we can enter the safe harbour of God’s promised land?

These few reflections set the scene for examining the New Testament Scriptures, particularly the teachings of the apostle John, when he speaks about ‘passing from death to life’.<sup>1</sup> Let us look at how he approaches the matter. Helpfully, John doesn’t refer to a momentary *crisis* of conversion, or to a *whole-of-life* journey. So when exactly *do* we make the passage over from death to life? Let us read what John says.

‘We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren ...’.<sup>2</sup> The much-read Pulpit Commentary quotes the rest of the verse, and then adds its own poetic reflection: ‘He that loves not, abides in death: he has not made *the passage over*’.<sup>3</sup>

How do we know we have made the passage over? We know because we love. If we don’t, or can’t, love others, then we are still abiding in death, and have not made the crossing. We should bear in mind that the Scriptures don’t refer to a ‘passage’ in the symbolic way that we are suggesting. John simply speaks of ‘passing’ from death to life – which, technically speaking, could be either a short or a long passage. Our focus here is on the matter of ‘knowing’, both in the positive aspect, as well as the negative. We know, John says, ‘that we *have passed over* from death to life because we love the brethren’. We can know. We will know! How will we know? We will know by the fact that we love all the ‘brethren’, the family of Jesus Christ. And on the

1. 1 John 3:14    2. *ibid.*    3. Pulpit Commentary on 1 John 3:14. Electronic Database, © 2003, BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.

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negative side, John adds that the one who *doesn't* love is still abiding in death. He hasn't made the passage over. So on the one hand, we will *know* that we *have* made the passage over if we arrive at a condition described as 'love for the brethren'. On the other hand, we will just as surely know that we have *not* made the passage over, if we find that we do not, and can not, love the brethren.

So this is our proposition, and the one that John is putting forward. Regardless of our crisis experiences with Christ, on the one hand, and regardless of the length of our Christian commitment, on the other, we have only made the passage over if we have arrived at 'love of the brethren'!

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He who loves has made the passage over  
from death to life.

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Immediately then, we are faced with a number of considerations. What does it mean to 'love the brethren'? Who are these 'brethren'? All this can unfold shortly. But let us stay with the first point; we *can* know! We can know here and now, that we have been converted from death to life.

Now it's easy to see how our study will need to develop. What is conversion? How is an individual converted? Why are some converted and some not? How shall we know if others are converted or not? Is this just a simple subject? In truth, this is a very deep ocean to fathom. The Scriptures are vast and detailed on the whole matter. That's why our starting point is so important. We *can* know that we *have* passed over, even if we don't really know *how*. This is very helpful. The *evidence*, as John says, is that we love the brethren.

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### What is love?

Naturally, there will be much to say on the subject of love. What is love? What does loving the Christian brotherhood mean? Doesn't everybody have love, at least in some form? Is everybody a godly person, to some degree? Is our subject a lot of words about nothing?

And regarding conversion, is this an instant thing? Do I believe, become full of love, and that's it? Or is conversion a progressive journey, a lifetime of severe testing? And if so, when will I know that I have passed from death to life?

A brief glance around us at the landscape of Christian faith tells us one thing. There are many who, although they have made a start on the Christian journey, have *not* made the passage over – that's if we take John's words seriously. We know this because there are so many believers who do not live in Christian relationship in the way that Jesus taught. There is no evidence of a fundamental change in the way they live. And assuming that we leave all that for God to be the judge, we are nevertheless facing a real challenge, right here and now, for ourselves! Jesus said that if we love one another, we are to *lay down our lives for another*, in the *same* way that He did for us. This stops us in our tracks. Is this the love of the brethren? Is this the challenge – to 'love one another' as He loved us?<sup>4</sup>

John said, '*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*'<sup>5</sup> So that's clear. But how will we ever achieve this? What does it mean to love in such a way that we lay down our lives? Are we to die, physically, or visibly suffer for others in self-sacrificing ways? Is this how we know that we have inherited eternal life? Is this the proof of

4. John 13:34    5. 1 John 3:16 NIV

being converted? This is sounding more like passing from life to death – not the other way around.

We have much to do here. Clearly, we shall need to examine conversion itself under the microscope. What is a Christian convert, in real terms? Are we talking about someone who merely *believes* in Jesus Christ? Is it really true that a meagre act of verbalising belief in Jesus can make all the difference between eternal hell and eternal heaven? What possible difference can believing in Jesus Christ make? Is that really all God requires to shift us from judgement to eternal life?

Here is the confounding point. On the surface, believing seems to make some difference to some people, but not to others. In fact, believing in Christ seems to turn some people into self-righteous power-mongers and murderers. Does it matter what we believe? And if love is to be the evidence of conversion, what are we to say about all the converts, to all kinds of religions, who become loving people?

### Eternal life?

The matter we have raised is linked to eternal life. John says, ‘These things I have written to you who *believe* in the name of the Son of God, that you may *know* that you have *eternal life*’.<sup>6</sup> This is the crux of our subject. What is eternal life? Will some live for ever, and some not? What are heaven and hell? Is there really an everlasting punishment? According to John, it is possible to *know* that we have eternal life – that we have passed from death to life.

This is where we will begin our deliberation. Most of us will have thought, just as it appears in the New Testament, that a convert is one who *believes* in Jesus Christ. But we now discover something else entirely – that a convert is someone who *loves* the brethren. The evidence of Christian conversion, of having passed over from death to

6. 1 John 5:13

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life, is that we ‘love the brethren’, the brotherhood of Christ. This is our focus. Even if the pathway *to* conversion is a more difficult subject, at least the evidence *of* conversion is clear. And once again, on the negative side, the one who has not arrived at this new life, described as ‘sincere love of the brethren’, is still abiding in death, and has not made the passage over.<sup>7</sup>

We are really talking here, in plain terms, about arriving at a corporate and relational view of salvation. In other words, salvation revolves around relationship in Christ, not just around individual belief. This is a significant shift of emphasis compared to traditional views of salvation, in that most deliberation on Christian conversion is focused on a sort of individualistic and formularised view of salvation. The question has been posed, and then answered in many a gospel sermon, ‘Sirs, *what must I do to be saved?*’ – just as the prison-keeper cried out to Paul and Silas, when they were miraculously delivered from prison by an earthquake.<sup>8</sup> And what answer did they give him? ‘*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.*’<sup>9</sup>

### Simply ‘believe’

And so the world over, through ages and nations, the call has gone out, both from genuine messengers who have loved the lost, and from self-serving peddlers of the gospel as well, to believe and be saved. And the simplicity of it all has left multitudes speechless with praise, as Christ has come and filled their tortured hearts with light, just as He did for the apostle Paul on the Damascus road.

It seems simple enough, and for many, it has been. Of course, equally, the apparent simplicity has left others unconverted, deluded and presumptuous. They *believe*, but it makes no difference to their

7. 1 Pet 1:22    8. Acts 16:30    9. Acts 16:31

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lives. Unbelievers then look on in quiet or vocal cynicism. Does God really accept people because they express a fragment of belief in Jesus Christ? Is He so simple-minded as to overlook obvious corruption, just because glib words of 'faith' have tumbled from insincere lips?

### A clear view of the passage

Now we can see why our study is so helpful. We can find answers to all these questions, both spoken and unspoken. Let 'believing' stand for a moment, while we heed John's words. It is when we have journeyed *all the way over* to a condition described as 'love of the brethren' that we *know* our passage is secured. This is the uncluttered view of what we mean by the 'passage'. We can arrive, and must arrive, at a place of mature Christian commitment, where we are not 'babes', 'carnal', 'tossed to and fro', partial or hypocritical. Instead, we are simple, sincere, kindly affectionate, hospitable, bearing with one another, forgiving one another.<sup>10</sup> For *without* love, in one word from the apostle Paul, we are 'nothing'.<sup>11</sup> It is vital that we journey from the isolated shores of selfish belief and personal alienation to find a secure berth in Christ, where we 'hold fast' to one another, as fellows in His household, living stones in His temple, where we are 'members one of another', serving one another, and abounding in fervent love for one another.<sup>12</sup> 'And above all things', according to the apostles, this is the beginning, essence and sum total of the Christian message.<sup>13</sup> This removes all the early mist, and ushers in the clear shining of the morning light. Have we made the passage over?

Achieving this condition is what John calls 'passing' from death to life. It's a passage, a cross-over to a life in which we now abide,<sup>14</sup> a

10. 1 Cor 3:1; Eph 4:14; Jas 3:17; 2 Cor 1:12; Rom 12:9-13; Col 3:13 11. 1 Cor 13:2

12. Heb 10:23-25; Eph 2:19; 1 Pet 2:5; Eph 4:25; Gal 5:13; 1 Thess 3:12; 1 Pet 1:22

13. 1 John 4:2,3 14. 1 Pet 4:8; 2 John 5

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fellowship in the light.<sup>15</sup> It's a practice,<sup>16</sup> a commandment,<sup>17</sup> a unique confession over against the contrary spirit of Antichrist.<sup>18</sup> And we can surely know, as John asserts in all three of his letters, that we have received the very love and life of God Himself. We have been born of God, born to *love*, in the same powerful love that Christ demonstrated.<sup>19</sup>

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We can arrive, and must arrive, at a place  
of commitment to relationship.

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The truth is like so. There must be a point in our lives where we are firmly docked and anchored to the fellowship of brethren of Christ, 'perfectly joined' and 'knit together'.<sup>20</sup> No, we are not 'already perfected',<sup>21</sup> for we are still discovering sin, confessing it and being cleansed.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, we are 'mature',<sup>23</sup> and walking in Him, rooted, grounded and steadfast in love, not easily 'moved away' from the gospel.<sup>24</sup>

Life will still go on, and other journeys, voyages and challenges are approaching. But there is a fundamental point of arrival that the apostles of the Scriptures are urging us to discover. This is crucial, because too many 'believers' today, in truth, know that they are becalmed in one-man vessels, running aground in shallow backwaters, or wrecked on uncharted outcrops. Sadly, whilst this is happening, an ark of safety – the body of Christ, with clear bearings amidst the storm of uncertainty – is sailing right past.

Yes, it is a time of restoration. The Scriptural details and patterns for successful seafaring are being uncovered and proclaimed. A

15. 1 John 2:10 16. 1 John 1:6,7 17. 1 John 3:10 18. 1 John 3:23 19. 1 John 4:7  
20. 1 Cor 1:10; Eph 4:16 21. Phil 3:12 22. 1 John 1:8,9 23. Phil 3:15 24. Col 2:6,7;  
Eph 3:17; Col 1:23

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thorough inquiry into all the spiritual voyages of history, both failed and successful, is tabled in front of us. It should be a straightforward matter for us to look back at all the maps and find the crossings that *were* safely negotiated. Then we ought to be able to plot our course in restoration so that the emerging body of Christ, and its many faithful families, will safely make the passage over.

### Looking across the passage

As expressed above, it is important to examine history, and observe the vessels of salvation, large and small – the sorties, ventures, movements and expeditions – that have set out across this symbolic ‘passage’. We shall sum these up with reference to four eras of history, and aim to determine, in each case, whether the converts arrived at the destination. We shall refer to the *institutional* era,<sup>25</sup> the *Reformation* era,<sup>26</sup> the great *evangelical* period,<sup>27</sup> and the present era of *restoration*. While it’s a very simplistic approach, it assists our inquiry if we associate four key words with these eras: *works*, *faith*, *conversion* and *fellowship*. *Works* links with the institutional era, *faith* with the Reformation era, *conversion* with the evangelical period and, finally, *fellowship* with the restoration movement. Our aim here, in taking this abbreviated view, is to highlight the matter of loving relationship (fellowship), as in the fourth case, in contrast to the earlier three eras. Naturally, while these four are chosen as *typical* of each era, they are also selected to reflect the shortfalls, and thereby to indicate an

25. Here we refer to the institutional Roman Catholic and the various orthodox churches which succeeded the apostolic era and took prominent place in history until the Reformation. 26. 1500s – 1700s: linked with Martin Luther’s revolt against the practices of the Roman Catholic church in Germany, and incorporating the flow-on reformation movements in other countries. 27. 1800s – 2000s: the evangelical movement includes the documented Great Awakening and associated revivals, including the Pentecostal movement, in which ‘evangelical’ churches were those affirming the preaching of the gospel (Gr. *euangelion*) to all men, as compared with the ritual form of traditional churches.

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upward progression across time. Consequently, these limited designations do not justly reflect all the positive aspects of the movements.

### Works – institutional era

We shall relate *works* to the *institutional* era, simply to highlight the emphasis placed by the orthodox churches, in that era, on rites, sacraments, sacred duties, liturgies, traditions, and religious *works*. Inevitably, and without prejudice, our conclusion is that the vessel of collective salvation, intending to transport seekers from death to life, did not translate the pilgrims very far at all from their existing cultural, religious and superstitious practices. Of course, in the interests of our study, once again, we are guilty of describing the Christian history of 1000 years as a single, all-inclusive voyage – when, in fact, countless individuals *were* genuinely converted and *did* make the passage over. It's obvious however, upon observing institutional Christianity today, that then, as now, many travellers were only nominal adherents, and not truly converted at all.

### Faith – Reformation era

Simply speaking, Christian history advanced to the *Reformation* era upon the assertion by Martin Luther and others that salvation was not obtained by works and sacraments, but given as a free gift through *faith*. In symbolic terms, we could say that the Reformation moved the gospel ship forward from a position of institutionalised good works. The coordinates of the reformed position focused on the free gift of righteousness through faith<sup>28</sup> – a position largely established from the 'chart' of the book of Romans.

28. See Romans chapters 3-5.

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### Conversion – evangelical era

Despite the advances made in the Reformation, the Christianity of the Lutheran (Martin Luther) and other Protestant churches (eg U Zwingli, J Calvin), remained fairly institutional. The succeeding movement referred to as the ‘evangelical’ era (1800s-2000s), emphasised the preaching of the gospel (Gr. *euangelion*) for individual *conversion*, as compared with the ritual creeds of traditional churches. To highlight our theme, it is important to realise that the evangelical ‘awakening’ popularised the individual experience of salvation, doubtless to offset the continuing defaulting of believers toward religious traditions and institutions.

So the picture we draw from research into the archives of Christian endeavour, in general, is that the Roman Catholic and orthodox emphasis on *works*, in the early centuries of the church, did little to retain or recover the life spoken of by the New Testament apostles. The shift from ‘works’ to *‘faith’* then carried converts a little further across the passage, and further still with the evangelical emphasis on individual *conversion*.

### Fellowship – restoration era

Now our point is that the *restoration* focus of this current era is hopefully delivering us to an emphasis on corporate relationship and *fellowship* – the love of the brethren. This analysis does not in any way deny or belittle the grace of God made known in other ages, where multitudes of believers made the passage over, as a result of, and in spite of, the various tides of church history. What this review does is to direct us more firmly to the immortal truth of the New Testament – to John’s words in particular. True conversion, we propose, will carry us all the way across the passage – from institutional practice (*works*), beyond theological ‘reform’ (*faith*), beyond individualistic confessions

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of salvation (gospel), to a commitment to the corporate life of Christ (fellowship). This latter development links with making the passage over to the love of the brethren.

### The dangerous crossing

The 'nautical' danger in the earlier cases is that institutional adherence and reformed doctrine can leave us becalmed, and evangelical doctrine can leave us marooned in independence. We learn something similar from the first two scenarios. Positional creeds and doctrinal reforms allow the suggestion that mankind has some inherent goodness, remaining from the Fall,<sup>29</sup> that can propel us across the passage. In the third case, the danger is that individual confessions of being 'converted', or 'born again', can produce as many varieties of independent Christianity as there are people. In all, we are left wondering what great *works* we need to demonstrate, how much *faith* we need to have, or how many critical, *conversion* experiences we need to accumulate. There is no passage over to the love of the brethren.

These earlier maps, preserved in the museums of Christian history, with their statements of dogma, creed and doctrine, have left generations of people to be their *own* reference points in crossing the passage. Then their belief in good deeds, or assorted tenets, or their claim to some deep conversion experience has left them captive in the religious prison described in Romans chapter seven – doing what they did not will to do, and willing to do what they cannot do.<sup>30</sup>

Here is the problem. If it is just 'me' doing the right things (*works*), 'me' believing (Reformation) or 'me' that is born again (evangelicalism), then I will be *aping* Christ, and the new creation, without having shifted across to be part *of* the new creation.

29. The 'Fall' is the traditionally accepted reference to mankind's 'fall' into sin at the time of Adam and Eve's disobedience. 30. Rom 7:19

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The new creation is Christ. We will know we have passed over when 'Christ is all, and *in all*' – when we love the collective community of the brethren of Christ.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly this transition to a converted life, resulting in genuine Christian relationship, is a troubled strait indeed. We know this is true because there are countless believers who have begun the journey but have been shipwrecked in the channel. The New Testament Scriptures bear this out. It is not enough to make a start in the Christian faith. We must 'hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end'.<sup>32</sup>

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True conversion will carry us all the way  
across the passage.

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The point of great encouragement is that if we *can* find true conversion, and can *learn* how to love 'in deed and truth', and not just in 'word or in tongue', then we can actually know that we are of the truth; '*by this we know* that we are of the *truth*, and shall *assure* our hearts before Him'.<sup>33</sup>

We *can* know that we are of the truth. Of all the statements in Scripture about what 'we know', there is just one that speaks of *knowing* that we have passed from death to life. So we shall focus on this. We *may* know! We *can* know! We do not need to be living in uncertainty, waiting to face the judgement seat of Christ. Alienation, even with a log-book full of individual, religious anecdotes, is proof that we are abiding in death. Love for the brethren, in all that this may mean, is the proof that we have eternal life, here and now.

31. Col 3:11 32. Heb 3:14 33. 1 John 3:18,19

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### Conversion

The resistance in many quarters of Christendom today toward sound Christian living is making it important to consider this whole question. How do we really know we have found ‘Christ’, and not an imitation of Christian life? There’s a big difference between a real sea voyage and an imaginary journey in a model craft. So how do we know? And *when* can we know? How long is it before we know, assuredly, that we have passed from death to life? Do we know in an instant? Do we never really know? Is conversion supposed to be an *instant* change – a burst of light shining into darkness? Wasn’t this Paul’s experience when he was thrown to the ground?<sup>34</sup> What about the repentant thief on the cross beside Jesus who was told he’d be in Paradise with the Saviour, that very day?<sup>35</sup>

Yes, indeed, there *are* crisis points in the process of Christian salvation, and doubtless there *are* those who make a late and desperate crossing. However, we also take heed of the many warnings about *continuing* in faith: ‘But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having *saved* the people out of the land of Egypt, *afterward* destroyed those who did not believe’.<sup>36</sup> This is a very confronting matter. The Lord may save us, but we can still be destroyed on the journey. We can set out from the shore, but still perish. There are many such Scriptures, urging that we continue, hold fast, walk worthily and endure.<sup>37</sup> Are we therefore to live a lifetime of tortuous endeavour, plagued with uncertainty, always trying harder to measure up to the righteousness of God?

No indeed. But let us allow these questions to set the scene for our inquiry. Without a doubt, as for the apostle Paul, there *is* a moment, with many such moments to follow, in which the word of salvation

34. Acts 9:3,4   35. Luke 23:43   36. Jude 5   37. Col 1:23; 1 Thess 2:12

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breaks through into our hearts. A new life begins. At the same time, we cannot deny the lessons of Scripture that we *continue* to hear his voice 'today', and endure 'to the end' if we are to be saved.<sup>38</sup> 'If we endure, we shall also *reign* with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.'<sup>39</sup>

In the matter of comparing an instant salvation with a lifelong pilgrimage John's words about love are a clear relief. There is an anchorage for us, across the passage, here and now.

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This transition to a converted life  
is a troubled strait indeed.

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At the beginning of our Christian conversion, the whole matter seems individual and personal. And in one sense it is. But it cannot remain that way. Immediately we need to make the passage over to a new life of relationship amidst the brethren of Christ. And we shall know we have arrived when we are living in love. Then we can *assure* our hearts, John says.<sup>40</sup> We can have boldness in the day of judgement.<sup>41</sup> 'By this we *know*', 'we *know* that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren'.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps now we are apprehending the point. John doesn't treat the Christian faith as a one-time-crisis, or as a lifetime journey. He deals with the matter as a 'passing' from death to life, a passage over to a way of life that *presents its own proof* that we do have eternal life *abiding* in us.<sup>43</sup> Then we are to live in this condition – as a lifetime commitment. We live in love; we abide in Him; we walk in the light – continually.

So the questions are not: 'Did we start? Do we believe? When did we become Christians? How long have we been attending a Christian

38. Heb 3:7; Matt 24:13 39. 2 Tim 2:12 40. 1 John 3:19 41. 1 John 4:17  
42. 1 John 3:19,14 43. 1 John 3:15

## 1. *The passage*

church? What good deeds have we done?' John approaches the matter from the other end. We may have *set out* on the pathway, but have we made it *across* the passage? 'He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.'<sup>44</sup> We could put it this way. The onus is not *on God* to save us, just because we study the Scriptures and quote some minimal formula for salvation, such as: 'He who believes and is baptised will be saved'.<sup>45</sup> We cannot snatch at these verses, true as they are, and make them into formulas. Rather, as John shows, the onus is on us to live a *saved* life, and to demonstrate that His life resides within us, in the most fundamental way – by loving the brethren, by living virtuously in a tangible, Christian community. If we do not demonstrate this basic quality of the life of God, then we are abiding in death – it's as simple as that.

### Right of passage – taking the passage

We could express it this way: Christ gives us '*right of passage*', but we actually have to *take* the passage, and *make* the passage over – all the way over to where our lives are devoted to the love of the brethren. This is not an instant achievement, and it needn't take a whole lifetime. In the case of the disciple Peter, who meant well but still denied his Master, Jesus said to him, 'When you are *converted*, strengthen your *brethren*'.<sup>46</sup> And it was not until Jesus met him again on the sea-shore, after the resurrection, that Peter was genuinely converted and committed his life to loving and feeding the sheep (the other brethren). 'Do you love Me? ... feed My sheep.'<sup>47</sup>

Plainly, then, although we begin the pilgrimage at a moment of divine illumination and new birth, we *must* make the passage across, and we *can* do so, to a *life of active love that is the very living evidence that we*

44. 1John 2:6 45. Mark 16:16 46. Luke 22:32 KJV 47. John 21:15-17

## THE PASSAGE OVER

*are born of God.* John deals with both aspects of the passage – the right of passage, and the passage itself. He speaks about our new birth and our new life of sincere love. The beginning point is that we are to be born of God, by the seed of the word of God.<sup>48</sup> Then both the power and the potential of this initial seed of the gospel become an important focus. Helpfully, the apostle of love beams out a clear course for us to follow. He does not approach the matter like the great debates over the minimum for being saved. He simply says, ‘He that does not love his brother abides in death’.<sup>49</sup>

### By this we know

This is not how most of us like to consider the Christian proposition. We like to think that *if* we have begun, then we *have* eternal life. And perhaps we cherish the entries in our personal diaries, the references to the high points of individual awakening. Then, like so many before us, we board the great ship of history, and fill our sails with the prevailing breeze of religious optimism. We set off across the passage but when storms of uncertainty break on us, we find ourselves heeling to and fro. We are surprised by our faithless reactions, as stinging sprays of uncertainty wash across our bows. We ride the surging swell by grasping for gospel promises, clinging on to safe tenets of doctrine like a life-raft. We don’t *know* that we have eternal life. Is this our experience? Have we made the passage over?

How calmly John addresses this shaky style of religious living. What does he say? ‘And by this *we know* that He abides in us’;<sup>50</sup> ‘by this *we know* that we abide in Him, and He in us’.<sup>51</sup> ‘By this *we know* that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.’<sup>52</sup> Here is the anchorage. We can know. We can

48. 1John 3:9    49. 1John 3:14    50. 1John 3:24    51. 1John 4:13    52. 1John 5:2,3

## 1. *The passage*

assure our hearts. We hold fast to relationship. We may not lose our grip on sincere love for one another. To use another of Jesus' pictures of Christian community, we must abide in the vine.<sup>53</sup>

And this is the test we can apply to ourselves, according to John's teaching. In fact, he is quite provocative – 'If we say ... if we say ... if we say';<sup>54</sup> and in chapter two: 'He who says, "I know Him" '; 'He who says he abides in Him ...'; 'He who says he is in the light ...'.<sup>55</sup> What are we claiming? Are we genuine? If we say we've found the truth, but don't love one another, we are liars.<sup>56</sup> *He who says ...* needs to be true to what he says. Perhaps the words of John could be translated into our modern vernacular, 'Don't tell me about your wondrous conversion, your zealous youth and your length of service. It's no use claiming that you have passed from death to life as veterans of some forgotten voyage. If you really *are* converted, then you'll know it, and so will others. And if there's no proof, then you're fooling yourself.'

So here's the point. Are we living in genuine Christian community? And on this sober note, we are reminded of Paul's words, 'For *many walk ...* who are [now] the *enemies* of the cross of Christ'.<sup>57</sup> So it's true. Many start the voyage, but do not make the passage over.

53. John 15:1-3   54. 1John 1:6,8,10   55. 1John 2:4,6,9   56. 1John 4:20   57. Phil 3:18

## 2. Sighting the passage



We need time, and will take time, to digest this whole matter. We need some clear compass bearings to sight our passage over. Just how does the process of conversion take effect? How do ‘old things’ pass away and ‘all things’ become new?<sup>58</sup> Clearly, there are a number of dangers that confront all of us in traversing this passage.

### Failed crossings

We may commence the Christian journey only to be driven back by opposing head winds before we even make it to the open sea. Or we may become becalmed, so to speak, by directionless doctrines, particularly those that are positional and presumptuous in nature. We can be marooned on islands of independence, never finding the love and fellowship of which John speaks. Perhaps some set off on the wrong tack, or are forced off course. And the nautical illustrations go

58. 2 Cor 5:17

## 2. Sighting the passage

on further. The New Testament speaks of our faith being shipwrecked, and of encountering false brethren who are like 'reefs'<sup>59</sup> in the midst of our new community life.<sup>60</sup> Who are these reefs? These are the lawless believers who harbour subversive agendas, contrary opinions and hidden motives that become like deadly reefs to unwary travellers. Community life poses many dangers, but we may not drift back to the self-assured alienation of our own 'position'.

The Scriptures are full of this theme. A great proportion of the apostles' letters are directed to the problem of reverting to fleshly living – going *back* to being carnal. 'Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?'<sup>61</sup> It's clear: there is a passage from death to life – and we are either living or we are dying. 'For if you live according to the flesh you will die.'<sup>62</sup>

### Redeemed, then sold back

The gospel proclaims that we can be 'redeemed' – purchased from the curse of death.<sup>63</sup> But, sadly, although we've been *bought* back at such a price, we can be 'sold under sin', Paul tells us, when we become carnal.<sup>64</sup> To become 'carnally minded is death'.<sup>65</sup> Do we, as newborn believers, begin in the Spirit, with a sincere love of the brethren, only to drift back across the passage, back into death? Are we abiding in love, or abiding in death? For all our good beginnings, and our length of Christian experience, are we in fact reviving the 'old man' and his fleshly desires, which should be 'put off'?<sup>66</sup>

It is to this problem that our study is directed. How is it that we, or our family members, never arrived at love of the brethren, when we have believed, repented, been baptised, prayed, worshipped and served

59. Lit. Greek – a rocky reef or ledge in the sea; also translated 'spots'

60. 1 Tim 1:19; Jude 4,12 61. Gal 3:3 62. Rom 8:13 63. 1 Pet 1:18; Gal 3:13

64. Rom 7:14 65. Rom 8:6 66. Col 3:9

in the church? What individual methodology have we substituted for relationship? What inner beliefs have we installed in place of Christ? How may we now revise our gospel, and find a lighthouse in the midst of darkness?

### Sincere love of the brethren

Let us pause to consider what sincere love of the brethren actually means – particularly if this is the evidence of eternal life. Of course, this is such a large subject that the study ahead of us will do very little to plumb the depths. But to begin with, ‘the brethren’ are simply the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, those who are born of the one heavenly Father, like Himself. As we are adopted sons of the same Father, as His joint-heirs, He is not ashamed to call us brethren.<sup>67</sup> Taking another Scripture reference, we also know that His ‘brethren’ are those who do the will of His Father. ‘For whoever does the *will* of My Father in heaven is My *brother* and sister and mother’.<sup>68</sup>

There is also a more specific sense in which John uses the term, ‘brethren’. From the beginning of his letters, John speaks about fellowship with ‘us’, of those who ‘hear us’, and of those who ‘went out from us’.<sup>69</sup> Who are the ‘us’ to whom he is referring? To John himself, plus all the believers? Yes, at the first level, the ‘us’ can be taken to be a reference to the brethren in general. Later, however, we read of *specific brethren* who were received, supported and sent forward – or in some cases *not* received, by dissident leaders like Diotrophes.<sup>70</sup> In this second case, the nominated ‘brethren’ were a travelling group of leaders. Let us consider the situation that John was addressing.

After vibrant beginnings, the churches led by John and the other apostles were being corrupted by false doctrine. It was becoming necessary to exhort the churches to discern ‘who was who’, in case

67. Rom 8:17; Heb 2:11 68. Matt 12:50 69. 1 John 1:3; 4:6; 2:19 70. 3 John 5-10

## 2. Sighting the passage

unwary souls should think that every adherent was one of ‘the brethren’. In addition, there would have been a great many seekers, just as there are today, who were hearing the sound of the gospel, but who had not yet made the passage over. So here is the point. Within the *general* community, John was identifying those ‘brethren’ who provided a *foundation* to which other converts could be joined.

So the term, ‘the brethren’, can also be applied to the overseeing groups of elders and deacons, across the churches, who provide a foundation to which others can become connected.

Overall then, as churches develop, ‘the brethren’ are the quorum of those who *have* made the passage over, whose sincere fellowship provides the ‘pillar and ground’ upon which *others* can be joined.<sup>71</sup> In this regard, Paul speaks of the apostles, elders and brethren as the authority base from which letters were written to other churches.<sup>72</sup>

There is a fellowship we are to join. John writes his heart-felt appeal, ‘that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ’.<sup>73</sup>

### Laying down our lives

On the subject of *love* for the brethren, we should now understand love as something a great deal more than a sentimental preference for Christian friendships over other friendships. We are not just *kindly disposed* toward our fellow Christians and leaders.

Two verses further on from our key verse, John tells us how to recognise love. ‘By *this* we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to *lay down our lives* for the brethren.’<sup>74</sup> John makes a link between love and laying down our lives. This is the first and utmost key. Love is not just loyal attachment. Love is

71. 1 Tim 3:15    72. Acts 15:23    73. 1 John 1:3    74. 1 John 3:16

demonstrated by laying our lives down for one another, esteeming others above ourselves, being poured out, spending and being spent.<sup>75</sup>

The attitude of 'laying life down' calls for a great degree of understanding. Simply, however, Christ is the example. The life that He laid down, and the lives we lay down, are referred to by the *same* Greek word – *psuche*. 'He laid down His life [Gr. *psuche*] for us. And we also ought to *lay down our lives* [Gr. *psuche*].'<sup>76</sup> Leaving a deeper analysis until later in our study, let us just say that the lives we lay down are our complete, essential, sentient persons – and not just our abilities, goods, gifts and ministries. And let us say two other basic things. Laying life down is not just choosing some acts of self-denial. Nor is it simply a matter of seeking the quickest way to sacrifice our mortal lives for others, in a good cause. And there's one more preliminary note. According to the verse we've just quoted: 'And we *ought* to lay down *our* lives,' laying life down is not to be an imitation *of* Christ, but it is to be in the very same spirit and attitude *as* Christ. This is where our entire subject arrives at its pivot point.

Are we capable of laying life down in the same manner as Christ, or not? If not, then we have to ask what the Scriptures mean: 'This is My commandment, that you love one another *as I have loved you*. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends'.<sup>77</sup> If, as these verses say, we *are* commanded to love and lay life down like Christ, then how, we ask, is this possible?

### Self preserving – or self-giving

The first thing to reflect upon is this. There is no power in ourselves to lay life down. Yes, we are capable of remarkable acts of self-sacrifice in the defence of loved ones, in pursuit of causes, and in life-threatening conflicts and wars. However, acts of simple giving,

75. Phil 2:3,17; 2 Cor 12:15    76. 1 John 3:16    77. John 15:12-14

## 2. *Sighting the passage*

sincere love, patient forbearance and genuine forgiveness, without any self-serving or self-defence, challenge us utterly, and expose in us, the most arrogant and aggressive pursuit of self-interest. It is true as Satan said in accusing Job, 'Skin for skin! Yes, *all* that a man has he will give for his life'.<sup>78</sup> In truth, we are desperate to preserve our lives. And as Hebrews says, the 'fear of death' places us in 'bondage' for the whole of our lifetime.<sup>79</sup>

Fear! We cannot love, because we are afraid. Why? Because fear links with self-preservation. Fear protects self, whereas love gives self away. That's why genuine love retains no fear, as John says.<sup>80</sup> Sincere love is the giving of our very 'selves', as a total disposition, just as it is with God Himself. And now we find the key. This kind of love is only possible if we are born *of* God Himself. 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who *loves* is *born of* God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.'<sup>81</sup>

There has to be an entirely new birth, and new nature, before we can truly love.

### How is it possible to lay life down?

Let us head in this direction: we conclude that the capacity of God, the ability to love in a manner that lays life down, has to be *received*. And in this regard, we shall make a most remarkable discovery. The Son of God Himself received this kind of life, this kind of capacity, as a command from His Father. Let us read carefully: 'I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This *command* I have *received* from My Father.'<sup>82</sup> We embark here upon the most deliberate and insightful examination of the relationship between the Father and Son. Perhaps we are approaching the most revealing statement on why

78. Job 2:4,5    79. Heb 2:15    80. 1 John 4:18    81. 1 John 4:7,8    82. John 10:18

## THE PASSAGE OVER

everything is as it is. Remember, Jesus is speaking as having already undertaken to be the ‘Son of the Father’, the ‘Beloved Son’, the ‘Son of His love’.<sup>83</sup> He is now the Son of Man, the Son in the flesh. He is speaking as the one ‘who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard *equality with God* a thing to be *grasped*, but *emptied Himself*, taking the form of a bondservant’.<sup>84</sup>

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The ability to love and lay life down  
has to be received.

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There are some obvious things being said here, but let us look beyond the obvious. We are confronted with the fact that God is not merely three stationary persons, with common, incommunicable attributes. Something took place among Themselves, in the dimension of Their own ‘being’ – the Father *being* the Father, the Son *being* the Son and the Holy Spirit being the Holy Spirit. And as well as ‘being’ itself, we are confronted here with a loving, submissive act on the part of the Son. Not so obviously, but nonetheless significantly, the Father’s initiative toward this action cannot be ignored – for Jesus spoke of receiving a *command* from the Father. And what about the Holy Spirit? If the Father named the many sons to be begotten, and the Son included us all in Himself as a context, then the Holy Spirit surely undertook to overshadow the formation, sanctification and maturity of these sons, just as He moved upon the waters in creation.

The faith, hope and love of this Godhead operation surely led to the beginning and end of all things. This same faith, hope and love are to abide in us. And there is no possibility of our finding the power of God to lay life down unless we participate in the same *mind* as the Son, in

83. 2 Pet 1:17; 2 John 3; Col 1:13    84. Phil 2:6,7 NASU

## 2. Sighting the passage

the way He responded to the Father. 'Let *this mind* be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who ... humbled Himself ...'.<sup>85</sup>

As we read earlier, the 'mind' of the Son obviously involved receiving the command of the Father. There was a *command* on the part of the Father, and a *receiving* on the part of the Son.

### The love and life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit

We will walk slowly through a number of important points. The example of laying life down is Christ, the Son. 'No one *takes* it [life] from Me, but I lay it down *of Myself*. I have power to lay it down.'<sup>86</sup> However, the heart of the matter is this: we discover that the source of this power to lay life down is the Father, and that Christ received it by command. This being so establishes the astonishing truth that through faith, faith that is generated within us by the word (the 'word of faith', Paul calls it<sup>87</sup>), we may likewise receive the Father's unique capacity – the power to lay life down.

The essential dynamic of this Son-Father relationship is the subject of the Gospel of John. As we read his first few chapters, it is made clear that Jesus is revealing the Father. 'I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.'<sup>88</sup>

This sounds straightforward, but the truth is that Christ is revealing the Father *because* the Father has laid down His life in order to *be* revealed. So as Jesus lays *His* life down, we are watching the most perfect demonstration of the Father. It is in this regard that Jesus said, 'Therefore My Father loves Me, because *I lay down My life* ... I have *power* to lay it down ... *this command* I have received *from My Father*'.<sup>89</sup>

So the act of giving of Himself is the Son's response to the Father, and for which the Father responds to Him also. Both of these elements

85. Phil 2:5-7 86. John 10:18 87. Rom 10:8 88. John 5:19 89. John 10:17,18

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are vital to the gospel. Let us stay with this line of reflection until the implications become clear.

### Receiving

The only begotten Son is a genuine ‘Son’ of the Father. His message is that those who receive Him will themselves be new-born sons of God the Father. Thus, they become the brethren of Christ. The key word is ‘receive’.

‘He came to His own, and His own did not *receive* Him. But as many as *received* Him, to them He gave the right [Gr. *exousia*, authority] to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but *of God*.’<sup>90</sup>

We may be born of God. This is nothing to do with human birth – through flesh and blood. And we are born of God by receiving Christ. Christ is the Seed. He is the seed of the Father’s life – something we understand by looking at any seed that has the potential to grow into a mature plant.

### The power is in the seed

So we have come to understand this. We receive Christ by receiving His word.<sup>91</sup> When we receive Christ, we actually receive the incorruptible seed of the Father’s life.<sup>92</sup> The power and capacity of this *particular life* is the power to lay life down and take it again. Where do we see an illustration of this kind of power? We see it in the life of Jesus. He was the ultimate seed of the Father’s life. He set aside the prerogative of expressing His *own* unique life, in order to show us the *Father*.<sup>93</sup> In the course of the divine purpose, Christ did enter in, once again, to His own unique glory. That’s why He prayed, ‘And now, O

90. John 1:11-13   91. John 12:48   92. 1 Pet 1:23   93. John 14:8-10

## 2. Sighting the passage

Father, *glorify Me* together with Yourself, with the glory *which I had* with You *before* the world was'.<sup>94</sup>

Now at the right hand of His Father, Christ shares His fullness with us, in the form of gifts and grace. 'And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.'<sup>95</sup> 'But to each one of us *grace* was given according to the measure of Christ's *gift*.'<sup>96</sup> Indeed, Christ Himself is the gift, 'the inexpressible gift', and our share in Him is evidenced in the gifts we share as members of His body.<sup>97</sup>

Incidentally, we should note that there is a difference between receiving the Father's life by birth, and the Son's glory by gift. In the first case, when we lay our lives down, we are behaving *like* Christ, but in fact it is the *Father's life* that is being expressed. In the second case, when we are pouring out our gifts, we are in fact expressing the Son's life. And then when we learn to express the administration of the Holy Spirit, in relation to His glory and gifts, we are involved with something much more again. The extent of these mysteries would fill many books.

### The power to lay life down

For our purpose here, it is crucial to stay with just a few points of emphasis. Readers may be more familiar with thinking of God in His unity, rather than as three distinct persons. However, if we don't digest these matters, there is no way of knowing how to lay our lives down. Remember, the power is not in ourselves. Even the Son of God, perfect as He was, emptied Himself and received the Father's ability to lay life down, as a command.<sup>98</sup>

Now here is the high point. If it's true that Christ emptied Himself, received the Father's unique power to lay life down, and then walked this out through faith, then His capacity to love is shown to be the

94. John 17:5    95. John 1:16    96. Eph 4:7    97. 2 Cor 9:15 RSV; Romans 12:5  
98. John 10:17,18

fruit of *His faith*, as the seed of the Father. So then, if we receive His life, and die to our own lives, then the power to love shall arise within *us*, by the same seed.

If this is not the case, then all we shall be able to do is to imitate Christ, with no power at all to lay our lives down, with no love for the brethren, and with no chance of traversing the passage over to eternal life.

### What life do I lay down?

Revising the previous section: we have concluded that we *cannot* lay our lives down until we have received the seed of His life. The life is the Father's; the *seed* of the life is Christ – for He became the *only* begotten Son in the Father's bosom.<sup>99</sup> And the Holy Spirit overshadows the process of new creation, just as He did the physical creation.

This explains why the apostles say that Christ is our life. 'For me to live is Christ.'<sup>100</sup> 'When Christ *who is our life* appears ...'.<sup>101</sup> 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.'<sup>102</sup>

The new creation is Christ. New life is *Christ*, being expressed through each individual *psuche*, or living person. 'For to *me* to live is *Christ*.'<sup>103</sup> The new life that I live is, simply, Christ: 'Yet not I, but Christ lives in me'.<sup>104</sup>

This is what we understand. The life I lay down is not the old nature, but rather *His* life, given to me as *my* life. The 'old man' as Paul calls it, is crucified, not laid down.<sup>105</sup> The actions of mortifying the 'old' members are entirely different to laying my life down in love for the brethren.<sup>106</sup> An angry nature is not *laid down* for one's friends.

99. John 1:18    100. Phil 1:21    101. Col 3:4    102. Gal 2:20    103. Phil 1:21  
104. Gal 2:20    105. Rom 6:6    106. Col 3:5 KJV

## 2. Sighting the passage

Hopefully, it is put to death in the cross, so that the new life of Christ can be laid down for one's friends.

What value is there in offering my old, sinful nature for my friends? This would have no meaning. Rather, the life I lay down is 'me' – but it's Christ. It's the life I now live. And it's deemed to be 'Christ' because He is the single seed of the Father's life, the One who includes all the many seeds. I am individually born of the Father, and I am also included in the context of the One Seed, Christ.

This is not difficult to comprehend if we look back to the beginning, and to God's intention to make man, as male and female, in His image.<sup>107</sup> Male and female were individuals, but were 'in the image' because their creation was individual and collective. The image of God was both of these things – not just one. We know that Adam and Eve were created and defined in relation to one another. It would be nonsensical to think of Adam 'being himself' without any relationship to his wife, in the image.

### The image of God

This is vital to our subject. The image of God in which mankind was made, was not merely designating man as a 'look-alike' – as if intelligence, outward features, emotions and various virtues were a faint impression of God. The 'image' was as much a *collective context* as it was a statement of *individual form* – not one without the other. Man was in and *within* the image – in relationship with God.

So now, in whatever way mankind was *in* the image originally, he has fallen *out* of this image. Once he moved from this location, he lost his individual definition, as well as the *entire dimension of relationship*. Now man has no image for individual or relational life until he is restored to Christ, who is the image of God.<sup>108</sup> The notion that we can

107. Gen 1:26    108. 2 Cor 4:4

be alive in some way, outside the image, is a falsehood. Apart from Christ, we don't even know who we are, let alone how to give ourselves and lay down our lives. Without Christ, we simply exist and live, but are abiding in death. We are 'dead in trespasses and sins'.<sup>109</sup>

When we come into Christ, we are restored to the image. We now abide in Him. *In* Christ, we are once again 'in the image'. With the image, the emphasis is on being *in*, not being *like*. Remember, the serpent provoked Eve with a comment about being 'like God', and thus destroyed the relationship of the image.<sup>110</sup> In the image, we have a context for knowing ourselves, individually *and* relationally – not one without the other. Now the word of God acts like a mirror into which we can look and recover our sense of self-knowing.<sup>111</sup> As we look into the face of Jesus Christ, we are transformed from glory to glory.<sup>112</sup>

### Death outside the image

The loss of the context of the image brought death to the human race. Equally now, without the gospel, we are dead. We can only try to love in our own strength, in the power of human goodwill. On the positive side, as our subject is directing us, *if* we are born of God, the proof will be that we can, and do, lay down our lives for one another (the brethren).

If love is sincere, it will show itself as a giving of my *psuche*, my essential 'self' which is recovered in Christ. Prior to conversion, there is no real 'me' at all – no seed, no remnant, no divine spark, no godly quality and no image. I am a person predestined by God, abiding in death. I am dead in sin.<sup>113</sup> When Christ comes as the seed of the new birth and gives me life, then 'I' am regenerated, in Christ. Immediately, I begin to find my life in the corporate new creation – the body of Christ. 'I am crucified with Christ, *nevertheless I live ...*'.<sup>114</sup> Now I can

109. Eph 2:1 110. Gen 3:5 111. Jas 1:23, 24 112. 2 Cor 3:18 113. Eph 2:1 114. Gal 2:20  
KJV. Notably, this translation is alone in carrying the correct sense, 'yet I live', or

## 2. Sighting the passage

offer myself and lay down my life for the brethren, not as an action of the fleshly nature, but in the power of His resurrection life.

I have a true 'self' to offer, a life to lay down. I may not offer a substitute self, a projection of who I falsely think I am. And I may not reserve and protect myself. But in the power of the Father's life, I can now give, even to the point of loss, cost, suffering and death, because the faith within me is the faith of the Son of God. Indeed, the Father's life within me is the power of resurrection life – life *out of* death. It's the power to lay life down, and *take it again*, as well – just as the Father's Son has already demonstrated to us all as the pattern. This is the gospel.

### His life in me

Despite being 'weak in Him' due to the weakness of my flesh, the life of Christ is being revealed in me.<sup>115</sup> His is the life 'I now live in the flesh'.<sup>116</sup> Accordingly, my loving, in some small or large way, is a demonstration of *His* life in the weakness and mortality of *my* flesh, since I am *not* now seeking to *save* my life, but to lose it. This is the meaning of the reference to those who 'did not love their lives to the death'.<sup>117</sup> Losing life necessarily means that I am overriding the self-preservation of my life with actions that exceed my comforts, extend my capacities, expend my resources, stretch my limits, challenge my faith, forfeit my control, exhaust my energy and, finally, cost me my life. However, I do not pursue these as a form of self-affliction or religious penance, since this would lead me right back to life-saving self-justification.

'nevertheless I live'. The importance of this cannot be ignored. Certainly the Scriptures are forceful that it is 'no longer I who live'; NIV and NASU. However, it's also true that there is an 'I' that does live – the person known and named by the LORD, who is individually predestined to find a place in the corporate Son, who is the Image. cf. Isa 45:4  
115. 2 Cor 13:4 116. Gal 2:20 117. Rev 12:11

Now we can see why care has to be taken with this subject. The giving of self must be the expression of 'who I am' in Christ, as one having a specific identity from the Father, a specific calling from Christ, and a specific leading of the Holy Spirit. Genuine giving has to link with true predestination, with the 'good works ... prepared beforehand that we should walk in them'.<sup>118</sup> And all giving needs to be toward relationship, first in the community of Christ and then beyond. So my loving does not require me to undertake some exceptional acts of sacrifice. Rather, love will be seen in every aspect of the work that God has given me to do.

### Not self-abdication but self-giving

Note these three points. 1. Laying down life cannot be based in a false projection of who I am. 2. Nor can it be a type of self-abdication in which I become inert or absent. 3. And on the matter of self-denial, laying life down is not a random demonstration of sacrificial acts chosen from a multiple-choice list. Because I am giving my self, I must know who I am in Christ. Then I am ready to harness all my faculties, and apply all my capacities, to the same end – toward those activities in which I am fully *present* and accountable in relationship. To lack love is to *be* nothing, in terms of substantial identity, according to Paul's chapter on love.<sup>119</sup> Equally, to have love is to *be* someone – to be everything that I am, in Him! Love believes all things.<sup>120</sup> Love is active – in deed and truth.<sup>121</sup>

From my first thoughts of the day, to my last prayerful reflections, my orientation is toward those relationships which God has ordained for my life – toward parents, toward children, toward work-fellows, or toward fellow-servants in the body of Christ. As I look around me, individuals within my sphere are either *in* Christ or, at the very least,

118. Eph 2:10 119. 1 Cor 13:2 120. 1 Cor 13:7 121. 1 John 3:18

## 2. *Sighting the passage*

they stand in *relation* to Christ, even if they don't know Him. So I first of all serve the 'household of faith' because it is among the brethren of Christ that my life is laid down.<sup>122</sup> From this foundation and central point, I give myself toward all men, seeking as far as possible to 'live peaceably' with all, and to be a witness of the life of Christ within.<sup>123</sup>

### Sincere, fervent love

How do I demonstrate sincere, fervent and pure love?<sup>124</sup> I am showing that I love the brethren when I am living and giving toward the brothers and sisters of Christ with active and tangible power that is from God Himself. I can commit unreservedly, and give actively, the very soul of who I am, employing all the capacity available to me from God through my new birth. My love is not a partial or discriminating love for certain ones among the brethren. It is not mixed in motive or limited in extent. It is not confused with human, fleshly obligation. It is not a 'give and take', social covenant, full of expectation and easily emptied when disappointed. Sincere love is not tinged with complexity, inferiority or superiority. We do not patronise others by deigning to augment their poverty, and we do not honour only those whom we deem to be more important than ourselves. We show no partiality or hypocrisy.<sup>125</sup>

Upon consideration, we can start to see how impure our love can be. Do we give unreservedly, but only to those who are younger or less able, or to those deemed to be lower in the strata of authority? Is relationship a kind of game, in which we see who we can humour, outwit, catch off-guard and conquer, perhaps by feigning naivety or inferiority? Can we only relate to, and love, those with similar

122. Gal 6:10    123. Rom 12:18    124. 1 Pet 1:22    125. Jas 3:17

temperament and skills? Do we impose our own culture of interaction, based on family and sectional interests, on others?

To arrive at the love of the brethren, as an entire way of life, is a challenging passage indeed.

### Cain, Balaam, Korah

Because the gospel *does* offer new birth, and the irresistible power to love, the New Testament Scriptures are quite severe concerning our failure to love. For example, further on in the same passage of John's Epistle to which we are referring, he mentions Cain, who murdered his *brother*.<sup>126</sup> In this way he illustrates his theme on the love of the brethren. John is quite 'black and white' in this matter. His argument is simple. If you don't love your brother, then you hate him. If you hate your brother, you are a murderer, just like Cain.<sup>127</sup>

In this way, we are compelled to heed his point, and not pass over the topic of love as a poetic nicety. He is warning us that we may well *claim* to love our brethren when in fact we are driven by insecurity, competition, jealousy and hurtful antagonism toward the brotherhood, as was Cain.<sup>128</sup> This reference to Cain reminds us of Jude's warning, where he also mentions Cain, but then adds Balaam and Korah as well. 'Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of *Cain*, have run greedily in the error of *Balaam* for profit, and perished in the rebellion of *Korah*.<sup>129</sup> Here the way of truth is compared, not just with Cain, but with two more woeful examples – Balaam<sup>130</sup> and Korah.<sup>131</sup> Balaam took advantage of his prophetic ministry, and also promoted another way, an alternative for God's people. Korah was ambitious and rebelled against his God-given appointment. All three of these errors had to do with the *brethren*, tying in with our theme. Cain competed against his

126. 1 John 3:12    127. 1 John 3:15    128. 1 John 3:12    129. Jude 11    130. Num 22,23; 2 Pet 2:15,16    131. Num 16

## 2. Sighting the passage

brother, Balaam exploited his brethren, and Korah rebelled against his brethren.

The Scriptures offer these illustrations, not to label us as a ‘Cain’ or a ‘Korah’ every time we have a jealous thought. Nevertheless, the warnings are clear. Remember, Cain was urged to ‘do well’, and also *warned* to ‘master’ his sin before it mastered him.<sup>132</sup> But he ignored the warning. In our case likewise, we are not suddenly unconverted every time we struggle. However, we are warned of these dangers so that we will repent of unconverted attitudes before they draw us back across the passage.

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The New Testament Scriptures are quite severe  
concerning our failure to love.

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This is an important perspective. John teaches us to humbly deal with sin, in the light, as we fellowship with one another.<sup>133</sup> So we are not always starting all over again. Yes, occasionally we do find that our vessel is so far off course, and so punctured by reefs, that we do have to seriously consider *whether we began properly* in the first place. Most of us will face this searching question somewhere across the passage of life. Mercifully, the Lord allows our own miscalculations to become a discipline upon us. Then the lessons of the Scriptures, as for example, regarding Cain, Balaam and Korah, become exceptionally important in considering the passage over.

### Faith and love

Love is not just a religious feeling or a contrived tolerance which we deign to bestow on others. Love is seen in actively laying our lives down. So there is no sense in which Christian ‘faith’ is separate from

132. Gen 4:7 NKJV and NIV    133. 1 John 1:4-7

## THE PASSAGE OVER

love. Faith is motivated by, and works by, love.<sup>134</sup> The love of the brethren motivates faith, so that faith is entirely to do with the brethren, and is demonstrated *amidst* the brethren. Mindful of what we have just said about Cain, Balaam and Korah, let us show how we lay our lives down. Faith is seen when we *reveal* our brethren (in contrast to Cain), when we *serve* our brethren (contrast Balaam), and when we walk in our appointed place, *submitted to* the brethren (contrast Korah). There is nothing so unloving and so unbelieving as to *resent* our brethren, *take advantage* of our brethren, or foster a *projection* over against the brethren.

The passage over is not merely that we should 'love' our fellows in some sentimental way, resisting the baser urges toward murder, immorality and rebellion. Loving the brethren is an entire mode in which we abide in the Son, in full and constant acceptance of our place among them. If we are plagued with jealousy (Cain), promoting our own prophetic agendas (Balaam), and warring against our predestined place in the body of Christ (Korah), then we are abiding in death. Rather, we should be abiding in joyous rest among our fellows, living and loving in a mode of laying life down for them, and among them. If this is not the case, then we have not made the passage over, regardless of what we may claim.

134. Gal 5:6 KJV

### 3. The right of passage



Our study has commenced, and will conclude, with an examination of love for the brethren, since this is the evidence of eternal life. However, we are pressed, first of all, to look behind this matter of evidence to examine the actual passage from death to life. If it's possible to *know* when we *have* crossed the passage, then we need to discover how to set out. How do we begin? How do we cross the separating line between death and life? Why is 'love for the brethren' the only trustworthy evidence, as stated in the Scriptures?

#### The right to become children of God

The answer is that love for the brethren is the proof that we have received *His* own life, and this life is the power to love. If we are not found to be loving the brethren, then we are abiding in death, *no matter what we believe*. This is quite striking. To examine this matter further, in line with our symbolic theme, it is useful to make use of the term,

'right of passage', as when one holds a legitimate travel voucher for an upcoming journey. Of course, the value of the voucher is only realised when the passenger actually takes the journey. Similarly then, although our Christian beginning may give us '*right* of passage', we must still *take* the passage, and we must *make* the whole passage over.

Is there a sense in which Christ gives us a 'right of passage', as we use the term? Yes, in his Gospel, John does approach the subject in this way when he says, 'But as many as *received* Him, to them He gave the *right* to become children of God, to those who believe in His name; who were *born*, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but *of God*'.<sup>135</sup> We are given the *right*, the authority, to become children of God. We may pass across to a completely different form of living, as large a transformation as if it were another birth completely. And this is exactly what John describes in the verse we have just read. Our first birth is 'of blood', 'of the will of the flesh' and 'of the will of man' (using John's statements in a converse sense). But then if we receive Him, we are given the 'right of passage' to become children of God. And we become children by being born of God. This birth, spoken of in John chapter three as being 'born again' (or 'born from above'<sup>136</sup>), is *not* of blood, *nor* of the will of the flesh, *nor* of the will of man. Let's ponder this briefly.

### Not of blood, flesh, or will

Unlike the new birth, human birth is by 'blood', that is by genetic bloodline. The life thus conceived is sustained by the 'will of the flesh', that is by the exercise of human capacity. The sum of the exercise is a

135. John 1:12,13 136. The Greek *anōthen* means 'from above'. The term 'born again' appears in most translations, not inappropriately, since Peter uses this expression in his letter. 1 Pet 1:21. 'From above' better conveys the unique nature of this new birth. RSV uses the expression 'born anew', and Peter's reference to 'newborn babes', together with Paul's to the 'new creation' gives rise to the common expression, 'new birth'. 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Pet 2:2.

### 3. *The right of passage*

kind of sovereignty, ‘the *will* of man’ John calls it, in which mankind acts as co-creator with God. Blood, flesh and will. These three statements, considered together in this way, are John’s backdrop to understanding the divine birth offered to us. First, this new birth is *not* by genetic blood-line, ie by family inheritance. Secondly, it *cannot* be activated by the exercises of fleshly endeavour, ie by ‘law’ as Paul uses the term. Thirdly, this birth does *not* in any way spring from the sovereignty of man.

#### Peter – and the right of passage

This view of salvation as a passage is well supported in the rest of the Scriptures. We could lift out illustrations from all over the New Testament, but two particular readings will be sufficient here – one from the first book of Peter, and one from Romans.

Before reading a section of Peter’s Epistle, let’s pre-empt his key point. He speaks of our *arrival* at ‘fervent *love* for the brethren’, and then he reflects back to our *starting* point, where we are *born* again by the seed of the word of God. It is helpful if we read all four verses carefully.

‘Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because “ ... all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.’<sup>137</sup>

137. 1 Pet 1:22-25

## THE PASSAGE OVER

What a glorious summary of our subject! Let us briefly look at the points in reverse order. 1. The preached word is the seed, the incorruptible seed. 2. The corruptible seed, by comparison, is linked with the ‘flesh’, which may grow and flower to a glorious extent, but still wither and die. 3. The word of God – in contrast to our fleshly birth, by blood, the will of the flesh and the will of man (John chapter one) – is the seed of our new birth. 4. Since we *have* been born again, let us love one another fervently with a pure heart – a clear reference to the passage over. 5. In between the new birth and ‘fervent love’ on the other side of the passage, is a way of life described thus: ‘purifying your souls in obeying the truth ... in sincere love’. This is most helpful. In other words, *new birth* is the start, *perfecting our love* is the passage, and *loving one another fervently* is the goal.

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We may pass over to a completely different  
form of living.

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In using the ‘passage’ analogy as we have done, it’s quite true that the whole of life is a single passage. Purifying our souls and learning to love are a lifelong exercise. It’s still valid to use the symbols in this way. We have made the point however, as does John, that there *can* and must be a specific point of arrival, here and now, and not just at life’s end. And that point of arrival is the love of the brethren. At the same time, and this helps fill out the total picture, we live always as if we are just newly born again. Peter says so in the next verses: ‘Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby’.<sup>138</sup>

138. 1 Pet 2:1,2

### 3. *The right of passage*

This is absolutely convincing. We are to live as newborn babes. How? By maintaining the initial basis of the journey. At times we *will* manifest ‘malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and evil speaking’. That’s clear. ‘If we say that we have no sin’ we are liars.<sup>139</sup> But all these imperfections in our love are to be laid aside so that we can behave like newborn babes seeking the sincere milk of the word.<sup>140</sup> What is the sincere milk of the word? Does Peter mean the elementary principles, as in the Hebrews discussion about babes, milk and meat?<sup>141</sup> No, Peter’s is a slightly different focus. In this context he is not so much chiding believers for being babes who are carnal,<sup>142</sup> but directing us to the sincere milk of the word – the same type of preached word by which we were born again. This is most helpful. In other words, we are to *continue in the same way that we began*. Just as the first gospel message conveyed the seed of another birth entirely, now we are to seek, desire, taste and be nourished by the same word – the same proceeding word that is preached to us.

We shall say more in later chapters about the power of the word as it cuts and divides within our hearts.

#### Paul – and the right of passage

Having referred to Peter’s letter for a view of the right of passage, let us examine one section of Paul’s writing. Once again, we shall pre-empt the point, then read the verses.

In the very centre of his profound Epistle to the Romans, Paul speaks in direct parallel to John’s theme on ‘the love of the brethren’, and Peter’s theme on ‘sincere love of the brethren’. Paul’s way of saying it is this. ‘Now hope does not disappoint, because the *love of God* has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to

139. 1 John 1:8    140. 1 Pet 2:1    141. Heb 5:12-14    142. 1 Cor 3:1

us.<sup>143</sup> The passage over! Then these words are followed by ‘for when ...’ – and Paul immediately reflects on how it is that we made the passage and arrived at ‘the love of God ... poured out in our hearts’.<sup>144</sup>

How do we arrive at this condition of being able to pour out the love of God? ‘For!’ Paul says; here’s the explanation. Here is a description of the passage over. How did we get there? There are three steps to the journey by which we were given the *right* of passage – whereupon we had to *take* the passage, and *make* the passage over.

1. ‘*For when*’, when we were weak, sinners and enemies, Christ died for the ungodly, for us, and reconciled us to God!<sup>145</sup>

2. ‘*Much more*’ than this, says Paul, we are saved – saved from wrath and saved by His life.<sup>146</sup> His life is now our life. This is ‘much more’ than the first aspect. Why is it more? Because Christ’s death was not just as a substitute scapegoat, but was a vicarious death that included us, both in His death and in His resurrection life. Paul expands this theme in Romans chapter six, where he stresses that we are actually baptised into His death, and grafted into the likeness of His resurrection.<sup>147</sup> The same theme appears in second Corinthians as well: ‘we judge thus: that if One died for all, then *all died*’.<sup>148</sup> We were all included in His death, and in the new creation that was brought forth as a result.<sup>149</sup>

3. ‘*And not only that!*’ Now Paul’s address reaches its high point. As if it were not enough that Christ should give us right of passage, by His death, we are actually included, transported, carried forward and saved, by His life. *And not only that ... there’s more.* ‘And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ’, Paul says,

143. Rom 5:5 144. *ibid.* 145. Rom 5:6,8,10 146. Rom 5:9,10 147. Rom 6:4,5

148. 2 Cor 5:14 149. 2 Cor 5:17

### 3. *The right of passage*

‘through whom we have *now received* the reconciliation’.<sup>150</sup> Yes, we rejoice in God – that is, God the Father. Yes, we have arrived somewhere; we’ve made the passage over. We have been reconciled to the image of God. Christ is the image, and we may now abide in Him, as He is in us. But the high point is this – and let us catch the drift – we have received the reconciliation. Received! Christ is now in us.

We have been returned to the image of God, through Christ. We are ‘in the image’ once again. But the high point, ‘not only that’, is that we have *received!* Christ is in us. Christ is the incorruptible Seed!

#### The reconciliation

Summing up the Romans passage – we have three statements: ‘For when ...’, ‘much more’, ‘And not only that’. This is how Paul deals with the subject of the passage over. And when he reaches the third point of the address, ‘*And not only that*’, he raises the subject of ‘*the reconciliation*’. Let us understand what is being said. ‘The reconciliation’ is the other side of the passage over! This is the love of the brethren, the ministry of reconciliation, where we implore one another *on Christ’s behalf*.<sup>151</sup> How is this possible? Because we are members of the new creation! We are in Him, but He is in us. ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory.’<sup>152</sup> Christ is within us, and we now act on His behalf, in the power of the seed of the new birth, in the ministry of reconciliation.

We are not merely restored to the creation state, where man was *in* the image. We are lifted to the heights of the mystery operation of God in the Everlasting Covenant – where Christ is *in* us. God is manifested in the flesh.<sup>153</sup> Mankind began in Him. Now He is in us. What a triumph! This is the reconciliation!

150. Rom 5:11    151. 2 Cor 5:18    152. Col 1:27    153. 1 Tim 3:16

How many believers there are across Christendom today who have never made the passage to the reconciliation – whose entire experience of Christ is lonely, individualistic, alienated, full of defensive mistrust, and even offensive, independence! If we love Him who birthed us, how is it that we don't love, associate, or fellowship with those who are 'begotten of Him'?<sup>154</sup>

### Faith – and the new creation

Where this leads us then, practically, is as follows. We first meet the individual Christ, as individuals, and immediately we are born into the collective Christ, the new creation. Then each one of us, in Christ, is a new creature. 'Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creation*; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.'<sup>155</sup> Because Christ is the new creation and He is revealed in us, we can say that each of us, individually, is a new creature – provided we abide in Him!

Do we believe this? Do we know how to keep faith with the fact of the new creation, toward ourselves and in relation to one another? There is a fundamental and specific mode of Christian practice by which we keep faith with this Christian proposition. Let us be clear. Who are we? Are we 'old man' or 'new man'?<sup>156</sup> This is the key to the love of the brethren. With whom are we faithfully relating as we love the brethren? The old man or the new man? The flesh or the Spirit? Paul answers it this way. We are not regarding anyone according to the flesh – not even Christ. 'Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we *know Him thus no longer*. Therefore, if anyone is

154. 1 John 5:1 155. 2 Cor 5:17 156. Eph 4:22-24

### 3. *The right of passage*

in Christ, he is a new creation.<sup>157</sup> This is a complete revolution in the way we look at one another. We regard one another as members of the new creation in Christ. We relate as members of the ‘new man’, not the ‘old man’.

#### Christ – known after the flesh, or in the Spirit

As we may realise, the entire Christian proposition pivots on this point. Who is Jesus Christ to us? And who are we, to one another, as a result?

Is Christ the suffering hero who took our punishment, or is He the eternal ‘Word’ who was *with* God and who *was* God?<sup>158</sup> In the latter case, we shall call Him ‘Yahweh-Son’ to distinguish this aspect from His earthly revelation as Son of God and Son of Man. Who is Christ? Is He Yahweh-Son or the suffering Son of Man? We would all say: He is both. Indeed, He is not two different manifestations. The one is the other.

Now here’s the point. It’s possible to believe in Him as the suffering God-man and not be born again at all. We are born again when, in the action of receiving the preached word, we receive the person of the eternal Word. Yahweh-Son is the Seed who has included us all in His conception as the only-begotten Son of the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### That I may know Him

Simply, we need to know the second person of the Godhead in all His dimensions if we are to ‘know Him’, as Paul prayed.<sup>159</sup> To visualise and eulogise His life and suffering in the flesh does not lead to new birth. In fact, it can lead to a belief system in which we do not yield

157. 2 Cor 5:16,17    158. John 1:1    159. Phil 3:10

our lives at all, but instead, we relate to Him ‘after the flesh’. We may try hard to appreciate the heights He left, the depths He embraced, the suffering He endured, the love He showed, the virtue He shared, the price He paid, and the pathway He pioneered. Then, in reverent consideration and application of this knowledge, it is possible to believe His words, wonder at His ways, follow His footsteps and imitate His actions, *without any revelation of the ascended Christ and of the new-born life that He has predestined for us*. In fact, there is a form of individual, Christ-like living that avoids the need to forfeit *our* lives and accept *His* life. Without a revelation of the Word, through the confrontation of the preached word, we are blind to who He really is. We see that this historic Jesus is the ‘Alpha and the Omega’ as well, and vice versa, that He ‘who is and who was and who is to come’, the Word, is actually the same Jesus Christ.<sup>160</sup>

### Born again by the living Word

Now here is the implication of what we are saying. We are born again because of the Word – the second person of the Godhead, the one we have called Yahweh-Son. The Word addresses Himself to us through the ‘word of faith’ that is preached.<sup>161</sup> The preached word makes known to us the person of the eternal Word, who has foreknown us, named us, and included us in Himself in the eternal operation called the Everlasting Covenant.<sup>162</sup> What we observe in history as we watch the incarnation – and what the Old Testament saints could also see by a revelation of the Spirit – is simply the out-raying of this entire operation, the process by which the grace of the only-begotten ‘Seed’, the ‘one man Jesus Christ, abounded to *many*’.<sup>163</sup> Because the grace of the one Man abounded to *many*, each one of us

160. Rev 1:4,11 161. Rom 10:8 162. Rom 8:29; Heb 13:20 163. Rom 5:15

### 3. *The right of passage*

was spoken into being as a unique and individual member of the new creation. However, the many are also one. We were also identified within the corporate new creation, and unless we make the passage over to *corporate* living, we are abiding in death. This is the meaning of the call to ‘put on the *new man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the *image* of Him who created him’,<sup>164</sup> and of the same thought in Ephesians, ‘that you put on the new man which was *created according to God*, in true righteousness and holiness’.<sup>165</sup>

The language is challenging, but the truth is clear. We were all conceived and created by the Word, in the one Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And, equally, we are being renewed to the image that He created for us.

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We are born again because of the ‘Word’  
Himself – Yahweh-Son.

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This makes a huge difference to our concept of the Christian faith. The word of the gospel preached to us is actually confronting us with the foreknowledge of God concerning an image that He has for us – a collective image, and an individual one as well. Each one of us, *individually*, is part of the *collective* new creation. We have a specific part to fulfil within the whole. We are not just newborn in the generic sense that we all make a common new beginning, all with a new power, and all with the goal to be *like Jesus*. We are newborn by the original Word, the second person of the Godhead, so that we can be *who we are*, in Christ. Then we see His saving operation as the pathway by which He included us, in His death, and in His resurrection life. Now the Christian life consists in taking up our participation in Him.

164. Col 3:10 165. Eph 4:24

His sufferings are in fact *ours*, already accepted by *Him*; so that *our* sufferings are in fact *His*, part of His reconciling work. We now 'partake of Christ's sufferings'.<sup>166</sup>

Accordingly, we don't see His death merely as an action of *substitution*, but as a truly *vicarious* death<sup>167</sup> – for Christ genuinely died *our* death so that we were included in the outcome of His travail. We were part of the collective old man that He put to death and carried outside the camp into everlasting burning. We were also part of the collective new creation that He took with Him to the right hand of the Father's throne. Accordingly, the expression 'Christ in us' denotes genuine identity as co-members of His body, of His flesh and of His bone. We are genuine joint-heirs, for it is clearly evident that we are suffering together with Him, on the way to being glorified together with Him.<sup>168</sup>

### Relating to one another in Christ

Now this is the basis upon which we relate to one another. We are members of the new creation, each with a predestination to fulfil. We are not merely moving existentially through life, picking and choosing our good works, comparing ourselves with one another, and competing with one another for approval. Our names are foreknown, our pathways are predestined, our works are fore-planned, and even our days were written before any of them existed.<sup>169</sup> Now we can understand why we struggle to take and make the passage over. Have we understood who we are, in Christ? Have we understood

166. 1Pet 4:13 167. A vicarious death helpfully draws attention to His embracing and suffering the actual condition of my death, which loving action now 'compels' me, ties me to Him, and commands my participation. 2 Cor 5:14. The notion of a merely substitutionary death, in our stead, can leave us disconnected from His death, with no apprehension of participation in His sufferings. 168. Rom 8:17 169. Psa 139:16

### 3. *The right of passage*

regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit?<sup>170</sup> Are we now led by the Spirit to fulfil the specific work that He would have us to do? Are our newborn lives being lived for ourselves, or for the other – for the entire household of God?

Yes indeed, Christ has provided for the individual regeneration and renewal of ‘you’ and ‘me’. The new birth restores us to the one new creation in Christ, but the new birth is not a generic form of ‘washing’, common to all believers. There is an individual predestination to fulfil. Nor is the new birth like ‘turning over a new leaf’, where we try hard, fail, then try again, only to become confused as to what we are supposed to be doing. If we think this way, we are soon overtaken with guilt and discouragement, for we quickly return to the same kind of religious projections that we had before. Perhaps we haven’t discovered how to put off the old man, and put on the new. And, so, genuine love for others, based in a clear sense of who we are, and with a clear idea of how to give our real ‘selves’ and relate to others helpfully, remains an elusive goal.

How different it will be if we can understand how to reckon toward the new creation, both in ourselves and then in relation to one another!

#### Cleansing from sin

A common point of confusion in the whole matter is this: how do we embrace the fact that although we are a new creation, we still have obvious sin and imperfection? The apostle John deals with this quite easily by saying that if anyone says he has no sin, he’s a liar.<sup>171</sup> So we all have sin. Are we, therefore, part of the new creation, or the old? John replies that if we walk in the light, we will have fellowship with one

170. Titus 3:5 171. 1 John 1:8

another, and the blood of Jesus *will* cleanse us from all sin. Such fellowship, he tells us, is actually with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.<sup>172</sup>

Our earlier discussion on the section from Peter's letter is relevant here. Once we are born again (the right of passage), our voyage involves 'purifying our souls' through obedience and sincere love.<sup>173</sup> Sincere love is the only way we can be cleansed. Can our love be sincere when we are imperfect? Obviously so. How is this possible? Because the power is in the seed of our new birth. 'Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him.'<sup>174</sup> We choose the seed. We yield to the capacity of the seed. We put on the new man, and put off the old. We walk in the light, confessing our shortfalls, and thus we are being changed.

### Living in the light

This is startling. We *can* take a passage over, from death to life. We need not abide in death. We *can* walk in light, in life and in love. In fact, we *must* do so, if we are truly born of God. If it is not apparent that we are living in light and love, we have not made the passage over, and we are abiding in death.

Living in light, in love, simply means that we are fully cognisant of our sin, and fully open to the light and scrutiny of others. Despite our oft failures, we are continuing to master the *envy* of Cain, the *profiteering* of Balaam, and the *projection* of Korah. We are laying down our lives for the brethren, in the specific sense that we are losing ours for *theirs* (contrast Cain), seeking *their* profit (contrast Balaam) and submitting to our true predestination out of respect for *others* (contrast Korah).

172. 1 John 1:7,3    173. 1 Pet 1:22    174. 1 John 3:9

### 3. *The right of passage*

#### Keeping faith with the new creation

We shall call this way of life ‘keeping faith with the new creation’. Do we truly believe that the life we are living is the life that He has given us? If not, we need either to be converted, or to renew our Christian faith. We cannot be double-minded. If we have made the passage over, we should confess that we are a new creation in Christ. Old things have passed away. We do not relate to ourselves, or to one another, according to the flesh. We do not see others as old friends, old failures or old family members. We are who we are, *in Christ*, and only in Christ. We love who we are, and we love who others are, in Him. We have no definition outside of this mode in which we are laying life down for the brethren – no self-defence, no self-preservation, no self-determination, and no self-realisation. There is no fear in love. The love of God being perfected in us casts out fear – where fear is the instinct of survival that motivates us to all kinds of defensive and offensive activity.

#### Life is in the Son

The true Christian confession is that Christ is coming in the flesh.<sup>175</sup> Christ is within me, and I am in Christ. Life itself is in the Son, and nowhere else.<sup>176</sup> It is found in the individual Son, and it is expressed in the corporate Son, within His body. Life is found amidst the brethren, where I lay my life down. It’s as simple as that. I’m not conscious of trying to find myself, for I’m intent upon laying life down among others. As I focus on losing my life, only then do I find it. So I’m refusing to be motivated by the sinful signals that rise up within me. And I’m refusing to be defined, by law, as the ‘old man’. I have received eternal life, and this life is only in the Son, amidst the brethren, and my

175. 2 John 7    176. 1 John 5:11

only exercise is to lose my life as I serve among them. Christ has made me a new creature so that I can do this. I have an individual predestination, yes, but only amidst the brethren, only in the Son. By giving myself, I am keeping faith with this truth. If I draw back in insecurity or uncertainty, or worse still, in quiet jealousy (cf. Cain), selfish profiteering (cf. Balaam) or proud projection (cf. Korah), I am abiding in death. I need to confess my sin to my Advocate who is faithful and just to forgive me, and to cleanse me from all such unrighteousness.

Strangely, this can *only* occur as I *walk* in the *very fellowship* that I am at risk of offending. What mercy that He should include me in His fellowship, knowing that I must yet the more be *convicted* by the light, *refined* by His fire, and *perfected* in His love! And just as He has included me, so He has included my brethren also. They experience failure as well, just as I do. But the love of God in me, and in them, 'bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails'.<sup>177</sup>

### Love never fails

True love never fails to keep faith with the truth of the new creation. Our only message to one another, in the total sense, is that *each should submit to his predestination*, and press on with the laying down of his life. Our experiences of grief and pain, personally and with one another, are simply and only because we fail to do this. The purity of our fellowship is harmfully breached (Cain), used for advantage (Balaam), or deceptively disturbed (Korah) when we do not act as others believed we would – when we do not honour the trust of the brotherhood, the confidence that others exercise toward us – and

177. 1 Cor 13:7,8

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when we do not act according to the predestination that others perceive in us. *Others see who we are, and they love us for all that we are.* They do not know, to any great depth, about our personal struggles with envy, advantage and projection. They do realise that we are living in a struggle of faith, putting off the old man, and putting on the new. But they relate to us, as indeed we should relate to them, only as those who love the brethren, who have made the passage over.

#### The traditional dilemma

We may realise already that the whole subject we have raised has an enormous theological background. The evidence of eternal life! The passage over! How many conflicts there have been over these foundations of the Christian faith! And what do we learn from church history on this matter? Have all the inquirers, speakers, writers, commentators and analysts arrived at the same conclusion? If not, why did they not? Are we any more able to answer these questions than they?

In the end of the matter, as it was for the apostle John, our final point is our beginning point, and vice versa. The love of the brethren! We need to journey on the ocean of considerations until the entire passage becomes clear. The question is not, 'What is the passage?' but rather, 'How do we arrive at love of the brethren?'. If we are born of God, we love. Love means that we lay our lives down for the brethren, just as Christ laid down His life for us. So we could ask the questions, 'Why have these basic questions been traditionally troubled? What can we learn from these struggles?' To set the scene for these answers, let us remind ourselves of the shape of the theological landscape.

## Sovereignty and responsibility

We may already know that treatises on Christian faith are set out between two notable ‘extremes’. We may call them extremes because, in their absolute sense, they are completely opposite to one another – viz. the ‘*sovereignty*’ argument (sometimes called ‘Calvinism’ from John Calvin), and the ‘*Arminian*’ argument (from Arminius 1560-1609). In the first case, it is contended that God is absolutely sovereign in the saving process – that we are only saved because of His predestination, and through His sovereign, merciful act. In the second case, it has been contended that man is completely responsible with regard to the saving process, and that the salvation offered to all men is apprehended by those who respond in faith. In the first case, faith is declared to be a gift from God; in the second, it is a responsive choice on man’s part. In time we shall find, as the majority of Christians have, that these extremes actually meet and are resolved in the truth as it stands in the Scriptures.

While volumes could be written on this subject, to add to the volumes already written, let us simplify the matter, drawing together the many Scriptural aspects. The issues of conviction, sin, repentance, faith, predestination, redemption, regeneration, baptism, the church ... and we could go on, all come together to form the single proposition of the Scriptures which is as follows.

### The word – receiving the word

An individual cannot believe, repent, lay his life down, or love the brethren in his own human capacity. It is the *word* of the gospel that carries the *power* of death and life. When the essential ‘word of faith’ is preached or communicated, in a way that calls for our response, it carries *the conviction of a predestination* that is available in Christ. The

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word is Christ, not just a fragment of information. So in receiving the *word* we are receiving Him.<sup>178</sup>

Gazing backwards and forwards across the Scriptures, searching for the one thing that men must do to be saved, we conclude that the only single response that is laid upon us, as a statement of our accountability, is to *receive*. We have already quoted the verse several times: ‘He came to His own, and His own *did not receive* Him. But as many as *received* Him, to them He gave the right [Gr. *exousia*, authority] to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born ... of God.’<sup>179</sup> The case is made plain. Some do not receive Him, and others do receive Him. It is receiving that actually leads to believing. This is quite clear from Jesus’ interaction with Nicodemus – in the chapter on being born again of water and Spirit. Notice as we quote the Scriptures, that because men don’t receive, neither can they believe. ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen [speaking, obviously, for the three persons], and you do not *receive* Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and *you do not believe*, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?’<sup>180</sup>

#### Receiving – believing

What we are taught here is absolutely central. The act of receiving makes believing possible. This explains why both a failure to receive and a failure to believe are equally recorded as culpable failures. Note what John says in his first letter, ‘He who does not believe God has made *Him* a liar’.<sup>181</sup> This is extraordinary. How can we make God appear to be a liar?

178. John 1:12

## THE PASSAGE OVER

In Thessalonians, Paul talks, in the negative case, about *not receiving* a love of the truth.<sup>182</sup> As nearly as we can understand the entire conversion miracle, it seems to be like so. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, takes what belongs to Christ, and declares it to us.<sup>183</sup> It is the Spirit who seeks to convince us of sin, of righteousness and of judgement.<sup>184</sup> Our ‘Helper’, as He is called, exerts His help in every way possible, testifying to us, urging the truth upon us, like a fire upon chaff, and like a hammer beating upon the rock.<sup>185</sup> In the mercy of God, His testimony is clearly stated, a breach is made upon our hardness of heart, and the truth is asserted, so that a man need only *receive* a love of the truth – or else He is condemned by his own refusal to receive the witness of God Himself. We cannot help but notice, with sober thankfulness, that even the *love* of the truth, a disposition that could easily be laid to *our* account, is still said to be something we need *only receive*. Quite plainly, if God is to be all that He is, and is to dignify His creation while graciously acknowledging our helpless condition, He cannot do less than *enable* our repentance, and cannot do more than draw *near enough* to be received. ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door [cf. receives me], I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.’<sup>186</sup>

### Predestination

It is on this passionate note that we find ourselves ready to understand ‘predestination’. For, simply, our predestination is a place of fellowship (cf. ‘dining’ in the above verse), fellowship with Him, and in Him. He has conceived and ‘known’ us ‘by name’, even if we have not known Him.<sup>187</sup> Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the act of being, as ‘I

179. John 1:11-13 180. John 3:11-13 181. 1 John 5:10 182. 2 Thess 2:10 183. John 16:13-15

184. John 16:8-11 185. John 14:16; Jer 23:29 186. Rev 3:20 187. Isa 45:3,4

### 3. *The right of passage*

AM', as Yahweh, could do no more or less than conceive us in the One Seed as wholly perfected persons. Through faith, we are to become those persons. This is the nature of eternal life.

The word that addresses us then, far from being an objective contract regarding heaven and hell, is itself the *person* of the Son, knocking on the door, and carrying in His address the sense of a total operation of purposeful love, from an all-proposing Father, an all-encompassing Son, and an all-revealing Holy Spirit.

As the word comes 'near' to me,<sup>188</sup> and as I receive the word, at that very moment the word *alerts me to a predestination* held within the counsel of God. Now I must choose the seed of new life. I am enabled to do so because the word, breaking into a moment of time, makes a distinction between the real 'me' and the old man, dead in sin. This confounding transaction around the 'I' that has to be crucified with Christ, and the 'I' that nevertheless lives, is conveyed in the glorious verse in Galatians<sup>189</sup> – where 'I' die, nevertheless 'I' live. And yet it's *Christ* who lives in 'me'. Certainly I am not Christ, but His life is given to a collective 'body' of many members who now live His life in a collective, but individual expression.

#### A place and a name

It's interesting to note that, upon talking with Christian fellows about their initial commitment to Christ, whether at a younger or older age, one common facet shines through all the differences – the compelling awareness of a predestination, 'a place and a name'<sup>190</sup> amidst God's people, that must be taken up. Most believers recall coming alive to the truth that God's will toward them, and for them, was also a call to be related to others. 'Even to them I will give in My

188. Rom10:8 189. Gal 2:20 KJV 190. Isa 56:5 191. Isa 56:5

house and within My walls *a place and a name* better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an *everlasting name* that shall not be cut off.<sup>191</sup>

The greatest failure of all is to project oneself toward a different 'place' and 'name', a different predestination, than that given by Christ.

Let us say it once again. The word we receive is Him. We receive a 'report'<sup>192</sup> of a place in Him, of a purposeful predestination, from Him who loved 'me' and gave Himself for 'me', the real 'me'.<sup>193</sup> The faith that is generated by the word is the faith of the Father who conceived me, the faith of the Son who included me, and the faith of the Spirit who sealed me to my predestination. Faith – if we just ponder on what is implicit in the very meaning of the word 'faith' – is not just believing certain things, but is an active, trusting, committed connection between an individual and his predestination in the many-membered body of Christ. That's why the word that is preached is called 'the word of faith'.<sup>194</sup> It's the word concerning the faith that the Son *already* has – which is the faith that *we* can have. His faith becomes my faith.

### Faith – the One, the many

Here is the whole point. The matter begins with Christ, not with faith. It begins with 'one' not 'many'. 'For we, though many, are ... one body.'<sup>195</sup>

There are not 'many' seeds of promise, there is only one – Christ; just as there are not many little 'christs' running around – there's only one. 'Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made'; not many seeds, but just one.<sup>196</sup> This is vital.

As we look for life, there is only one life, one seed, one Christ. So we are not first searching for a multiple birth, a vast, evangelistic register

192. Rom 10:16    193. Gal 2:20    194. Rom 10:8    195. 1 Cor 10:17    196. Gal 3:16

### 3. *The right of passage*

of the seed of Abraham, right across the nations – as if *that* one is born again, and *that* one, and those over there. There's no 'you' or 'me' in the equation, at first. There's *only* Christ. Listen carefully to the verse: 'And if you are Christ's [the One, singular], then you are Abraham's seed [plural]'.<sup>197</sup>

Yes, if we are Christ's in the singular sense, then we are the multiple seed, multiplied and multiplied to a vast company of sons, through faith – through the faith of the One, a faith born in the many hearts from the One Word, the second person of the Godhead, Yahweh-Son. If at first, the only *one* is *Him*, this clears the way for 'you' to emerge as an individual, but *only* within a collective new creation. Yes, there are many sons of Abraham but only because, first of all, there is *one* Son. This sounds laboured, but holds the key to the mystery, and explains why so many have not made the passage over.

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As we look for life, there is only one life, one  
seed, one Christ.

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In the case of so many believers, *they* are the individuals – each claiming an individual new birth, and finding themselves completely becalmed at that point. It almost seems that at the instant there is an individual claim of new birth, the progress stops. The wind ceases and the sails fall limp. How different if the *One*, the individual statement, is only ever of *Christ*; and then for individual definition, believers move immediately to a collective statement of love for the brethren. Who am I? Answer – I am who I am, in relation to *you!* If I am newborn at all, in any sense, as an individual, it is only for love. And if not for love, I'm already dead. *If the one is 'me', I simply don't make it to the community of the*

197. Gal 3:29

*brethren*. If the one is Christ, I die in Him, and my individual life is hidden in Him. I am issued with the 'right of passage', but I only emerge as a genuine individual once I have made the passage over to the collective life of the body of Christ.

### Right of passage – becalmed?

We will have to accept the historic reality, confronting as it is, that Reformers like Martin Luther (discussed later) did grasp hold of the 'right of passage', but fell short of defining the goal in terms of the corporate dimension of eternal life. A lighthouse did appear amidst the darkness of the Dark Ages. Sensing a fresh wind, the Reformers cast off from the shore, propelled by a gust of conviction that righteousness was a *gift* and not achieved through works. Immediately though, the eager vessel of Reform theology seems to have been *becalmed*, without arriving at any definition for the collective life of the new creation. The course drifted to the logic of individual, imputed righteousness over against the background of righteous works. History shows that the theological disposition of the Reformation did not define corporate relationship in Christ, and so did not map the passage over to love of the brethren. In fact, somewhat understandably, the spectre of being drawn back into the foreboding institutional church, casting its shadow across the foundering life-rafts, meant that there was a good deal of reaction to collective faith, in favour of individual 'faith'. And so for a number of reasons, the noble ship 'Reform' became stalled at the collision point of various tides and swells.

Following on from Martin Luther, others, like John Calvin, lost themselves even further in the cross-winds. In an endeavour to acknowledge the sovereignty of God as well as the total depravity of man, Calvin reasoned that God predestines only some to be saved. Why else were some saved, and others not, than as an act of the

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sovereignty of God? Once again, these map bearings left the pilgrims obsessed with individualism and theology, leaving no place for the exercise of active faith, the faith of Christ, that could have brought them to the collective new creation. For so many Reformers the tidal drift back to carnality, legalism and moralistic reform, landed them on rocky outcrops, very little distance from where they began.

As we did earlier in our study, in a broad sweep of history, we might well look at all the subsequent waves of revival that seemed to bring fresh promise – the Great Awakening, the evangelical movement, the missionary era, and the Pentecostal movement. But they all leave the same question: why so much *individualistic* salvation, with no outstanding comment at all on the passage over to *corporate* relationship?

#### One – then many

As it is with so many prominent figures today who claim to be ‘born again’, it almost seems as if the individualistic claim *itself* is an *immediate* sign of having lost the chart, and failed the passage. If there is ‘one’ at all, this can only ever be Christ. And if we have allowed just Christ to be the One, then indeed there *are* many – there’s a whole company of Abraham’s descendents, here and now, to which we are absolutely devoted, to the death.

The whole matter is stated in Galatians chapter three. ‘For as *many* of you as were baptised into Christ have put on *Christ* [the one]. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are *all one* in Christ Jesus [not many]. And if you are Christ’s [the one], *then* [only then] you are Abraham’s seed [the many], and heirs according to the promise.’<sup>198</sup>

198. Gal 3:27-29

## THE PASSAGE OVER

The One Seed, Christ, meets us with His faith, and connects us to the multiple seed of Abraham. Now Abraham's seed is the new race that replaced Adam. And there are all kinds of brethren to meet – slave and free, Jew and Greek, male and female, barbarians and Scythians, where 'Christ is all [one], and in all [many]'.<sup>199</sup>

It's possible that the Christian preoccupation with the subject of faith, and with trying to negotiate salvation through faith, has shifted the emphasis from Christ. Of course, both Romans and Galatians do focus on Abraham's faith, primarily to direct us away from law. In this vein, we tend to be struggling to maintain the faith of Abraham, as if this leads us to Christ. Rather, we really should be maintaining Christ, so that we are led to faith – His faith.

### Predestined to be saved or lost?

Now the difficult subject of predestination can be easily covered. God is sovereign, and we are responsible toward His sovereignty. In the end, all the Scriptures point to the one conclusion. If we are saved, God is said to have appointed us to salvation.<sup>200</sup> If we are judged, God is said to have chosen us for wrath.<sup>201</sup> The apparent dilemma here is answered thus. God's word itself either *produces* salvation or produces our damnation. 'He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already.'<sup>202</sup> The certitude of the outcome is deemed to be in *God's* hands, not in ours – even though the matter swings on *our* participation in our destiny. It cannot be other than this, or God is not truly sovereign. And it cannot be other than this, or man is not truly responsible and could not be subject to

199. Col 3:11    200. Rom 9:22,23    201. Rom 9:22; 2 Tim 2:20    202. John 3:18  
203. Rom 9:6

### 3. *The right of passage*

judgement. The word of God has two effects, not just one. 'But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect.'<sup>203</sup>

The word contains the power of death and life. It joins me to His death, as well as to His life. Upon receiving it I am grafted into His 'once for all' death.<sup>204</sup> At the same time I am planted in His resurrection body, the collective new creation. If I do not believe, I abide in death – the eternal death that Christ left behind Him as He rose again.

Eternal life is in the Son. The Son Himself has been brought forth with a 'body ... prepared' for Him, a body of many members who do His will. Those who do His will are called 'brethren'. We have been made 'joint-heirs' with Christ, and He is 'not ashamed to call [us] brethren'.<sup>205</sup>

The life that I now live is His, in me, and mine, in Him. 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.'<sup>206</sup>

#### Nevertheless I live

Let's conclude this chapter by meditating on this verse, breaking it into seven sections (note that the KJV conforms best to the Greek text).

1. *I am crucified with Christ.* Yes, there's an 'I' that is co-crucified with Him, as surely as He was crucified Himself. Until He identifies 'me' with Himself, the whole 'I' is dead in sin.

2. *Nevertheless I live.* Yes, now there is an 'I' that lives.

3. *Yet not I.* Let us take care here; the old cannot be revived; the 'I' that lives is now Christ in me, and me in Christ.

204. Rom 6:10    205. Heb 2:11    206. Gal 2:20 KJV

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4. *The life I now live.* 'I' now live *His* life.

5. *In the flesh.* I live His life in the vehicle of a frail, mortal body – one which will eventually put on immortality; although I am weak in Him, He is strong in me.<sup>207</sup>

6. *I live by the faith of the Son of God.* This new life I live is lived by His faith – not just faith *in* Him, but through *His* faith which defines *my* faith.

7. *Who loved me and gave Himself for me.* All this because He saw, loved, gave Himself, and then called 'me', notwithstanding my eternal death.

When the matter is laid out like so, it becomes quite straightforward. The ministry of the word of God makes me aware of a predestination that I must now take up. In an instant, His love is revealed. I respond. I'm captured by His love. I meet Him, accept His life given to me, and I step out to live it. It is all there in the seed. As soon as I'm prepared to confess His life, I can cast off from the shore. He has given me 'right of passage'. I have a starting point, and I can make my joyous departure from the crushing weight of traditional and internal religious machinery. The spectators on the shore may not be waving, but I am. This is a new life, born of water and Spirit.

207. 2 Cor 12:10

## 4. Charting the passage



With the departure docks behind, it can seem as though the passage ahead will be smooth sailing. Before long, however, we find that we are going to need more ‘sincere milk’,<sup>208</sup> if we are to grow, maintain the course, resist the pressure to revert to old landings, and journey all the way to the love of the brethren. The old man is crucified with Christ, but we shall need more understanding regarding putting on the ‘new’ and putting off the ‘old’. The transition from death to life is a challenging passage, not an automatic express. And as we cross over, there is one way of living that leads to life, and another way that leads, most surely, back to death. ‘For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.’<sup>209</sup>

208. 1 Pet 2:2 KJV    209. Rom 8:13

## THE PASSAGE OVER

### Old man, new man

If we are to ‘chart’ the passage over, it is imperative that we understand our ‘selves’ and the charter that the apostles have laid out for us. Their charter will give us the map references we need. In particular, we need to understand Paul’s teaching on the ‘old man’ and the ‘new man’,<sup>210</sup> to guide our steps and to ensure that we don’t revert to our former fleshly mechanisms. Why are these map references so vital? Because they help us understand the *individual* and *collective* nature of *fallen humanity* (the old man), as well as the *individual* and *collective* nature of the *new humanity* (the new man) in Christ. This is the singular aim of the apostles’ doctrine. But a great deal of explanation is needed. What actually happens, for example, when an individual passes over into the collective new creation? How does the Spirit of God affect flesh, so that man’s mode of life moves from ‘fleshly’ (carnal) to ‘spiritual’?<sup>211</sup> How do we avoid being driven back to the lonely, tortured shores of fleshly endeavour?

### Individual and corporate

The New Testament writers describe salvation in the two dimensions – corporate and individual. The corporate focus is the priority, as we said earlier – the emphasis on Christ as the ‘One’ must precede any focus on the *many* individuals.

In the way that the apostles use the term, the ‘old man’ is a corporate entity, as is the ‘new man’. The collective Adam has been succeeded by Christ, who is shown to be a collective ‘Man’ as well.<sup>212</sup> Paul teaches this in Romans. ‘For as by one man’s disobedience many

210. Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9,10    211. 1 Cor 3:1    212. 1 Cor 15:45-47

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were made sinners, so also by *one Man's* obedience *many* will be made righteous.<sup>213</sup>

Nevertheless, each of us participates, individually, in the old man, and each of us is accountable for so doing. That's why Paul can speak to us individually, as well as collectively, and admonish us to 'put off the old man, and 'put on' the new man.<sup>214</sup>

Here's the picture. The 'first' became 'old'. The 'first Adam',<sup>215</sup> including each and every one of us, became the collective 'old man', due to sin. Then, in speaking of His redeeming work, we can't say that Christ became the 'old man', for Christ is larger than, and exceeds, the old man. But Christ was able to gather up the old man in Himself. He did so by including every individual in His 'once for all' death.<sup>216</sup> He put this collective 'old man' to death, in *His* death. Our individual response to this is reflected in baptism. Equally, on the 'life' side, He has included us in the resurrected *new creation*, as members of His body, 'of His flesh and of His bones'.<sup>217</sup> Our individual response to this is also reflected in baptism: 'Therefore *we* were buried with *Him* through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, *even so we* also should walk in newness of life ... knowing this, that *our* old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with'.<sup>218</sup> Amazing words!

#### The real 'you'

Like Adam, the first man, each of us has unique identity – albeit this first expression is now the 'old man' because of sin. Hypothetically, we could say that the infant cry of a newborn baby is

213. Rom 5:19 214. Eph 4:22 215. 1 Cor 15:45 216. Rom 6:10; Heb 7:27  
217. Eph 5:30 218. Rom 6:4-6

the only instant of 'pure' first man, before the nature of the 'old man' begins to express itself.

Before the word of the gospel comes, an individual's definition is unknown to him. Before he hears the word, he is not yet aware that a predestination exists apart from the conceptions of himself which he has accumulated since childhood. He is not aware of God's purpose for him, and he is not aware of his 'first man', his essential being inbreathed by God, as was Adam. He bears the image of the 'earthy', from creation, and was always intended to bear the image of the 'heavenly'.<sup>219</sup> The term 'heavenly' here links with Paul's discussion on Christ as the last Adam. We bear the image of Christ, here and now, when we are born again – or 'born from above',<sup>220</sup> – not just when we die.

Until a man is born again, the only concept he has of himself is the 'old man'. He has identity from God but is abiding in death, not abiding in Christ, or in love. He tries to express this identity, but cannot know himself apart from the image of God.

### The gospel breaking in

As we briefly said earlier, the preached word of the gospel creates an instant of opportunity to be aware of Christ as the One who is addressing 'you' – the 'you' that belongs to God's covenant promise, who is named by God – as distinct from the person that you thought you were (the old man). This is the crucial moment in the gospel transaction. As the word comes by the messenger, there is an instant of revelation where a hearer is made conscious of *Christ* and of one's real self in relation to Christ. Just as lightning splits and divides a tree,

219. 1 Cor 15:47 NASU    220. John 3:3 Gr. *anōthen* – allows the sense of born 'from the first', from the origin. cf. Luke 1:3. This is confirmed in John's letter where he plainly says that we are 'born of God'. 1 John 4:7

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when the piercing word comes, it creates a division between soul and spirit.<sup>221</sup> The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all involved in this saving operation. The Father is giving His own zoe-life in the Son.<sup>222</sup> The word of the Son is about to be the seed of our new birth, so that we become sons of the Father – the brethren of Christ. The Holy Spirit is making a breach with the sword of the word, and is convincing of sin, righteousness and judgement. The Father is drawing, the Son is speaking, and the Spirit is convicting. The word of the Son will reveal the Father's life. The Father will reveal the life of the Son when He sends forth 'the Spirit of His Son into our hearts' – the 'spirit of adoption', whereby we'll cry 'Abba, Father', in the same manner as Christ.<sup>223</sup> The Holy Spirit is about to be 'given to us', and the very essence of Eternal Spirit – the love of God – will be shed abroad in our hearts.<sup>224</sup> How wondrous the work of God to so give Himself to us so that we could not be less than fully joined, fully reconciled – more than a friend, but a son of the Father, a brother to the Son, and a sanctified vessel of the Holy Spirit.

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The Father is drawing, the Son is speaking  
and the Spirit is convicting.

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As such a work of God breaks in upon us, each one of us has a chance to see, distinguish, own and be accountable for what we have become, as individual participants in the old man. Now each of us is able to make contact with our 'roots' in every sense of the word – our roots in God's eternity (our *predestination*), our roots in the *origins* of mankind (the first man), and our roots in the *family* lineage of man

221. Heb 4:12    222. *Zoe* is the Greek word referring to the higher life – and therefore to the life that comes from the Father, just as Jesus explains in John 5:26.    223. Gal 4:6  
224. Rom 5:5

since the Fall (the old man). As C S Lewis wrote in expressing the same truth, 'Our real selves are all waiting for us in Him ... [previously we were] dominated by our own heredity, upbringing, surroundings and natural desires'.<sup>225</sup>

### Regeneration and new creation

Now some of the beacons in the passage are becoming clear. Salvation is about the recovery of 'me', in Christ, so that I can be who I am, and lay this life down for others. This is our principal heading for the passage over. If we lose our course and think that conversion is about a contract for entering heaven, our vessels will certainly stall or be blown back on to the rocky shoreline. What a difference it would make across the Christian church if believers could be restored in the fundamentals of identity and relationship! Instead, the Christian faith is often reduced to matters of moral judgement, good will and religious adherence. It's about right and wrong, and not about personhood that is named by God. And, as a result, the real issues of personal growth and maturity, marriage and family life, all suffer for lack of direction.

This leads us to consider the meaning of regeneration and new creation. Titus speaks about our salvation in these two aspects: 'according to His mercy He *saved* us, through the washing of *regeneration* and *renewing* of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>226</sup> The matter seems complex at first, but simply: our 'first man' creation needs the washing of regeneration, and then the Holy Spirit, in our new birth, from above, 'renews' in the sense that He adds the element of the new creation in Christ. Salvation recovers elements of our person that are corrupted, and also adds elements from our original predestination that are

225. C S Lewis, 1952, *Mere Christianity*, Fontana, London, p187.    226. Titus 3:5

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completely new. The map for our future pilgrimage is not at all clear without these two aspects.

The 'first man', fathered by God, was plunged immediately into iniquity.<sup>227</sup> The 'natural', which came 'first', is now unable to receive the things of God.<sup>228</sup> We each commenced life, not as the pure 'first man' with the *original* 'earthy' image, but with vain traditions, malformation and corruption that clothed and confined us to the 'old man' as a total definition.

Once the gospel comes to us, we have to decide between these familiar traditions and Christ.

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Salvation recovers elements of our person  
that are corrupted.

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The gospel word is the seed of the new creation – Christ. Now the real person that God predestined can be regenerated, not because the life is in the root (as with a hewn tree that regenerates), but because the life is in the seed of the word of God. 'In the beginning was the Word.'<sup>229</sup> Our lives are generated *again* – re-generated – once we are 'born from above'.<sup>230</sup> Regeneration is only possible by the renewing that the Holy Spirit brings.

'That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'<sup>231</sup> Our first birth was 'flesh', and not 'Spirit'. That was stage one in God's purpose. Now we are to be born of the Spirit,<sup>232</sup> born from above, from 'the first',<sup>233</sup> right from the origin in the bosom of the Father.

227. Psa 51:5    228. 1 Cor 15:46; 2:14    229. John 1:1    230. John 3:3 NASU margin  
231. John 3:6    232. *ibid.*    233. See footnote 220

## The Firstborn among many brethren

The conception of Yahweh-Son as the ‘Beloved Son’, the ‘Firstborn’, in the bosom of the Father, included *us*.<sup>234</sup> He was not conceived apart from us. We know that this is so because His motivation was to reveal – first of all to reveal the Father’s unique ‘name’ *as* Father, and to do so He undertook to reveal the fullness of *all* begetting, as the ‘only begotten Son’.<sup>235</sup> James says of the Father of lights, ‘Of His own will begat He *us* by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures’.<sup>236</sup> The Father ‘gave us birth’<sup>237</sup> in the one and only Firstborn. Our true beginning is in Him, right there at the birthplace of the Everlasting Covenant.

It was in this magnificent faith that the Son emptied Himself to become the ‘Beginning of the creation of God’, the Firstborn among many brethren.<sup>238</sup> Hebrews states the wonder of this in quoting the words from the Psalms as being the Son’s own words: ‘in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to [the Father]’. ‘I will put my trust in Him [ie the Father]’; ‘Here am I and the children [brethren] whom God has given Me’.<sup>239</sup>

To whom does the Son sing? In whom did He trust and invest the sum total of His faith? Who are all these children? Who is this ‘assembly’ of ‘brethren’ that is given to Him?<sup>240</sup> The content of Hebrews chapter one, where the writer compares the Son, the Father’s Firstborn, with the angels, makes it quite clear that we need to apply these matters to the conception of the Son in the Father’s bosom, before the founding of the heavens and earth. And of course, these foreordained realities, from *pre*-beginning, are then manifested in time.

234. Luke 9:35; Heb 1:6; Col 1:15; John 1:18 235. John 1:14; 3:16 236. Jas 1:18 KJV  
237. *ibid.* 238. Rev 3:14; Rom 8:29 239. Heb 2:12,13 240. Heb 2:12-14

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‘He indeed was *foreordained before the foundation* of the world, but was *manifest in these last times* for you.’<sup>241</sup>

#### The faith of God Himself

The faith of the Father was the faith that foreknew every one of us. The faith of the Son was the faith that foreordained our place in Him. The faith of the Spirit was the faith that made us new, overspreading His perfecting power across creation, procreation and incarnation. For each and every one of us, named and ordained of God, creation and procreation would be succeeded by ‘new creation’,<sup>242</sup> and thus the complete predestination would be achieved.

The guiding light in this discussion is that our individual life is to be found in the One Seed, Christ. ‘He does *not* say [about the promise], “And to seeds,” as of *many*, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.’<sup>243</sup> There is only One Seed, hence the new life we find is only in Him. Those who are convinced of this will make the passage over!

#### The story of ‘you’

Understanding our origin in the Son of God Himself is essential to our journey. Let us now consider the familiar Scripture in this way: ‘Therefore if any [first] man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old [man] things are passed away; behold all things [which are in the seed] have become new’.<sup>244</sup> This is a helpful paraphrase. It’s gloriously simple: by regeneration, the real ‘you’ can be recovered. But this only takes place in the context of the corporate new creation, in the fellowship of the body of Christ.

Let us wonder once again at the miracle of conversion. The word of faith, as it is preached, divides between ‘you’ and the old man.

241. 1 Pet 1:20    242. 2 Cor 5:17    243. Gal 3:16    244. 2 Cor 5:17

## THE PASSAGE OVER

Furthermore, the word renders the old man powerless, inoperative. Now each individual can be born from above and stand up. And for as long as he stands up in Christ, he can stand and reckon the old man dead! The old man could not do this, for he is already dead.

Now, by the word of the cross, the old man is smitten, crucified with Christ. His whole operation, working by law, is rendered useless. The stronghold of flesh, held under Satan's power, is put to death, run through with the sword of God's word. Now the new man, joined to Christ, can stand up. In the power of Christ's life, each new-born individual can now obey, from the heart, the form of doctrine to which He has been delivered.<sup>245</sup> As it was for a defeated foe on a Roman battlefield, each of us has been taken captive and made a bond-slave of Christ.

Summarising: God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, within the Eternal Covenant, conceived one seed, one new creation, in which each one of us would be a joint-heir with Christ. God then expounded His purpose in history, 'the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward, the spiritual'.<sup>246</sup> Mankind was born 'natural' and, as we find, he was also corruptible, able to be corrupted, once temptation entered. But man was not just to be natural, like Adam. He was to be regenerated – divinely born through participation in Christ. And this was the step that would require us to lay down our lives.

As we have said clearly, the passage over involves laying our lives down. The power in the divine seed of the new birth is such that I have power to lay my life down. Then His life, in me, becomes a whole new way of life. The life I now live will be the one predestined for me, before the foundation of the world, conceived in the covenant that brought all things into being.

245. Rom 6:17 246. 1 Cor 15:46

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### The works prepared beforehand

Now it is possible for me to do the works 'prepared beforehand that [I] should walk in them'.<sup>247</sup> These works are not the works of the old man (the works of my *own* righteousness), which were antagonistic to Christ, even if they *were* good works. These are the works of the new creature, predestined beforehand. These are the works of faith, arising from the seed of my new birth. Now I enter the rest of ceasing from my own works, according to Hebrews, the 'rest' of walking in the Spirit, fulfilling the righteousness that was foreordained.<sup>248</sup>

### Wars and fights

We can see clearly that we must chart the passage before pressing on with our journey. Why? Because the principal danger in our navigation is that we are tempted to *revert* to living in the flesh, by law. Why are there 'wars and fights ... among you? Do they not come from your desires [lusts] ... you lust and do not have.'<sup>249</sup> Various desires, James says, lead to striving and war. What are these desires, and where do they come from? If there is one solitary source of fleshly motivation, we would say it was the 'fear of death', by which Satan keeps us in bondage for the whole of our lives.<sup>250</sup> The instinct of survival is his touch-point in every human individual. And consequently the only antidote to this fear is the laying down of life.

### The fear of death

If we do not diligently exercise the *faith* of the new creature, and the *power* to lay life down, the fear of death becomes 'another law' that captivates us immediately to the law of sin.<sup>251</sup> Every kind of law which

247. Eph 2:10    248. Heb 4:10    249. Jas 4:1,2    250. Heb 2:15    251. Rom 7:23

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we have practised as part of our familiar, fallen culture can drive every kind of lust, or desire. The law of the old man, aroused by fear, now incites desire, and desire conceives sin. In an overall sense, fear and anxiety drive the lust for control. *Control* is the primary lust, for all other forms of lust are expressions of this one lust, the lust for control. We feel compelled to protect ourselves, or preserve ourselves, and the image that we have of ourselves. Remember, the old man with which we have been familiar in our previous existence is an idol, an image of our own making that we have projected onto the screen of reality, right into the face of God. The most difficult thing to yield is our image of ourselves. This is the greatest of all idols, supported by the deepest and strongest of all our defences. In truth, we would do almost anything, and even yield anything, as long as this idolatrous image is not cast down. If we do not cast it down and press forward to love the brethren, the traditions and oppressing spirits of our own family background will overwhelm our vessel. How then shall we deal with these dangers of the sea?

The truth is that we may *try* to discern, and then *attempt* to war against, the demons of our own familiar history. However, if we are driven by self-preserving fear, anxiety and lust for control, we will never defeat them. The exercise becomes a vicious cycle. Laying our lives down in sincere love is the only answer.

If an individual strengthens his 'position', then Satan is stronger still, and will take control of such a man, whether Christian or not. Note what Jesus said, 'But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his *armour in which he trusted*, and divides his spoils'.<sup>252</sup> The point is this. When we trust in our own armoury; that is, when we set up and depend on our own defences, the

252. Luke 11:21-23

#### 4. *Charting the passage*

enemy turns this very armoury back upon us. The only defence against Satan is in losing our lives, followed by a sincere love of the brethren. 'And they overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.'<sup>253</sup>

Making the passage over is the only defence against demonic oppression.

#### False projection can imitate authority

We should take this matter of projection and self-deception one step further. As we have just said, what we might believe to be diligent warfare can be an act of delivering our weapons into Satan's hands. Strong and authoritative Christian action can just be fleshly lust for power, aping and posing as spiritual leadership. Why else do very many troubled, insecure and inadequate people pursue positions of leadership and authority? Merely for self-validation. This is a severe deception, and a serious problem across the church, particularly where gifted leaders begin to participate in trans-local oversight of Christian groups. Leadership ought never become a disguise, foil or cloak for a mode of fleshly control. The mark of true authority, as Paul takes pains to teach, is the demeanour of meekness and weakness, even in the face of those who are clearly 'messengers of Satan'.<sup>254</sup> Genuine leaders are 'too weak'<sup>255</sup> for the kind of haughty, overbearing activity which unwary novices think is the true nature of leadership. The conclusion is clear. Only the new man in Christ, laying his life down, accepting and walking in his predestination and loving the brethren, has any power over the works of the enemy. Only this man will make the passage over.

253. Rev 12:11    254. 2 Cor 11:13-21    255. 2 Cor 11:21

## 5. Crossing the passage



The compass points discussed in the previous chapter are the important bearings for our journey. Doubtless, our aim is to make it all the way across, with a clear understanding of the dangers of the open sea. Having charted our course by discussing the new creation in Christ, we will now confront some of the reasons why vessels never finish the race. There are gospels and precepts, both in content and practice, that will leave us misdirected or becalmed. And there are outright perversions that will blow us off course and leave our faith shipwrecked. Having focused on the personal knowledge of ourselves in Christ, we now look out across the surging seas to understand the contrary winds of false teaching. Paul warns us in exactly these terms, ‘But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach *any other gospel* to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed’.<sup>256</sup> It may be a

256. Gal 1:8,9

## 5. *Crossing the passage*

new and surprising thought to some readers that there are indeed *other* gospels posing as *the* gospel. In nautical terms, we might think of them as pirate vessels, tacking about on the same ocean, but distracting, attacking and robbing passers-by. So let us take care to study the basis of false teachings, and identify their impact on our homeward resolve.

### The gift of righteousness

Once again, we look across the centuries of struggle around the basic precepts of the Christian proposition. If we were to identify one cardinal issue above all others, it would be this. The life of Christ is a *gift*, not a conversion of *my* life. *My* conversion occurs when I cease to live *my* life, in my strength, in pursuit of my ideals. I no longer employ all the 'old man' machinery for preserving, qualifying, judging and promoting *my* life.

Prominent figures and writers in all ages have passed through wild and stormy waters to arrive at this conclusion. There is no way of converting our life into the righteousness that earns God's acceptance. Relationship with God has nowhere, at any time, been achieved in any way, without an intervention from God, by His word. What we will trace, briefly, are some of the courses travelled, and steps taken, in this epic, historic journey. In this regard, the passage of the Reformer, Martin Luther, becomes a useful object lesson, as we mentioned earlier. Helpfully, his engaging wrestle with Roman Catholic theology, leading to his now famous Reformation awakening, reflects most of the struggles that are common to man.

As a young man, Martin Luther wrestled with how to satisfy a righteous God. What is the single act or response that is required of *us*? Should one try to *love* God? *Repent*? *Believe*? According to the Scriptures, yes. But as deep as he reached into his own heart, he discovered that all attempts to *love* were merely erotic (possessive, not

giving), that all attempts to *repent* in contrition were self-centred, and that all *believing* was, in part, still self-serving. The best that a Christian could expect, he wrote, was that a man's deeds were good, but never 'quantitatively or qualitatively sufficient for salvation'.<sup>257</sup> In this regard, he was quite correct.

### Righteousness – by works or as a gift?

Luther's awakening, which did lead to wholesale reformation in his day, was merely that God's righteousness is to be accepted as a *gift*, not earned through the slavish *works* prescribed by the institutional church of the day. On this basis, Martin Luther parted company with the Roman Catholic church, and his subsequent theses and lecture tours had enormous repercussions in those dark ages of superstitious ignorance.

### Divine spark?

On the way to his awakening, Martin Luther wrestled with, and articulated, *three of the primary quandaries* that still lodge in pre-conversion thinking, across all ages and religious streams. As we have said, Luther's awakening did move him beyond these classic dispositions, at least to some degree. So we identify them here, in the manner that he did, merely to show how these prevailing, contrary winds have baffled and misled countless mariners in successive ages.

The first quandary was the notion that a 'divine spark' still remained in all human beings, a faint ember that could be fanned into life, given the right religious stimulation. In fact, according to Luther, it was a double spark, one of will and one of mind, evidenced respectively in the desire to do good, and in the capacity to distinguish

257. J M Kittleson, 1986, *Luther the Reformer*, Augsburg, Minneapolis, p 74.

## 5. *Crossing the passage*

between good and evil. Such a belief can be traced to the Greek philosophers, Plato, Socrates and Aristotle.

### The image of God?

The second of Luther's quandaries was the notion that despite man's fall into sin, the *imago dei*, the image of God, was stamped in every human being, albeit as a now faint, corrupt, but redeemable, replica of what God intended. (This is not the same thought as we have expressed earlier about the first man in relation to the old man.)

The third point of constant deliberation was built on these two – viz. that human beings could, and should, make every effort to be righteous, but the church would help by mediating the grace of God through its sacraments, and thus make the partial work of human endeavour acceptable to God. Infant baptism, confirmation, marriage, confession, penance, mass and extreme unction (at death) were the seven sacraments that would assure men that 'God would not refuse grace to those who did what was within them'.<sup>258</sup>

In his youthful search for the truth, Luther found his conscience to be an unforgiving monster. His near hatred of God, his inner torment, and the obvious weakness in these precepts, led Luther to the illumination that 'the righteousness of God had to come completely from faith' – 'that neither humility nor faith were human undertakings; both were gifts of God that came with the righteousness of God'. Of Christ he said, 'But *He* made satisfaction. He is the righteous one, and this is my defence' (emphasis ours).<sup>259</sup>

The effect of delivering the people of Germany, and beyond, from their bondage to religious works, and into a belief in faith-righteousness, was indeed remarkable. No more need be said about

258. *ibid.* 259. *ibid.* p 94,95

that here. There are two points of interest to our present study. 1. In a way that is typical of us all, he learned that we cannot plunge into the law-bound conscience within ourselves to find the root, seed, spark or image that can be recovered. 2. We learn, as well, that while Luther came alive to the gift of righteousness, he did *not* in fact articulate *the passage over* in the way that we now understand it. His passage seems only to have taken him part of the way. Once again, note that we are highlighting his deliberations, not because Luther was fastened to them, but because very many other false gospels have taken on these doctrines as partners in their piracy.

Of Luther himself, we stand by our point. He seems not to have left his early sketches entirely behind him. This matter requires some insight, and readers will need to meditate carefully here.

We discover, for example, that his fundamental proposition was stated like so (quoting from a notable biography): ‘We implore Him to take away [sin] by grace ... we confess ourselves sinners, and hold ourselves to be sinners through weeping, penitence, grieving and tears ... for Luther the fundamental mystery was this: salvation started from being sinners and knowing it’.<sup>260</sup>

At first sight, this appears reasonable. The shortfall in Luther’s line of thinking is not immediately obvious. What he is saying is this. We are not to exhaust ourselves trying to be righteous; we acknowledge that we are sinners, and we accept His offer of imputed righteousness, through faith. We must just *accept* that we are sinners. Once again, this seems quite sound. However, in this acceptance that ‘we *are* sinners’, coupled with a firm belief in the gift of righteousness, the whole equation took on a certain ‘legal’ connotation. In other words, believers simply relied on the imputed righteousness that was

260. *ibid.* p 97

## 5. *Crossing the passage*

promised, and were not bound to change so as to reveal righteous character. Reliance on the 'position' of justification, through faith, made righteous living an option. Believers ought not to try too hard, in case they appeared to discount Christ's free gift. This is not what Paul taught, for he specifically stressed that 'in 'the gospel of Christ ... the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.'<sup>261</sup>

For Luther, we could say the pendulum had swung from the ardent but vain endeavour to *be* righteous, to a dogmatic belief in a 'position' that we could hold *without* actually having to *be* righteous.

As it turns out, Luther himself lived and died amidst angry controversy, leaving some doubt as to how much headway he made across the passage.

### Becalmed on the sea

It is not our aim here to discredit Luther's theological breakthrough, or the obvious fruit of his courageous stand. Rather it is needful to draw attention to where the Reformation stopped short. Certainly Luther was delivered from the torments of his conscience as to man's incapacity to be righteous before God. And in pursuing this freedom, he was able to bring his hearers up to the point of acknowledging their need of *imputed* righteousness. He then maintained some emphasis on the sacraments of the church as a means of providing grace. His clarity here is unconvincing. In all, we have to admit that he did not direct our passage over to the faith of participating in the new creation, the *corporate* new man, Christ.

Luther's emphasis was upon individual 'legal' justification, and not upon the imperative of sincere love as the fruit of having left the shore and of steering a course toward relationship. And without this kind of

261. Rom 1:16-17

conversion, we will all find ourselves carried back into the troubled torrents of the tormented soul, so well described in Luther's biographies.

Recall our key precept. Only sincere love is the evidence of having passed from death to life – regardless of how many theological reforms we can identify.

Luther magnified the gift of righteousness, but only as a legal imputation, as a position that we now hold *through faith*. He was so wary of works in relation to this kind of positional faith, that he deemed the book of James ('I will show you my faith by my works') as being unworthy of inclusion in the Scriptures – when in fact, *true* faith is shown 'by our works'.<sup>262</sup>

In the end, we have to say that Luther's teaching directed generations forward from the shoreline, but left them becalmed on the sea – somewhere between the notion of imputed righteousness, and the reality of righteousness actually lived and revealed in us.

### Purgatory?

And because righteousness was scarcely evidenced in changed lives, the notion of purgatory continued on in human thought. Why was this? Because lack of change, fear of hell, and growing disbelief in eternal punishment, left many to believe that God has some other way, after death, to equip godless men for heaven – namely, a period of punishment in purgatory. In truth, our own generation is very vague regarding this whole matter. While only certain groups of believers would actively claim to believe in purgatory, other insidious persuasions are robbing us on the high seas. For example, it's become common to believe that our inherent goodness will 'get us there'.

262. Jas 2:17,18

## 5. *Crossing the passage*

Worse still, many would believe that genuine change is not possible here and now, but will only be effected in the hereafter. Worse still again, growing numbers of cynics are deeming any endeavour to demonstrate loving, righteous nature, as nothing more than vain hypocrisy. ‘We’re all the same underneath .... no one’s perfect ....’ – these are the catch-cries of the modern age.

In summary then, Luther did not lead us across the passage to the laying down of life, to the love of the brethren, to the gift of righteousness as a *specific life* that we now live, or to the fulfilling of the specific works ‘prepared beforehand that we should walk in them’.<sup>263</sup>

His wrestles, therefore, provide an insight into dangers of the sea, as we embark upon the passage over.

### The content of Calvinism

Our exploration in these channels of theological history leads us to comment on some of the conclusions of Calvin as well (1509-1564, a younger contemporary of Luther). His central thought on salvation went along these lines.

If we are dead in our sins, as dead as Jesus’ friend, Lazarus, then we are unable to participate in our new beginning, just as Lazarus could do nothing to raise himself from his tomb. Similarly, a baby cannot participate in its own birth. Calvin’s points are quite sensible, and his aim was to show that faith is a gift of God, and not a quality that is resident within ourselves. Accordingly, God acts entirely in His own sovereignty to grant salvation to a man or woman. This being so, when the gospel was preached, and when some believed and others did not, he concluded that those who believed did so because God granted them the faith to do so. The logical extension of this argument was

263. Eph 2:10

that if God has elected to save us, then we cannot be lost; we are ‘once saved, always saved’, as the saying is often repeated.

As we said earlier, the Arminian argument swung out on the other side of the vessel – that men were responsible to believe and accountable if they did not. We won’t repeat what we covered earlier, but rather move directly to a helpful point.

Calvin’s references to Lazarus and to the newborn child are appropriate, as is his conclusion that neither the faith nor the power to revive ourselves lies within ourselves. However, the quandary to which he addressed himself is better resolved as follows.

We have already said that the power to deny ourselves, to lay our lives down, and to love the brethren, is not within ourselves. We must be born again. Then the capacity for change is in the seed. This leaves us with nothing to do but receive the seed. ‘But as many as *received* Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God.’<sup>264</sup>

Does this suggest, contrary to Calvin’s argument, that there is something we can and must do? The answer can be explained this way.

### The power to respond is in the word

The proclaimed word, alone, creates the entire opportunity, and conveys the entire content of the transaction. In this regard, we agree with Calvin’s conclusion. There is no action on man’s part that enables the new birth. Remember the verse: ‘who were born, not of *blood*, nor of the *will* of the flesh, nor of the *will* of man, but of God’.<sup>265</sup> It is only when the word distinguishes the essential person, loved by God, *from* the old man, that for a moment in time and eternity, a living identity created by God, and predestined in Christ, *is endowed with the capacity to*

264. John 1:12    265. John 1:13

## 5. Crossing the passage

*receive the word*. The very fact that it is given to us, and bound upon us, to receive Him, is clear from the Scripture we just read. John is quite clear. While some ‘received Him not’, to ‘as many as received Him, He gave ...’.<sup>266</sup> We quoted Paul earlier on the same point, ‘because they did not receive the love of the truth ... for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all *may be condemned* who did *not believe* the truth’.<sup>267</sup>

So we are condemned if we do not believe. If even faith itself is carried in the word, then we are absolutely accountable to receive and believe, just as the Scriptures say. The criminal piracy of teaching anything else but this, is plain to see.

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There is no action on man’s part that  
enables the new birth.

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Responding to Calvin’s logic then – if the power to mix *faith* with the *word*<sup>268</sup> was *not* inherent in the preaching (Gr. *kerugma*) of the word, then we *would* have to agree that it is impossible for a dead man to hear the call. We would also agree that a newborn could not participate in his own birth. Sadly then, Calvin has displayed a lack of understanding of this fundamental tenet of the book of Romans.

‘For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?’<sup>269</sup>

266. John 1:12    267. 2 Thess 2:10-12    268. Heb 4:2    269. Rom 10:13-15

It's patently clear from Romans chapter ten (expressing it in reverse order): that a messenger is sent to preach, we hear, we can believe, we can call on His name, we can be saved.

Readers will be somewhat clear by now, and somewhat startled, to realise how the prevailing winds of false doctrine can leave 'children tossed to and fro', robbing them of the accountability to have faith, and spoiling them of the fruit of sincere faith, once it is submitted to and exercised in the gracious power of Christ.<sup>270</sup>

### The essential you – from death to life

The central consideration of the Reformers of whom we've spoken has been helpfully identified. This is our chief consideration also. We shall express the matter as one question, in two sections: 1. What is our condition before the word comes (remembering the arguments about the 'divine spark', the 'image of God', the sacraments of the church, the gift of righteousness, the sovereignty of God in saving us, etc)? 2. What is the nub of our response; one that can lead either to salvation or condemnation?

We shall express the matter as a question: 'What is the condition of 'you' before the word comes?' If the word brings *with it* the power of regeneration and new creation, we could well ask, 'In what condition is the essential identity of each individual, prior to regeneration?' The Scriptures simply say that He 'made us alive' who *were* 'dead in trespasses and sins'.<sup>271</sup> We were dead! We were 'abiding in death'.<sup>272</sup> Our overall occupation was in 'fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind'.<sup>273</sup>

Now the theological musing covered above makes sense. The Scripture plainly says that we are dead until Christ makes us alive.

270. Eph 4:14 271. Eph 2:1,5 272. 1 John 3:14 273. Eph 2:3

## 5. *Crossing the passage*

Man was inbreathed and ‘wonderfully’ made a ‘living soul’ by the ‘Father of spirits’.<sup>274</sup> But the Scriptures contend that we are now dead, and do not have a ‘divine spark’ that can be fanned into a flame of godliness. In this sense, Luther and Calvin were partly correct in highlighting our need for righteousness as a gift, having no basis at all in our inherent capacity remaining from the Fall.

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We are dead until Christ  
makes us alive.

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We have to think quite seriously here. In what condition are we without the new birth? Why do so many people manifest such goodness and sacrificial virtue *without* the new birth? Are we all, in the end, simply judged according to our works – leaving us free to decide our own goodness and practise our own good deeds? What did Jesus mean when He said that our righteousness had to exceed that of the Pharisees if we were to enter the kingdom of heaven?<sup>275</sup> Just how righteous do we have to be, and how can we ever achieve it (as Luther reasoned)?

What elements of God’s creation of mankind *do* we retain, if any? What does it mean that we are ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’?<sup>276</sup> Are we totally corrupt, as Calvin taught?

And at the end of these questions, we are most curious to understand how the new birth impacts on the human individual. Are we turned into another person altogether? If not, how does divine birth interact with and affect the person that we already are? We need to know the answers here, if we are not to cast off and mistakenly

274. Gen 2:7; Psa 139:14; Heb 12:9    275. Matt 5:20    276. Psa 139:14

determine our own future, or else be set adrift to sing the anthems of existentialism ('whatever will be, will be').

### Dead in sin

The starting point in our quest lies in understanding what it means to be 'dead in sin' and 'abiding in death' until Christ makes us 'alive together' with Himself.<sup>277</sup> The truth is this. The Scripture says that we are 'made alive' by Christ. So we must conclude that without Christ, we are dead, no matter how alive we appear to be. There is no good news for *you* or about *you* unless it is properly confirmed that *you* are dead, and until He makes you alive.

To be 'dead in sin', then, is clearly a particular type of death – a kind of living death. Let us explain. Identity is present; the person does exist. This is what the philosophers have tried to describe as the 'divine spark' and the marred 'image of God'. They presumed there is something good within ourselves as the basis for godliness. This is where the danger lies. If we are basically 'good' at all, then the claims of the gospel are optional. Little wonder that Paul takes pains to undermine this proposition: 'There is *none* righteous, no, not one ... none who understands ... who seeks after God ... none who does good, no, not one ... the poison of asps is under their lips ... there is no fear of God before their eyes'.<sup>278</sup> And this is everyone, not just the wicked people.

Later in Romans, he says, 'For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) *nothing good* dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find'.<sup>279</sup>

Here Paul states the matter clearly. The will of man reaches toward the ideals of the law, but the flesh has no power to achieve them.

277. Eph 2:1,5    278. Rom 3:10-18    279. Rom 7:18

## 5. Crossing the passage

This is the condition of being ‘dead in sin’. The identity is present. There is a ‘me’, with a will, albeit nothing good dwells within. This is what we worldlings find so hard to accept. And so humanism – the common belief in the goodness and ability of man – continues to fly in the face of reality. For according to the gospel, whenever a wonderful, God-breathed identity moves to express himself, he does so according to the code of death, ‘fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind’.<sup>280</sup>

What is the problem? What are we to understand by this? Simply that each individual has lost the single context of the ‘one’ called ‘the image of God’ in which to be alive and expressive. *That’s why individualism is the mark of being fallen – and should not at all be the mark of a Christian who has made the passage over.* Men and women are not abiding in God, or abiding in love, with God abiding in them.<sup>281</sup> Each is *abiding* in death. His context and code is death. Remember God’s word to Adam: ‘but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for *in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*’.<sup>282</sup>

### What is ‘death’?

Let us discuss the matter of death more slowly now. Certainly we know we will all die, in the human sense. And as Paul says, we judge thus, ‘that if One died for all, then *all* died’.<sup>283</sup> Christ comprehended all of us in His death, because we are dead already, eternally dead. He met the human race in the hell of our own making. This is what we are to judge and conclude when we observe the death of Christ. This is the very first tenet of which we need to be convinced. No individual is in any better condition than that described by Calvary. It is not as if we are in some mid-point between poles, in a college examination room,

280. Eph 2:3 281. 1 John 4:16 282. Gen 2:17 283. 2 Cor 5:14

waiting to know the outcome. We are already abiding in death. At the same time, we *can* surely know, according to John, *when* we have passed from death to life.

So here is the situation before the word of the gospel comes. Each person has identity, ‘fearfully and wonderfully’ wrought by God Himself.<sup>284</sup> Now if each identity could just ‘be’, and not ‘do’ anything, he might live. But as soon as there is a consciousness of the law of God, and a desire to act upon it from the law of one’s mind, one is brought into captivity to the law of sin. This is the simplest possible summary of Romans chapter seven. ‘For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am!’<sup>285</sup>

### The effect of law

Here, in this amazing chapter, Paul is speaking to those familiar with Moses’ law covenant, as one who was himself familiar with it, and with its potential for producing a law-abiding Pharisee of Pharisees,<sup>286</sup> yet doomed to eternal death. He marvels at the dynamic by which the good and holy law of God, revealed at Mount Sinai, could arouse within him such emotions of sin.

‘But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me *all* manner of *evil* desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.’<sup>287</sup>

284. Psa 139:14    285. Rom 7:22-24    286. Phil 3:5    287. Rom 7:8-11

## 5. *Crossing the passage*

This matter needs vast expansion, but we shall confine ourselves to simple reflections. His overall conclusion is clear. The individual finds it impossible to act in any way other than in this code described so ably by Paul. As soon as one is aware of the good that he should do, and seeks to do it, he cannot do it, and even in attempting it, the sin within him deceives him and kills him. Hypothetically, a man might be able to live if it were not for the law – the standard of righteousness to which he is compelled to be related. Certainly man (Adam) was alive before he partook of the knowledge of good and evil. But once he became aware of the good, evil was present with him.<sup>288</sup> Like Adam and Eve before the Fall, man desires to be the source of his own life and, in so doing, becomes alienated *from* the source of life, from the image of God.<sup>289</sup>

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The holy law of God arouses in man  
the emotions of sin.

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This is the overall mode and code of death. Where one is ‘dead in sin’, he is not yet ‘made alive’ in the image. He only ever moves according to his own exercise of being right, or righteous, according to law. He fulfils the desires of the flesh and of the mind. In this overall exercise, it appears that the individual is finding himself by these exercises of self-motivated righteousness. Indeed, he believes he is finding himself, and others watching on believe this also. In fact, they are observing what the individual would be, if only he could be, but the identity is functioning in death, not life. Furthermore, each one is cut off from genuine community with the other. There is no collective

288. Rom 7:21    289. Eph 4:18

‘image of God’, only a collective expression of the ‘old man’ – with all his noble intentions.

Here’s the startling point about the passage over. In practical terms, many presume that this entire spiritual exercise, just described, is ‘Christian’, when in fact it is the mark of spiritual death. In this regard, the ministry of the gospel becomes a huge challenge, as well as a huge relief, for the very reasons that Paul wrote Romans chapters five to eight. Seekers are setting out across the passage to find their lives, but killing themselves in the process. Each individual is in absolute hellish captivity, with no image in which to proceed other than death. And at the instant he becomes conscious of the *law of God*, and aspires according to the *law of his mind*, he is immediately in captivity to the *law of sin*. And ‘another law’, viz. every other law, locks him in to the same captivity.<sup>290</sup>

### Dead – made alive

How triumphant then is the truth, ‘you He made alive, who were dead ...’.<sup>291</sup> ‘You’ were dead. There is no mistake. Whatever activity was thought to bring life, as Paul says, leads to death. The very exercise of acting outside the image produces more and more death. And so the glorious light of the gospel shines as the only hope. The word draws near and knocks on the door of the tomb. The imprisoned soul is presented with an opportunity to regain the collective image, in Christ. Christ is the image of the Father’s life, the One Seed who includes all of us. There is no way back to the Father except through Him. He is the *way* of recovery. He is the *truth* about *who we are* in relation to God, and He is the *life* of God. Christ, the new creation, the name above all names, calls Lazarus from the grave, so to speak. Upon

290. Rom 7:23    291. Eph 2:1

## 5. Crossing the passage

hearing the word, the individual walks free from the vain tradition of living death. He may now express himself in the image of God, amidst his fellows, newborn and empowered by the seed of the Word, of Christ Himself. He may now present himself 'to God *as being alive from the dead*, and [his] members as instruments of righteousness to God'.<sup>292</sup>

The light shines brighter now – the clear sun by day, and the beacons of the heavens by night. And there are lighthouses aplenty for the dark, stormy times. The passage is ablaze. With anchors aweigh, and fellows on board, we can set sail for an active corporate life, still facing the threats of death-producing laws, and the eddies of false doctrine. But there's a sure hope as an anchor for the soul. Christ our Forerunner has endured this very same passage. He has faced the onslaught and overcome through faith, never losing sight of His brethren. And now we humbly, and proudly as well, stand beside Him as brethren of whom He is not ashamed. What a wondrous gospel!

### The gospel and 'you'

Can we see it now? The seed of the word brings Christ, to 'you'. You are dead. *He* is the one and only image of life. Life is only in the Son. Now each individual *psuche* is enlivened with the Father's zoe-life, the seed-life of God, which is Christ Himself. As you receive Him, the old is crucified and you are raised.<sup>293</sup> 'For *you* died, and *your* life is hidden with Christ in God.'<sup>294</sup> If we miss this point, it will allow for 'you', presuming to be newborn in the image of God, to imitate newborn life by once again adopting the entire mode of legal living. And it will prove to be just too tempting to return to the old, familiar code. Worse still, with wind in our sails and a belief that a new birth

292. Rom 6:13    293. Then our full identification with this operation is accomplished in baptism.    294. Col 3:3

has taken place, we will proceed to compare and equate our self-driven living with the word that is proclaimed. We will think the two things match. We will nod ‘amen’ in consent, and feed the ‘old’ with the promises applicable to the ‘new’. And this delusion will not be realised until our great endeavours are shipwrecked in some way – often when our family vessels fail on the high seas of life. We discover that we are trying to cross the passage in the old mode, and not in the vessel of the new creation.

### Abiding in death

Peter confirms this entire view when he speaks of flesh being like grass. The human being may appear to be alive, but it is perishable and perishing. Then Peter compares this *corruptible* seed with the *incorruptible* seed of the word of God.<sup>295</sup> He makes this comparison, well knowing that the human seed is corruptible. It was not death-resistant from the beginning. There was to be another seed, another birth – not just ‘born of flesh’ this time, but ‘born of the Spirit’.<sup>296</sup>

And so Peter says, ‘All flesh’ is as ‘grass’, and even the ‘glory of man’ is as the ‘flower’ that still fades, despite its beauty.<sup>297</sup> What he is saying, in very practical terms is that our birth ‘of blood’, our creation of flesh, is, at best, like the flower of the grass. Yes, there is a flourishing beauty to which the human race aspires. Enlightenment, education, political reform, science and the arts have raised up flowers all over the human landscape. Nevertheless they all fade.

This sounds obvious enough, but leads to another fearsome element in this whole discussion. Not only is essential identity captive

295. 1 Pet 1:23 296. John 3:6 297. 1 Pet 1:24

## 5. Crossing the passage

in a mode called 'death', but it is deteriorating further as well. This is the meaning of the worm that does not die.<sup>298</sup> More on this later.

Identity, created by God, cannot cease to exist. In the beginning, God breathed into man the breath of life, and made him a living soul. God gave him community, in common with all living things, and individual identity. The LORD is called the God of the *spirits* of all flesh, the 'Father of spirits' and the Father of lights (ie identities with various glories).<sup>299</sup> We concede therefore, that the identity of man, even in the first creation and without the new birth, is fathered by God. This makes the definition of the new birth extremely critical indeed. Why? Because there is that self-consciousness in mankind that would lead him to believe that there is nothing more he needs to receive from God. He already has a sense of eternity. Even though the outward tabernacle will cease, men are convinced they will never cease to exist. And the Scriptures confirm this point. Both life and death *are* everlasting. Hell will be eternal as well.

### Understanding death

With this in mind, our passage from death to life requires us to make a study of death. We will consider death in five different dimensions.

1. Mortality. Beginning with the most obvious, the death of mortality comes to all men. For the Christian believer, this death has no sting because it leads to participating in Christ's resurrection life.

2. Eternal death – the 'second death'.<sup>300</sup> Not as easy to comprehend is the fact that while there will be resurrection to eternal life, there will also be a resurrection to eternal condemnation.<sup>301</sup> The Bible calls this the 'second death', because those raised to face judgement are then

298. Mark 9:46 299. Num 27:16; Heb 12:9; Jas 1:17 300. Rev 20:6,14 301. John 5:29

condemned to eternal death – a second and permanent death. Other Scriptures which describe hell and the lake of fire, and those who enter it ‘alive’ – like the beast and false prophet – help us understand this state of eternal death.<sup>302</sup>

3. Dead *in sin*. Adam was told that on the day he ate of the forbidden tree, he would die. While he did not instantly ‘drop dead’ and die the death of mortality, he did immediately adopt the *code* of death. He was dead to God, and alive to sin. Furthermore, he was not simply frozen, but the state of corruptibility overtook him and his entire sphere. No element of this sphere, from the creation itself through to his personal relationships, could be preserved from degeneration. Adam and Eve, and the human race to follow, were all now ‘dead in sin’, enslaved to sin – that is, to the dictates of self-consciousness and self-preservation.

4. Dead *to sin*. Because Christ’s death is very specifically described as death *to sin*, we will occupy ourselves with understanding this aspect of death also. And the outcome is glorious indeed. For we discover that we are able to be conformed to the likeness of this very death, His death to sin. ‘For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise *you also*, reckon yourselves to be *dead indeed to sin*, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.’<sup>303</sup>

5. Death *of sin*. The marvel of Christ’s work is that while He was ‘without sin’<sup>304</sup> and remained ‘separate’ from sin,<sup>305</sup> He was also ‘made sin’ and *became* a curse so that sin itself could be cursed and devoted to destruction (Heb. *cherem*).<sup>306</sup> The demand of God’s law was fully

302. Rev 19:20 303. Rom 6:10-11 304. Heb 4:15 305. Heb 7:26 306. See V J Hall and M A Wylie, 2004, *Take My Cup*, Seedlife Publications, Forest Glen.

## 5. *Crossing the passage*

expressed, and by Christ's voluntary acceptance of the appointed penalty of law, the curse was exhausted. By touching the doom of sin, He was condemned *as sin*. Then, because the law cannot curse what is just, Christ was able to make a separation between Himself and the body of sin. Thus He was able to condemn sin in the flesh. Now Christ is able to put sin and death, *to death*.

### The death of the 'old'

Christ's death *to sin*, and the way in which He effected the death *of sin*, is of course the major key in crossing the passage. But, briefly here, let us restate the condition of the essential identity, before the new birth. We have stated earlier that we may not suppose that there is a divine remnant within us that makes every man the luminary of his own pathway. Nor can we hold to the notion that man is like a damaged coin – with a marred image of God that can be washed off, scrubbed and re-presented as righteous and acceptable to God. The awful danger here is that our understandings of the new birth may build on either of these suppositions. The individual must be born *again*. The essential person exists, but he is in a state described as 'dead in sin', and must be made alive. Each original predestined identity, named and known by God from the womb, must be regenerated, not just polished up for the sea crossing. There is a lot to learn here as we join the Christian college of mariners.

There is no way of passing from this wretched state of living death to the condition of the new birth, without death *to sin*, and the death *of sin*. There can be no regeneration without new creation. We cannot fix up the 'old' by fanning the 'spark', or by contriving and adhering to a set of laws. If righteousness were achievable through the operation of the law, according to Paul's analysis of the fleshly condition of man, then Christ has died in vain. 'I do not [or should not] *nullify* the grace of

God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.<sup>307</sup> If aspiring to the 'law of God', empowered by the 'law of the mind', is sufficient, then there is no reason for Christ's death. What does this mean?

In these pivotal verses in Galatians, Paul is stressing that Christ's death was needed. Why? Because He had to put sin and death, *to death*. The collective 'old man', operating collectively by the law of sin and death, had to be crucified. The old man can't be converted or regenerated. It has to be put to death. And if there's another solution, perchance the exercise of some sparks of innate goodness, then Christ had no reason to come and die.<sup>308</sup> He came to condemn sin in the flesh, die to sin in the flesh, and put sin to death in our flesh.<sup>309</sup>

### The wreck of the 'Four Laws'

To make the most of our nautical analogy, it would be helpful to use it to describe the doomed vessel of man's aspirations as the 'Four Laws'. We shall shortly define man's desperate condition in relation to four laws that are discussed in Romans. We have already noted the sound of Paul's drowning despair, 'O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?'.<sup>310</sup> In this same way then, let us agree to describe *our* final plight – if we continue to live by law – as the wreck of the Four Laws.<sup>311</sup>

307. Gal 2:21 NASU, NKJV 308. We see clearly that is not sufficient to reason that Christ came to be a scapegoat without which the Father could not forgive mankind. The Father could have forgiven mankind; after all, we are told to forgive others. So then, the incarnation and crucifixion are not merely a morbid appeasement. They represent the fullest possible expression of the purpose of God for reconciliation – the acceptance of flesh within the image of God, and the destruction of sin. In this case, an adequate response to Christ cannot neglect to receive His life in flesh, and to effect His death to sin, in this same flesh, here and now. 309. Rom 8:3; 6:10 310. Rom 7:24 311. Rom 7:14-27

## 5. *Crossing the passage*

If there is such a vessel (and clearly there is, because we all cling to it like drowning men), then it has four distinct features. There are four operations by which the failed human vessel hopes to engineer a passage to his own salvation. The four together comprise one overall operation, which Paul refers to as ‘law’, or as being ‘carnally minded’.<sup>312</sup> The gospel offer is that we can become ‘dead to the law’ through the ‘body of Christ’.<sup>313</sup> Dangerously, of course, if we revert to being carnal, we return to the same state of death as at first, and our vessels will be shipwrecked and lost.

The four laws are as follows.

1. The law of God – identified *not* because God operates according to a law, but because, when viewed objectively from an external position, His law is variously identified also as the law of God, the Royal law, the perfect law of liberty.<sup>314</sup>

2. The law of my mind – also referred to as ‘delighting in the law of God’, and discussed by Paul as the law that ‘wills’ and ‘wills not’ to do.<sup>315</sup>

3. The law of sin in my members<sup>316</sup> – most clearly, this is the desire to be the source. It was this temptation and desire that led to the eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

4. Another law in my members<sup>317</sup> – bringing me (identity) into captivity to the law of sin. Simply, this law is the overall code of death, driven by fear and binding me to fear. We shall define this law shortly.

Paul calls the total operation ‘the law of sin and death’. The motivation driving the overall operation of the four laws is the fear of death. Interestingly, the only antidote to fear is love – the love of the brethren. Fear drives me to seek a law by which I can preserve my life.

312. Rom 8:6    313. Rom 7:4    314. Rom 7:25; Jas 1:25; 2:8    315. Rom 7:19,20,22,23  
316. Rom 7:23    317. *ibid.*

The law of God offers me life if only I can keep it. The law of my mind is such that I constantly aspire to the highest possible goal in response to the law of God that weighs upon me. The first aspect, the law of God, appeals to me. The second, the law of my mind, reaches out to achieve. Then the third, the law of sin, overtakes me, for in the very act of aspiring to keep His law, in my strength, I have fallen for the original temptation – to be the source of my own life, my own eternal salvation. The fourth aspect, ‘another law’, shows itself as death breaking in on me from every direction, keeping the whole deadly dialogue alive through fear. What amazes me is the lengths that I will go to in maintaining sovereignty over my own salvation. In the end, when I am driven by conscience, it is my own self that I am seeking to please, not God. Sin is the base of the third law, and death is the basis of the fourth. I cannot lay down my life. I am afraid of death. Fear drives the operation of death, and death motivates fear.

### Another law?

Paul calls this fourth aspect ‘*another*’ law, because something further occurs. The law of God, the mind willing it, and the sin taking opportunity because of it, all seem to be predictable. But something further happens. In fact, it happens again and again. Note the verse, ‘For you did not receive the spirit of bondage *again* to fear’.<sup>318</sup> Fear rises *again*, motivating *another* operation of law. The ‘fear of death’ brings me, for the whole of my lifetime, into bondage.<sup>319</sup> This is Satan’s foothold. And thankfully, Christ overcame Satan through death. Death to sin is the key. Laying down our lives is the victory.

This fourth law is aroused from within and without, always with another stimulus, another factor, a maverick activity that’s driven by

318. Rom 8:15 319. Heb 2:14,15

## 5. Crossing the passage

the fear of death. Just when I'm exerting my mind over sin, and positioning myself happily in relation to the law of God, there's another law, in my members, that unseats the equilibrium. What's this law? In a sense, it could be any legal perception at all. It brings me into captivity to the law of sin. There's an operation to which Paul is referring that makes a new judgement on the state of things around me, another assessment – always *another* assessment. There is that in me, driven by fear, and attempting to control my life, which must check things once again. I can never be satisfied. If I could be, I would be. But I have no actual capacity to keep the law, even though I desire to. I cannot be a doer of the law; I can only ever be a judge. I am determined that self remains the source (law of sin), so I maintain the stance of a judge (another law). Driven by fear and self-preservation, I am not able to give up my life and lay it down for the brethren. I am not able to lose my life. I make a good windward reach, and head in the right direction, across the passage. But while ever my vessel is powered, with flags aloft, by the 'Four Laws', it's heading for another reef of despair.

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The fear of death brings me  
into bondage.

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We are reminded here of the rich, young ruler, who kept the whole law, as he said, for his whole life. The one thing he lacked was the ability to *sell* all that he had to gain the greater riches.<sup>320</sup> He didn't lack the will to defeat sin (the third law), but he couldn't *sell* his life for fear of death (fourth law). This illustrates the operation of the 'other' law. We all seem to be able to maintain sight of the first three aspects, but

320. Matt 19:21

not the fourth. This is what Paul is saying. When we are almost righteous, and at peace with ourselves, fear takes over – fear of the *cost* of change. And then the whole self-justifying dialogue begins all over again. This ‘other law’ is the activity of assembling data through perceptions that do not come from faith, hope and love – comparative perceptions of self-doubt, self-depreciation, self-relativity, self-motivation etc. If the law of sin is to be the *source*, then the ‘other law’ is to be the *judge*. This is the law that actually brings me into captivity to the law of sin – the desire to be the source of my own righteousness, to be ‘like God’, and therefore the source of my own justification and approval.

To illustrate all this, one only has to think of a typical ‘legalist’. He is not, in the end, seeking the approval of those who may monitor right behaviour, in a particular setting. He is seeking his *own* approval. His fierce judgement of others is by the same measure that he places upon himself. His exercise of self-judgement maintains him as the source of his own self-realisation.

In the end, a lawful man, in his own eyes, becomes a *lawless* man – for he is a law unto *himself*. The end of this exercise is the spirit of Antichrist, the lawless one, who typifies the desire to create new realities as an alternative to God’s reality – in the mode spoken of in Daniel; ‘He shall intend to change times and law’.<sup>321</sup>

### Confusing law with life

When individuals believe they are crossing the passage, while in fact they are still saluting the ‘Four Laws’, their plight is most regrettable. Who can deliver a soul to the liberty of the new birth, when he believes the wind under which he is sailing *is* the leading of

321. Dan 7:25

## 5. *Crossing the passage*

the Holy Spirit? How will those cruising under their own power, exercising the strength of their flesh in keeping the law, ever be delivered to the 'law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus'?<sup>322</sup> Who can convince veteran sailors upon the seas of self-righteousness that they have not made the passage over? In truth, there is never any willingness to change until the vessels fail, and the charts are found to be faulty. How convinced we are of our own ways – our own personal and familiar laws!

### The worm of corruption

An important warning bell needs to be sounded here. Paul's crowning point is that law has no power against the indulgence of the flesh.<sup>323</sup> What lusts are ever cured by prohibition? Does making laws and imposing punishments ever train lust out of the heart of man? Not by any means. When children are young, we observe that external regulation can hold identity expression within certain lines. However, this is still part of the code of death. Many will achieve good results, like the rich, young ruler, but will not be able to pay the price of giving up their own image to receive the life of Christ.

More seriously still, the operation of fleshly constraint and control will not resist the worm of corruption. In this condition described as 'dead in sin', identity will not remain as a stationary quotient. Instead, the fundamental identity will erode away within us, quite apart from the deterioration of the outward man. Without the new birth, we are unable to sustain the glory of man, the flower of identity expression. Not only do the human faculties deteriorate, but the worm consumes fundamental identity as well. In fact, this deterioration begins very

322. Rom 8:2    323. Rom 7:8-11; Col 2:23

early in life. And the more the outward presentation, the greater is the inner deterioration.

Across the community, we are now facing a matter of immense social and pastoral concern. Unless the gospel begins to address such fundamentals as identity and gender confirmation, through the exercise of wise, Christian parenthood, then basic identity is being eroded – even before the onset of adolescence. Again we should stress: outward conformity, religious values, social prowess and the overall ‘flower’ of fleshly achievement, may be the only markers monitored by many parents. In such cases, the lack of reality in addressing inner formation, and in coming to terms with the common corruption of man, destines ‘successful’ children to serious maladjustment.

From observation, a number of elements that erode identity can clearly be identified.

1. Projection of a false image. As uncertainty emerges, and parental assurance is not offered, young people will project onto the screen of life the image of who or what they believe they are. Skilled young people seek assurance in their skills, only to be plagued with insecurity. Less skilled young people will often project negative images of themselves, almost as a way of finding some self-validation.

2. Self-rejection: rejection of who we are. Rejection of who we *are* corresponds to projection of who we are *not*. These go hand in hand.

3. Self-oriented sexual activity. ‘Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.’<sup>324</sup> Sexual activity is ordained for giving, within the context of marriage, not for taking or conquering. Where sexual activity of any kind is self-directed, whether in single or married people, with the

324. 1 Cor 6:18

## 5. *Crossing the passage*

motivation toward self-validation, such activity is sin against oneself – against one’s own person. It is self-destructive.

4. Moralistic regulation, together with outward compliance. The most serious cancer of the soul is compliance. When contrived compliance becomes the substitute for willing obedience from the *heart* of the individual, the very soul of the person is eroded. Regulation, with compliance, as a substitute for identity confirmation, amplifies the gap between the real person and the behaviour that is projected. If, instead, the child is introduced to Christ, he will find identity and validation in Him. Then he can be taught that ‘this is you’, and to obey from the heart, rather than being regulated for compliance. Obedience will produce genuine confirmation, while compliance will leave the child with no sense of identity confirmation in what he is doing. This will be followed by a diminishing sense of validity, since he is not finding any ‘rejoicing in himself alone’.<sup>325</sup> It is only when a child is being himself, and is being confirmed in this, quite apart from ‘good’ performance, that he finds genuine peace and rejoicing before God. If parents’ affection and confirmation are linked with compliant behaviour, the sense of identity-assurance erodes away. In fact, identity itself is being progressively corrupted. Children then believe they will find themselves once they leave home and move away from the confusion of their parents’ input.

### The worm never dies

A frightening scenario arises from this contemplation. Since identity is eternal, created by God, then existence is eternal also – either as eternal life or eternal punishment. Without the gift of newborn life, the identity of an individual is doomed to everlasting

325. Gal 6:4

disintegration. The worm of corruption, we are told, never dies – while at the same time, the fire of judgement is never quenched.<sup>326</sup> The scene is this.

The lake of fire, ignited by the judgement of Calvary against sin, will never go out. An infinite infinity will never be equal to the matchless grace of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. As we know, worms corrupt a body until it is destroyed. Fire normally destroys worms – which is why we submit to the refining fire of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We desire that our corruption be dealt with here and now. If it is not removed, we will go into hell, where normal destruction by fire does not ever occur. In fact, in this case, ‘the worm never dies’.<sup>327</sup> It doesn’t die because there is no more refining process available. And it doesn’t die because the worms of corruption and disintegration feed on our *eternal* identity, and this goes on and on forever.

Corruption is ceaseless, and the fire burning against it is ceaseless. This might be almost incomprehensible, except that we can witness this very principle at work here and now, where we observe in the dispositions of some individuals, that fundamental identity is simply eroding away. A lifetime of identity projection and aberrant behaviour, driven by self-rejection and self-loathing, has magnified the gap between true identity and projection. The individual becomes increasingly lost, and the cry of wantonness echoes louder and louder in the personless vacuum within.

### Familiar oppression

It is in this vacuum created by identity rejection that demonic oppression begins to manifest itself. ‘Give no regard to mediums and *familiar spirits*; do not *seek* after them, to be defiled by them: I am the

326. Mark 9:46 327. Mark 9:43,44

## 5. *Crossing the passage*

LORD your God.<sup>328</sup> While some do actually *seek* after liaison with demonic power, the greater problem is that we are surrounded by it, without particularly seeking it at all. This is a large subject, beyond the scope of our study here. However, the Hebrew word for a ‘familiar spirit’ denotes a water-skin, a hollow receptacle, a hollow sound, hence its link with the necromancer and ventriloquist. This interests us simply because demonic spirits do oppress and possess those individuals who permit a vacuum within themselves.

A craving to apprehend reality and validity that are *beyond what is ordained* by ‘the LORD your God’, or the flagrant pursuit of *self-ordination*, will lead us to oppression. This is why the hearers in the above section from Leviticus were told not to *regard, seek* or *turn* to familiar spirits.<sup>329</sup> The man who seeks after verification aside from his predestination in Christ is actually seeking after familiar, oppressing spirits.

### An empty house

This helps us understand the curious words of Jesus about spiritual oppression. ‘When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, “I will return to my house from which I came.” And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.’<sup>330</sup>

Just a brief comment is relevant here, remembering that our subject is the loss or regeneration, of essential identity. Quite clearly, an empty person will be subject to being filled with spiritual oppression. Part of

328. Lev 19:31    329. Lev 19:31; 20:6    330. Matt 12:43-45

## THE PASSAGE OVER

God's judgement upon a wicked generation is that there is no defence against demonic oppression. If a particular spirit is resisted, the empty space simply attracts seven more spirits, and the problem increases. What are we to learn from this? If we do not accept, express and grow in true identity, the vacuum within us attracts spiritual oppression. Of course, without the new birth, there is no way to stall identity erosion.

Let us now sum up this chapter on the crossing of the passage. It is essential that we make the journey all the way over to sincere love. That's our overall theme. We've identified the contrary winds of doctrine, and the flagrant robbers that inhabit the sea channels. If we board the 'Four Laws', or revert to being powered by the 'old man', we will definitely fail or be driven back. We can't dress up the fleshly nature. The only power to be who we are, and to mature in Christian identity, is in the seed of the word that is ministered to us. If projection of the 'old man' substitutes for sincere faith to be who we are, in Christ, true identity will begin to be eroded, and oppression will fill the void. If we then think that we can re-deploy the activities of law, a 'stronger' will come and simply grasp the fleshly armour in which we are trusting – our self-defined authority – and turn it back upon us.<sup>331</sup>

It's not difficult to see that we will end up back at our starting point, and worse, if we do not press forward to the sincere love of the brethren.

331. Luke 11:21,22

## 6. The end of the passage



To focus on practical matters in this last chapter, let us discuss and chart the passage that we must take from day to day, with the endpoint in view. What are the practical implications? What is the pathway for family and church life – for husbands, wives and children? How do we arrive safely, as men, women and children, at the love of the brethren?

Remember that the ‘brethren’, in the broad sense, includes those who do His will. But let us look at the matter from the family viewpoint. Christ is the Head of every man – of every husband, who in turn is the head of his wife and family.<sup>332</sup> Christ is also the Head of the church.<sup>333</sup> The church is actually the assembly of families. There is no church at all without the assembly of families in which Christ is Head. So let us look closely at the relationship between family and church.

332. 1 Cor 11:3    333. Col 1:18

## THE PASSAGE OVER

We are not two different people when we are in the family and in the church – or at least, we shouldn't be. It is those men, with Christ as Head, who have rightly negotiated the passage between family and church, between human relationship and relationship to the body of Christ, who form the base of the 'brethren'. Men who love the brethren make the link between Christ's headship to every man, and His headship to His church. Christ's headship to the church cannot be expressed other than through those who love the brethren, and through men who call their wives and families to Christian discipleship. Thus, 'the brethren' includes both brothers and sisters whose devotion to Christ harmonises the dimensions of church and family.

### Disciples who love the brethren

Let us make this cardinal point once again. 'The brethren' are those disciples who lay down their lives for one another, and who also hold Christ as Head in their families. These brethren form the base for Christ to be Head of His church. They provide the passage and ground upon which their wives and children pass from death to life. How? Once again, because they lay down their lives for 'the brethren' and also love their wives as Christ loves the church of which He is Head.

Husbands and wives make the passage over, they pass over from death to life when they lay down their lives for the brethren, and love the brethren more than their own lives. In this way, they join family to church under Christ's headship. Does this mean that they cease to be husband and wife in the church? Not at all. Do they place so-called Christian duties ahead of their roles as husbands and wives? How do husbands love their wives as Christ loves the church? How do they do this without losing their love for the brethren?

## 6. *The end of the passage*

Where we are heading is straightforward. If we take the passage over, there need be no disharmony between the roles of husband-wife, and the relationship of brother-sister in Christ. The key is in laying our lives down to abide in Christ, to abide in love. Then the woman is ‘a sister, a wife’.<sup>334</sup> Equally, the man is a brother, a husband.

### Brother-sister disciples

The specific instructions given in Scripture show clearly that Christian brothers and sisters never cease to be husbands and wives. The recipe for harmony is clear. Husbands are told to pray and prophesy in the church with heads uncovered – a term indicating a right relationship to Christ, and to their wives in Christian love.<sup>335</sup> Wives are told to pray and prophesy in the church with their heads covered – a term indicating their right relationship to Christ and to their husbands in Christian submission. A wife is ‘of the man’ whether at home or in the church. The man expresses himself ‘through the woman’ whether at home or in the church.

The final goal is that Christ should be manifest as Head of His church. He will be manifest in His headship when there is right order in the home and church, along the lines stated here. Men with *covered* heads do *not* demonstrate the headship of Christ. Wonderfully, women living *with* covered heads are in fact a glorious manifestation of the headship of Christ.

### Abiding in death within marriage

Again, a husband and wife pass from death to life when they love the brethren. Unless this is so, they abide in death within their marriage. The marriage relationship, or the individual state of one or

334. 1 Cor 9:5 KJV    335. 1 Cor 11:3-12

other, can be imprisoned in death unless there is a full connection to the collective Christ. Eternal life is in the Son. Marriage has no separate ground for life and blessing apart from the relationship described as the love of the brethren. As we said, Christ is Head of His church and of every man. This is crucial teaching, and essential to the passage over. Sadly, such elementary navigation advice is largely lost or distorted amidst the humanist, chauvinist, and feminist influences.

### The roles of husband and wife

Unlike 'brother' and 'sister' amidst 'the brethren', which are designations of *eternal identity*, the terms 'husband' and 'wife' identify *roles* that establish a family. Each is a role, *not* an identity. We pass from death to life when we pass over and establish ourselves as brother and sister in eternal identity, through relationship to the body of Christ, and to the overseeing authority of the brethren. We are then 'heirs together of the grace of life',<sup>336</sup> not first because we are husband and wife, but because we are joint-heirs with Christ. Christ is full of grace. He is the full expression of the Father's zoe-life. We will be heirs together of this grace when our commitment as brother and sister is transferred to the family, to our roles as husband and wife, where we both live in the Spirit of Christ – the husband-head showing understanding, with the wife-helper as the weaker vessel.<sup>337</sup> This is Peter's exhortation.

### Head and helper

The harmony of brother-husband and sister-wife is assured if we simply heed the apostles' teachings. The wife is helper to her husband in every aspect – toward his headship in the home, and toward his

336. 1 Pet 3:7    337. *ibid.*

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brotherhood and gift-service in the body. The husband is head toward his wife in every aspect.

In the church, the two do not have the same ministry gifts, and they do not *share* a particular ministry-gift or authority. The Master's servants are given authority and to *each* his work.<sup>338</sup> In the measure of the grace-gifts of Christ which husbands and wives share, they are both submitted to Christ and are both submitted to the brethren.<sup>339</sup> In Christ, the woman does not share the gift or the authority of the man, even though this man is her husband, and she is helper to this man and to his ministry. On the man's part, he does not share *her* gift, even though he is her head.

Sincere love of the brethren will protect and mature the harmony of these aspects of life. The man will then keep his head uncovered. He and his gift are laid down to the service of Christ, in the body. In this way, he keeps his head uncovered toward Christ and his brethren. The uncovered head, of which Paul speaks, is the sign of a submitted attitude amidst the brethren, and of a man who is not veiled or confused by loyalty to his wife and family within the marriage. A man who is confused, who adopts a mid-position between his family and brethren, is no longer standing with his head *uncovered*. The evidence that his head has become *covered* is the loss of sincere love for his brethren. His light falls into a shadow and his eyes are blinded.

### The ministry of a wife

A wife retains a covered head by walking in submitted relationship to her husband, as to Christ. In the church, however, she does not minister from the *ground* of her husband. She shares her gift from the same basis among the brethren as does her husband – for she

338. Mark 13:34    339. Eph 4:7

maintains right relationship to him, just as he does toward her. Either one, or both, can manifest disorder toward the other. ‘Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord.’<sup>340</sup>

As both function together in various settings, each one ministers according to the grace of Christ, and not on the basis of being the spouse of the other.

The wife’s invitation and freedom to minister in the church comes from the brethren, among whom the husband has laid down his life. The final glory of this matter is seen when they minister *together*, and do so according to individual grace, while also in ‘one spirit’ together.<sup>341</sup> Then there is no confusion or power-sharing, such as we might find where the wife of a business executive or military commander adopts the same ‘status’ as her husband. Equally, a man may not draw acceptance or validity from the giftedness of his wife.

The Holy Spirit guards these lines of sanctification. Then fatherhood and motherhood, brotherhood and sisterhood, the diverse gifts of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, and the authority of these gifts in both men and women, are all completely free to be expressed under Christ, amidst the brethren. The mature man will be rightly related to his wife as he ministers, and she to him. They are one spirit together, but completely sanctified by the Holy Spirit on the ground of the brethren. Each is completely accountable in his or her own right, both toward the body and family. Each reveals the other – the husband is revealed by his wife, and the wife by the husband, as they are devoted disciples together.

This practical understanding is vital to the release of grace, as well as to the careful exercise of authority whereby hearers will not be

340. 1 Cor 11:11,12    341. Phil 1:27

## 6. *The end of the passage*

confused. For example, in areas of care and counsel toward one another, the wife doesn't speak *for* her husband or on his *behalf* when he isn't present. Even though they are likeminded, neither should reinforce the perspective of the other, as if to add weight to the authority of the other. Rather, both are to speak according to their own authority and accountability.

### The negative scenario – power sharing

Briefly, confusion in these matters leads to what we have called 'power-sharing' – not in the sense that either has 'power' in a worldly sense, but in the sense that one draws his or her validity from the gift of the other. We recall that free expression of essential identity is the mark of having made the passage over. Where there is confusion, the symptoms of that confusion will be: 1. that one or other manifests no faith for personal identity and expression, 2. that there is a presumption of validity drawn one from the other, or 3. that there is an obvious lack of respect for the way in which God expresses Himself via the order of headship.

### Division within the family

This exposition of the Scriptures on the love of the brethren shows that either partner in a marriage can fulfil his individual predestination with or without the other. Each one is sanctified to the Lord, and can walk in right relationship toward the brethren, and toward the other, even if a partner does not. Where one or other loves his own life, partner, or family, more than Christ, the harmony that could exist will be undermined. In this very regard, Jesus said: 'Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did *not* come to bring peace but a *sword*. For I have come to "set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law"; and "man's

enemies will be those of his own household.” He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.<sup>342</sup>

### Identity development within the family

Turning now to the subject of children, let us comment on the implications of making the passage over in relation to the formation of children. This is exceptionally important if we are to comprehend how the new birth relates to the essential identity of each child. We began to address this subject in the previous chapter.

First of all, family procreation is ordained by the fatherhood of God. Human birth from father and mother is the mechanism by which God-breathed identity is propagated. So this essential *identity itself*, more than just the inherited physical characteristics and genetic qualities, is from father and mother. This all seems obvious, but is leading to important conclusions.

Because family order is ordained by God, His commandments include the instruction to honour father and mother. Positively, to honour father and mother is to honour oneself; while on the negative side, it is a ‘*woe to him who strives with his Maker*’, or contends with his father and mother who ‘*brought him forth*’.<sup>343</sup> We are taught to accept who we are, in the genetic line, in honour of God’s fatherhood.

This observation is quite important in understanding the new birth, which is *not linked* in any way with procreation. We recall that Jesus even said that to follow Him we needed to ‘hate’ father and mother.<sup>344</sup> In this same connection, we need to understand what it

342. Matt 10:34-38    343. Isa 45:9,10    344. Luke 14:26

## 6. *The end of the passage*

means for a man to marry and leave 'father and mother' when he cleaves to his wife as his new location for identity and community.<sup>345</sup>

### Human birth – new birth

Here is the heart of our understanding about human birth and the new birth. The essential identity of all young people is formed, protected and matured by parenthood. Young children emerge with the 'image of the earthy', but are yet to discover their place in Christ.<sup>346</sup> Parents, with or without the knowledge of Christ, are able to identify essential identity, and so strive to promote growth through love, regulation and encouragement. Of course, without the addition of the new birth, each child is captive in the code of death, and so all the best efforts will only produce the 'flower of the grass', which still perishes. Christian parents should understand this, and in sober dependence upon the grace of God, make the formation of their children a matter of faith and prayer from the very beginning. They well know that without the activity of the Holy Spirit, the crookedness of the human condition, and the inevitable corruption of death cannot be withstood.

Non-believers, naturally, don't accept the Christian proposition. In this case, the real danger is that they will maintain belief in the 'flower' of inherent goodness and in the apparent success of their fleshly endeavour. Then the gospel seems irrelevant, at best, allowing the identity erosion of which we spoke earlier, to encroach and overtake those without Christ.

Christian parents who become confused as to the mode in which they are functioning, will likewise confuse their children in the passage over. Note, for example, that Christian parents should not employ the fleshly mechanisms of law at any stage of the child's life. In

345. Gen 2:24    346. 1 Cor 15:49 KJV

other words, we cannot raise young children under the administration of law, regulation and outward appearance, and then hope to lead them to Christ at some adolescent age. Rather, from the beginning we dedicate the children to the heavenly Father, and then exercise faith to be the extension of His hand toward the children. We pray, love, instruct, admonish and constrain children toward trust in the power of God, from the beginning – on the understanding that no one at all can fulfil the righteous standard without the power of the Holy Spirit within.

### Parents and the passage over

This is where we need to take care to understand the difference between human birth and new birth. The original *predestined* life, conceived in God Himself for each individual, *pre-exists* the order of father and mother, just as eternal life will also supersede the order of father and mother. The essential identity that is resident within a human individual cannot be elevated and connected to his eternal predestination without the new birth, which is by another seed entirely – the incorruptible seed of the word of God.<sup>347</sup> While parents are involved in the originating of human birth, they are not the origin of the new birth. Confusion here has serious results. The key is for the father and mother to point firmly to the passage over from death to life. While attending to the needful provisions for human life, their overriding message from day to day, through prosperity and crisis, is that there is ‘another birth’, another step. The human soul (Gr. *psyche*) is derived from the zoe-life of God, and inbreathed by God, as was Adam. But the purpose of God was to grant His *own self-existent life* through Christ, in that named portion foreordained for every

347. 1 Pet 1:23

## 6. *The end of the passage*

individual. This glorious predestination was not possible in the initial creation, but only in the new creation, Christ.

Parents who wisely understand this gospel proposition will set themselves to lift their households to the ground of the new creation, in Christ. The fruit of this commitment will be that parents lead their children across the passage to the sincere love of the brethren. They do not enshrine their family competence and fortify themselves, by proud comparisons, over against others, fostering mistrust and superiority. Families that do so, particularly Christian families, cast deadly restraints upon their children. Inevitably the children may set out to cross the passage, but they will grow up trusting neither the Christian community nor their parents.

### A family fortress

Families that are overtaken by mistrust and inoculated with insincere love, find themselves laid captive and imprisoned in fortresses, back on the deadly shores they hoped to escape. A family that is not free to love the brethren, as a priority, and 'loves father and mother' more than Christ is 'not worthy'<sup>348</sup> of Him. This family becomes a fortress that imprisons members to their untrusting and uncommitted attitudes, or to their independently religious attitudes.

What produces a family fortress? The difficulty begins when parents confuse the fleshly mode of parenting with that of the 'new creature'. In the father's case, for example, although he is the head of the home, he will not necessarily be the origin of the word of the new birth, and should not be threatened or offended in this regard. If he is not careful, he will adopt a superior position to the word, and to those who minister the gospel word. Then he will become the interpreter of

348. Matt 10:37

the word, and apply *his* interpretations of the word to the family, as if these *are* the word itself – believing that his headship stands equal to all other authority. Men who are threatened in this way will bind children to a form of loyalty that does not free them to love the brethren, and to receive Christian input from beyond the family. Children can feel disloyal if they do not regard their parents as the principal origin and authority. Wise parents will recognise the danger of standing *apart* from, or over against, the brethren, and so foster an harmonious context for children to be nurtured in the new birth.

Parents' primary goal must be to proclaim the need of the new birth, and to highlight that essential identity is only ever perishable without the addition of the life of God. The family can water the grass and fertilise the flower of the grass, but the very best result that they can produce will still fade.<sup>349</sup> As we said, wise parents will constantly point across the passage.

### A charter for disaster

The cardinal compass bearing is this. The gift of new life is *by the word* of God, not by the regulation of behaviour. If parents invoke *religious regulation*, instead of announcing the need of the new birth, and citing their total dependence on water and Spirit as the elements of this new birth, then they will merely train the 'old man' to aspire to righteousness. Then two destructive things occur. The projection of the old man is *approved*, and essential identity will begin to be *eroded*. This is the charter for eventual shipwreck and disaster.

If the religious mode is adopted, the only confirmation the child will ever feel is when he is doing the 'right thing'. He will not feel acknowledged, loved or confirmed in essential identity, but only for

349. 1 Pet 1:24

his ability to fulfil the parents' cultural expectations. Indeed, the parents become blind to the 'person'. They do not even see the identity confusion, gender confusion and eccentricity that are threatening to overtake the child.

As soon as the child knows, instinctively, that his performance and not his person, is being 'loved', he will progressively move away from parenthood and seek verification and approval for his essential person elsewhere – among his peers, for example. If this 'gap' is amplified through the parents' blindness or by the child's alternate pursuits and pleasures, the relational gap widens, and confusion in the child increases as well.

### Antagonism as a mode of parenthood

Many parents are blind to this outcome. Their expression of 'love' is only in giving approval to good behaviour, not in genuine esteem and respect for the child. In fact, they become *adversaries* toward their own children, and employ antagonism as a mode of parenthood. This antagonism generates only enmity, and sadly some parents actively foster this enmity as a means of maintaining control over the children. This situation is corrected by Paul when he says, 'Do not provoke your children to anger'.<sup>350</sup>

Under the guise of training 'good' children, parents are often serving their own ends. They are lazy and do not themselves practise the very things they demand. The children will conclude that religious practice is actually based in anxiety and self-interest, and that the parents only become proactive when their life-goals are disturbed. The children are not meeting the real Dad and Mum, but see them as

350. Eph 6:4

anxious underlings of the church, who appear to use the reinforcement of the leaders and of God Himself in their cause.

The parents may try harder and harder, doing all the ‘right things’, remonstrating with the children, urging communication, compensating for the alienation, rewarding such behaviour as they can approve of, but the most serious danger of all is well advanced. Compliance! Regulation and compliance provide the context for a break-down of relationship between the parent and child. Talk of the new birth and of the passage over to the love of the brethren is only heard as another law. Frequently, children feel no confirmation or hope that the new birth will regenerate fundamental identity. The Christian faith appears only to be a part-time hobby of their parents, and not a viable transport for a genuine sea-crossing.

### Parenthood in relation to the new birth

Now it is important to take note. Even though the new birth is not of ‘the will of man’, as we have said, there is still a God-given role for parents to fulfil in relation to the new birth. Where parents remain clear on the distinction between ‘the will of the *flesh*’ and the *new* creation, they are able to be proactive in shaping the new-born life in each child. For the whole purpose of God is a harmony, and not two dimensions in conflict. There is only a conflict if the sharp line of distinction between flesh and Spirit is not understood.

The love, wisdom and care of the parents should be leading the child, from early years, to the firm conclusion that identity, although confirmed by the family, is nevertheless corruptible without the seed of the new birth. There is a sharp and immovable line between human life and newborn life. Whatever identity we *do* have is abiding in death, and has no clear image outside of Christ. The role of parents in

## 6. *The end of the passage*

dedicating the children back to God is to devote themselves to providing the ‘training and admonition of the Lord’.<sup>351</sup>

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Identity is corruptible without  
the seed of the new birth.

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Since life is *in the Son*,<sup>352</sup> and not ‘*in the family*’, as the image, parents need to lead the family in the passage over to the context of the new creation. The corporate new creation, the body of Christ, is the context. No man can come to the Father except through Christ. There is no other name than Christ’s by which men may be saved. And there is no hope of salvation outside of the body of Christ. Here is the cardinal point of our entire study. If parents make the passage over *to this context*, then the members of the family can be transported across to this context also. Then the family will hold its right and proper place in relation to Christ. Children can now be taught to find eternal life that is ‘without father [and] mother’.<sup>353</sup> Jesus’ unusual words calling his disciples to ‘hate [their] father and mother’,<sup>354</sup> are intended to show the absolute nature of the choice to love one above the other. ‘He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.’<sup>355</sup> This need not be a threat to family relationships, but rather a reminder that what is born of flesh is flesh, and what is born of Spirit is spirit. The line between these orders is defined as *hatred*, to express the need for preference in the strongest possible terms.<sup>356</sup> Nevertheless, the sharpness of the line is intended to create the ground for unity, not for enmity. How eternally freeing it is if a parent can guide a child to this

351. Eph 6:4 352. 1 John 5:11 353. Heb 7:3 354. Luke 14:26 355. Matt 10:37

356. cf. ‘Jacob have I loved; Esau have I hated’, which also designates absolute choice of one above the other. Rom 9:13

line, without threat or personal hurt, and commit the child to the lordship of Christ – and to the love of the brethren!

Parents can then lead the way toward an ongoing fellowship in the proceeding word of salvation that is ministered from day to day within the context of the body of Christ.

### Christ loved ‘me’

The glorious truth of a second birth, and of the prospect of regeneration and renewing of the Spirit, is the message that should be resounding within the family. Then, hand in hand with the gospel comes the loving confirmation that Christ ‘loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*’. He loves the essential ‘you’ and ‘me’, and relates to this person, despite the overburden of the old man. Christ has crucified the collective old man, and has not in any way called for it to be revived, redressed, refurbished, improved, polished up and re-presented. This is where family culture with its familiar, vain traditions can be so deadly to children. Christ has redeemed us from the vain traditions of our forefathers.<sup>357</sup> He is against the old man. He hates the projection, but loves ‘you’. If we protect, install, or reinstall familiar traditions, these will become an alternative to Christ as the assurance of righteousness.

The understandings put forward here become vital to the saving process. Wonderfully, parents and young people who find humility and love are able to broach and debrief their inadequate dynamics, and find regeneration and renewal as they meet in Christ, no longer on a separate family ground. If family members do not meet in Christ, they will not truly meet at all. And if parents or family members bind one another to family dynamics, then traditional forms of family ‘resolution’ will merely overwhelm all ability to meet in Christ.

357. 1 Pet 1:18 KJV NASU

## Family and ethnic church dynasties

Before we leave this facet of our subject, let us make just one more sober observation. Where the aspects of family and ‘the brethren’ are confused, whole churches can grow as quasi-dynasties, where the leadership passes automatically from father to son, or from tribal leader to next-in-charge. If family, ethnic and tribal mores are not clearly distinguished from the culture of the new creation, leading families who are seen as ‘the brethren’ can begin to foster indigenous churches with a very localised flavour. Western countries are just as prone toward strong family and ethnic predispositions as other nations.

When the family or ethnic base becomes dominant, the majority of church growth is by internal propagation. Then progressive generations of children are groomed in the predominant ethnic culture, and can lose sight of the imperative of discipleship that ‘hates’ father and mother. Whole churches are then forced to function around, and compensate around, the foibles of the leading families. Nevertheless it’s true that the body of Christ is a family of families. But all families must take the passage over to the love of the brethren.

## Family of families

This is vital because the nuclear family is the cornerstone of God’s order. The church is not a separate community in which family relationships are negated, as we have stated earlier. Every member serving in the church does so as a husband to a wife, a child to a parent etc. However, we may not import family and ethnic culture into the body of Christ, where His headship sets the sanctified culture. The harmony of these orders is found as we recognise, honour and observe the sharp distinction between them – not so that they are separate

orders, but so that family life is caught up in newborn life. Then Christ, the new creation, is expressed in and through each individual.

### Flesh is flesh, Spirit is spirit

‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again”.’<sup>358</sup> As we draw toward the conclusion of our study, and of our nautical analogies, let us dwell on John’s use of ‘wind’ to illustrate the work of the Spirit.

The new birth is not of blood, John said. The one who is born of the Spirit is like the wind. ‘The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it *comes from* and where it *goes*. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.’<sup>359</sup>

John says this, not about the *Spirit*, but about the *one who is born of the Spirit*. What does he mean? Where do we come from, and where are we going?

Explaining simply, the essential *life* of which Christ is the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, is from before ‘father and mother’, before ‘beginning and end’. ‘For this Melchizedek ... [is] without *father*, without *mother*, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God.’<sup>360</sup> This is what we were saying earlier about the Word, Yahweh-Son. The second person of the Godhead, who was revealed in the flesh as the Son of the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, was begotten as the seed of the Father’s life within the Everlasting Covenant. In that context, before the beginning, He was the Alpha and the Omega. He articulated, as the Word, and as the Son of the Father, every identity that the Father conceived – the complete ‘you’ and ‘me’. This is the one

358. John 3:6,7    359. John 3:8    360. Heb 7:1,3

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He loved and loves. Now the word of the gospel brings this predestined identity near to us, in its full expression, as a seed, the seed of the new birth. Amazing truth!

Now it's clear why Jesus spoke of His 'mother and brother' as those who did His Father's will, and of 'hating father and mother'.<sup>361</sup> 'Hate' was the only adequate way of expressing the acute distinction between the order of family procreation, and the order of the new creation.

On the subject of raising children then, the new birth does not re-create the person as a different person. But neither does the new birth merely inject new life into the old man. We must be clear about this. We cannot reject human identity in the search for a new form of mystical being. But neither can we confuse the old man with the newborn creation. The resolution is like so. Essential identity is God-breathed, and needs to be formed and protected in every child. Nevertheless, it is corruptible, even in full flower. And so the new creation offers a context for *regeneration*, but also adds the element of the *new creation* through the gift of the person of the Holy Spirit. Remember the key verse, 'the love of God has been poured out in our hearts *by the Holy Spirit* who was *given* to us'.<sup>362</sup>

### Water and Spirit

Now the whole picture begins to emerge. Paul speaks about our salvation, 'not by *works* of righteousness which we have *done* [old man], but according to His mercy He saved us, through the *washing* of *regeneration* and *renewing* of the *Holy Spirit*'.<sup>363</sup> The elements of water and Spirit do not merely refresh the old man. They *regenerate* the essential person, and add the *renewing* element of the Holy Spirit. These

361. Matt 12:48; Luke 14:26    362. Rom 5:5    363. Titus 3:5

operations of God do not *re-generate* and *re-new*, as if the entire seed still lies within us. We are not washing off the old man, and refreshing his capacity. The terms *re-generation* and *re-newing* are used with reference to the *original* predestination. Regeneration recovers what we were born to be, and the new birth adds what we never had in the first place. And so John spoke of being ‘born of water and the Spirit’, as compared with our human birth ‘by blood’, and spoke in such strong terms as if there is no link between the two whatsoever.<sup>364</sup>

The way in which water and Spirit operate, via the ministry of the word to one another, is a large but vital subject. We are told that Christ is the one ‘coming by water and blood’,<sup>365</sup> while the Spirit ‘bears witness’.<sup>366</sup> Then we are told that these three are the ‘witness on earth’, and that to receive them is to receive ‘the witness of men’.<sup>367</sup> The practical point is simple enough; namely that these operations of salvation are on earth, and through men. In fact, it is amidst ‘the brethren’ that these important agencies are active toward our lives. Christ Himself sanctifies the church by the ‘washing of water by the word’.<sup>368</sup> And His entire, glorious, saving operation is carried and administered amidst His brethren – those who love one another.

### The regeneration of ‘you’

While the addition of the new creation has been the main focus of salvation, it is the regeneration of the *psuche* of each individual that is quite a revolutionary aspect. New birth must shift us across the passage from individualistic righteousness to corporate relationship. However, unless new birth addresses the matter of fundamental identity, it becomes meaningless. Without it believers drift off, and

364. John 3:5    365. The Greek language denotes ‘coming by’ not ‘came by’.

366. 1 John 5:6    367. 1 John 5:8,9    368. Eph 5:26

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backwards, driven by currents and cross winds, to a troubled mixture of religious idealism and fleshly endeavour (the four laws).

In contrast, wherever parents and Christian leaders begin to understand regeneration, a huge avenue of pastoral progress opens up. We simply must take care not to invoke a false pastoral process – one that assumes we can know ourselves apart from Christ, and which then leads seekers back into the habitual mechanisms of their familiar law. It is vital that we are wary and, in some cases, dismissive, of approaches to Christian counselling where deeper life and inner healing are orientated completely toward the individual, and not toward relational reconciliation – the love of the brethren.

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Regeneration recovers what we were born to be; the new birth adds what we never had.

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Positively of course, with careful direction toward the word of Christ, individuals *can* recover themselves, recover their essential being. Where projection has created a corrupting overburden, where self-rejection has led to habitual insecurity, where parental neglect or religiosity have led to diminished self-awareness, where confused sexuality has led to aberrant behaviour, and where self-verification has led to erosion and perversion, the water of regeneration can reopen an eternal well-spring within the innermost being. ‘He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’<sup>369</sup> Wholeness, and with it the power to express love from a recovered identity, can overwhelm the lost soul. Each soul, as Peter said, can now be purified through obedience and sincere love, and

369. John 7:38

## THE PASSAGE OVER

heeling vessels, blown off-course, can return to the chartered passage over to the love of the brethren.

### Hope is an anchor

There will be no passage to Christian identity and unity whatsoever unless the troubled waters of individual, marriage and family relationship are negotiated. Life-saving anecdotes and noble doctrinal destinations have been floated abroad for centuries. But the passage over is not in the doctrine, it is in the doing. Ever deeper investigations into our own corruption, yielding more precise definitions, and more convincing confessions, are no substitute for simply receiving the word of predestination that calls us to our place amidst the brethren. Yes, it's a walk of faith, a voyage over, but the sure hope anchors our soul.<sup>370</sup> Faith, hope and love!

Finally, if the total result of our faith, background, experience, theology, practice, vision and hope, is not simple, rich, affectionate, self-denying, life-giving love for the brethren, then we are abiding in death, and we have not made the passage over.

370. Heb 6:19