

KINGDOM SEEKERS

A Multiply "Lets Talk" Booklet

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“The Kingdom of heaven advances forcefully and forceful people are taking hold of it.”

This “manifesto” was written when a group of young Christians challenged themselves to get hold of the reality of their faith and calling in God. Nevertheless, anyone who wants to know what all out, radical Christians are saying and doing – and what this “Kingdom of God” is all about – should read on for information and inspiration.

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CONTENTS

Part One – The Kingdom Community	1
● First things first.....	1
● The Kingdom of Heaven: Light Shines in Darkness.....	3
● The call: Kingdom discipleship	4
● The City of Light.....	5
● “Your will be done on earth...”	6
● Love	8
● “Walk as Jesus did”	9
● Life.....	9
● How good! How pleasant!	11
● Community.....	12
● Love means Justice	13
● Justice means Equality	14
● Justice and Righteousness.....	16
● Jesus on Money.....	19
● One or the Other	20
● Death to wealth for self!.....	21
Part Two – The Covenant Church	23
● The Two Movements.....	23
● The Kingdom Movement: Kings.....	23
● The Covenant Movement: Priests	24
● BUT... not him alone	26
● The World, the Flesh and the Devil: The Devil.....	28
● The World.....	29
● The Flesh	30
● The Overcomer.....	31
● One New Man.....	33
● “Get into Jesus!”	33
● Blood, Water, Spirit... the Covenant “testimony”	35
● Covenant brotherhood.....	38
● Brotherhood Pledge	40
● The Covenant of Salt.....	41
● New Creation: the Body, the Bride.....	43
● The Creative Cross	44
● The Body: accountability and deep unity.....	45
● The Bride: unspotted by the world.....	47
● Marriage and Celibacy	48
● Receive it?.....	52
Afterword	53
● Possible Further Reading	55

TO KINGDOM SEEKERS

PART ONE – THE KINGDOM COMMUNITY

What you will read here isn't going to cover everything that we explored when we met together. You can't put meetings in paper – there's a sense of vision when people meet together which is impossible to confine into squiggles of ink. Nevertheless, as you read, ask God to speak and have the courage to listen. Get desperate for God to have a generation who obey him and make something amazing on the earth – and you'll suddenly find that you're part of it!

- **First things first...**

You can't learn about the Kingdom of God without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit revealing it to you. Understanding certain arguments with your head is not the same as the spiritual experience of seeing the Kingdom. In fact these notes will be all but useless to you unless the Holy Spirit makes the Kingdom a living vision to you – you will probably find yourself combing them for things you can disagree with(!) rather than hearing the voice of the Spirit calling you further into the will of God. Nicodemus was Israel's teacher¹ yet was completely flummoxed by Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom. Look at it in John chapter 3 – Nicodemus puffs up to Jesus thinking that he and the best religious Israelite brains knew something:

“Rabbi, we *know* you are a teacher from God... *blah, blah...*”

Jesus cuts in through all the religious waffle with the point of the matter:

1. John 3:10

“No-one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again, from above.”

Flesh gives birth to flesh and Spirit to spirit – the Kingdom of God is only perceived at all by revelation from the Spirit. Flesh may give birth to decent sounding theologians like Nicodemus but the Kingdom is seen as the Holy Spirit “births” you into it. Ask the Spirit to reveal the Kingdom and the heart of the Kingdom’s King to you – and then follow through with obedience to what you see.

Beware of theory with no practice. The ultimate disaster (and major bonus for the enemy) for any Kingdom Seeker is that he or she become an “expert” on the Kingdom (quoting scriptures and all) but doesn’t actually *do* a great deal about it. Don’t end up in the fearful position of those who have been given much but in the end, yielded little actual fruit. Jesus said that “from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded”² – if you find that the Kingdom has been revealed in greater clarity or urgency through what we’ve been exploring – do something about it! Go for the life that is founded on maximum obedience (don’t even settle for 99 per cent obedience!) The church, particularly in the West, is haunted by Christians who have said, effectively, “this far and no further.” The result is that some of the more unacceptable parts of Jesus’ teaching about what it means to “enter the Kingdom” are swept under the carpet of our acceptable theologies. Many sermons preached on Luke 12:32 –

“Fear not, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom”

– all very good Sunday school stuff, *but look at the very next verse!*

2. Luke 12:48

“Sell your possessions and give alms. Provide for yourselves treasure in heaven...”

We must, if we are to be the generation that God is looking for, take God at his word and live for the heavenly treasure. “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”³

● **The Kingdom of Heaven: Light Shines in Darkness**

Jesus, the Man born from heaven, came to earth as a great light shining into a dark world.⁴ He brought the rule of heaven to earth in a way that none had ever been able to before. Enoch and Elijah were taken to heaven but only Jesus ever came *from* heaven. Jesus came to a fallen world as the embodiment of the righteousness of God in heaven. He said, referring to himself, “the Kingdom of God is among you”.⁵ He said, “I am the light of the world,”⁶ which meant essentially, “I am the righteousness of God in a corrupted world.” (I AM is the sacred name of God himself).

Yet notice something. Immediately after Matthew tells us that Jesus was the light of the Kingdom reign, he describes Jesus calling men into that light.⁷ And just after this we are told that Jesus looked at his followers and said:

“You are the light of the world.”⁸

Jesus does not stay in the light *alone* – he calls people to join him in the Kingdom and to share the righteousness of God in him. We can come into the light. More than this, we can become the light! *We can enter into Christ*

3. Luke 12:34

4. Matthew 4:16, John 1:9 & 3:19 etc.

5. Luke 17:21 (It is unlikely that he said “the Kingdom is within you” – as some render the verse – since he was speaking to Pharisees at the time!)

6. John 8:12

7. Matthew 4:18-22. Cp. John 3:21

8. Matthew 5:14

through faith and baptism.⁹ In this way, we too are “born from above”¹⁰ just as he was, and we too can embody the righteousness of God in a dark world.

● **The call: Kingdom discipleship**

Have a look at how these people are added to the light. Read it in Matthew chapter 4.¹¹ Here we see Jesus calling disciples to the light. Peter and Andrew left their nets. James and John left their boat and their father. These callings demonstrate important things about the Kingdom call. The disciples had to leave behind three specific areas if they were to follow Jesus in the light:

- “*Nets*” – a job is no longer important next to the new “Kingdom” occupation.
- “*Boat*” – possessions must be left behind to inherit the Kingdom.
- “*Father*” – the natural family is secondary to the Kingdom call.

Later on in his teaching, Jesus came to spell out these things very clearly. Look at the parable in Luke chapter 14, verses 15-24:

- “*Field*” – possession.
- “*Yoke of oxen which need trying out*” – occupation
- “*Just got married*” – natural family.

Jesus perfectly embodied this lifestyle, having left behind a carpentry business, every possession¹² and his natural family.¹³ He calls his followers to do the same.¹⁴

9. Galatians 3:27 etc.

10. John 3:3 & 5

11. Everything in Matthew's gospel means something. Matthew as a Jewish writer was familiar with the Jewish parabolic form in which recorded events have a meaning beyond themselves: this can be said of the development of his gospel narrative as we will see again and again.

12. Matthew 8:20

13. Matthew 12:46-50

● The City of Light

In the next section of Matthew, large crowds are drawn to the light as Jesus demonstrates the power of the gospel of the Kingdom in healing miracles. As the bringer-in of heaven's rule, Jesus ensures that sickness (the devil's work) departs before him! So we have the crowds – however note the beginning of Matthew chapter 5:

Now when he saw the crowd he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and he taught them...

One way to read this is that Matthew is presenting us with a parabolic window into the essence of the Kingdom. From the crowds that follow him, Jesus draws disciples. His going up a mountain and sitting down is a picture of his present position as ascended King with all authority¹⁵ and he calls disciples to join him in that place of heavenly rule.¹⁶ Jesus teaches *them* how to live out a life as the Kingdom of heaven, ascended in him, a “city on a hill” and “light of the world.”¹⁷ Notice that he teaches the disciples not the crowds – though the crowds are here and are “amazed at his teachings.”¹⁸ Jesus wants his Kingdom people to live out a life, in obedience to his teachings, which will cause the crowds of the world to “praise the Father in heaven.”¹⁹ He wants a people who demonstrate heaven now on earth.

“A city set on a hill cannot be hidden”

We can see the “city on a hill” as referring to Zion, the city of King David. The reign of David represented the golden age of Israel's supremacy (and therefore the expression of God's reign on the earth). Only slowly would

14. Luke 14:33

15. Philippians 2:9

16. Ephesians 2:6

17. Matthew 5:14

18. Matthew 7:28

19. Matthew 5:16

some of those Jews realise that this man on the mountain was none other than David's greater son, the Messiah-King of whom it was prophesied that he would have an everlasting throne.²⁰ This was the greater Kingdom and the greater King. Yet like David, Jesus has his Zion, his shining city – this is a new Jerusalem with a new and everlasting King. And the lifestyle of this city? – Jesus teaches it on the mountain.

● **“Your will be done on earth...”**

When, as part of his teaching, Jesus instructs the disciples how to pray,²¹ it shouldn't surprise us that the prayer he taught them contained another “essence of the Kingdom”. In fact, in the prayer usually called “the Lord's Prayer”, we have the most startling, revolutionary definition of the Kingdom:

- Your Kingdom come (this is the prayer)
- Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (this is the definition!)

The implications of this alone, frankly, are enough to drive us to a life of radical sharing – who calls anything “mine” in heaven? – and of radical commitment to one another – who says “I'm off” in heaven? “Not everyone,” insists Jesus, “who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven”.²² Re-apply this a little: “not everyone who knows their bible, not everyone who goes to ‘Delirious’ concerts, not everyone who... comes to Kingdom Seekers... not everyone will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he who *does the will of my Father in heaven.*” It must be this way because the Kingdom of heaven is quite literally that – heaven. The will of God, here on earth, here in our lives, here in what we DO – as it is in heaven. Jesus is not talking here so much about avoiding hell and going to heaven one day (he'd have made a useless speaker at many modern evangelistic events) but about the Kingdom of

20. 2 Samuel 7:16, Isaiah 9:7 etc.

21. Matthew 6:10

22. Matthew 7:21

heaven here on the earth expressed through obedient, shining people. OK, there *will*, it seems, be those who believe in Jesus (and say “Lord, Lord”) and are saved “as through flames”²³ having not done a great deal of God’s will. According to Paul in 1 Corinthians, “Lord, Lord” is the foundation we build on – but let’s build with the “gold, silver and costly stones” of the Kingdom rather than the “wood, hay and straw” of doing our own thing. Let’s enter the Kingdom. Let’s do the will of our Father in heaven.

Now Jesus defines this will in his sermon on the mount. Firstly, he redefines the old covenant law. This was given to people whose “hearts were hard”.²⁴ But Jesus knew that under the new covenant, the covenant made in him, in the body and blood of the new man,²⁵ there would be a new humanity, with a “new heart” as Jeremiah and Ezekiel had prophesied.²⁶ The whole of Matthew chapter 5 is the radical “topping up” of the old covenant law. Jesus is preaching the radical righteousness of the Kingdom of heaven.

- In heaven no-one is angry with his brother without cause.
- In heaven no-one looks at a woman lustfully.
- In heaven there is no divorce.²⁷
- In heaven “yes” means “yes.”
- In heaven the only competition is to *give* the most.
- In heaven – love, love, love!

You get the idea. Listen – as the one who had “come from heaven”,²⁸ Jesus knew what he was talking about! Sense his passion to bring about the lifestyle of heaven on the earth! He *rips* into both unrighteousness and our

23. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15

24. See Matthew 19:8

25. See the earth-shattering 1 Corinthians 15:48 and also Ephesians 2:15b. The new creation is “created in Christ” – and why? – “to do good works”! Ephesians 2:10

26. Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 36:26

27. In fact, there’s no marriage – except the Lamb and his bride and they will never divorce!

28. John 3:13

petty attempts to paper over the cracks with religious legal goody-goodness. And his new law-giving²⁹ culminates in The Answer: LOVE!

“Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect”³⁰ – how is God perfect? *He loves*. Even when we were his enemies he loved us. The Kingdom people must *love* if they are to demonstrate the Kingdom. Love is the fulfilment of the old law³¹ and if we truly love then we will do the will of our Father.

● Love

Now this love has nothing to do with warm glowy feelings, nothing to do with soft-focus photography. The focus of the New Testament, in fact, is fairly sharp:

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. (1 John 3:16)

Now let’s get to the real issue here. If you lay your life down for someone then you put everything you are and everything you have at their disposal. It’s not a case of, “I’m free on Wednesdays at nine and I can lend you a tenner,” it’s a case of, “I will be with you always and everything I have is yours”... hang on – *everything I have is yours?* Well, yes. Love, true love, cannot possess what the one loved does not have. The nature of love is to give. Please, please, please, forget the notion that love is being nice and not annoying the neighbours (the British gospel). Love is tough and it is radical. Love shares *all* its possessions and *all* its life. In case we haven’t got the full impact of what he is saying, the apostle John spells it out for us straight away:

If any of you have material possessions which your brother has need of, but you close your heart to him, then how can love be in you? Dear

29. New law for a new covenant, a new Adam, a new creation – a new start.

30. Matthew 5:48

31. Romans 13:10

children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:17)

How is the love of Christ to be communicated to the world? When the people who bear his name demonstrate his love by sharing all they have and laying down their lives for each other. “A city on a hill cannot be hidden,” remember?

- **“Walk as Jesus did”**

Another quote from the apostle John,³² no less earth shattering than the last one, perhaps more so. So, just how did Jesus “walk”? What was his lifestyle, how did *he* practise love?

Well, we know that Jesus shared a common purse with his disciples – in fact, it is recorded that Judas (who didn’t understand love) used to steal from it.³³

Jesus practised the radical love-sharing with his disciples. He taught them that the Kingdom pearl of their shared life was worth selling all to possess.³⁴

However, there was one thing Jesus had that his followers didn’t have...

- **Life**

Jesus had in him life from God, eternal life, “life which is the light of men”³⁵ – and the disciples, like the rest of humanity, were dead in their sins. Jesus, as a man, as the Son of Man, had eternal life – and his brothers desperately needed it. So what did the Son of Man do? He loved. Because of the nature of love, Jesus could not keep for himself the life – so he poured out his life, eternal life, for us. He died for all of us and now we can share in his eternal resurrection life as we enter into him through faith.³⁶

32. 1 John 2:6

33. John 12:6

34. Matthew 13:45

35. John 1:4 etc

36. John 3:16

Understand that the cross was the ultimate act of community!

Now listen: all who enter into Christ gain *all* his life! No-one is given more life than another. No-one just gets a bit of Christ's life (and someone else gets a bit more because God likes them more or something) – when a person receives eternal life that person shares *all* the life of Christ with the others in Christ. We are the Body of Christ, all members of one new man.³⁷ Think of a body – it's not as if the arm can say, "I have more life than the leg." The life of the body flows throughout the body. So the life of the Christ flows throughout his Body. The life of the body is the breath.³⁸ The life of the Body of Christ is the Breath of God, the Holy Spirit. We *share* the life of Christ. We *share* the poured out Holy Spirit.³⁹ Now, granted this is a spiritual sharing, but the material follows from it: we share all things, because the shared Spirit produces the fruit of love in our lives⁴⁰ (and we know what love means). The common life and sharing of all things is the result of the Spirit's coming.

Look how it happened in Acts chapters 2 and 4:

Acts 2:4, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit" leads to Acts 2:44, "All the believers were together and had *all things* in common."

Acts 4:31, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit" leads to Acts 4:32, "All the believers were one... no-one claimed *anything* was his own, but they shared *everything* they had."

The Holy Spirit came to earth with an express commissioning from the ascended King Jesus: to create community on the earth. Now *this* is a city on

37. Romans 12:5

38. See the creation of the old man, Adam, in Genesis 2:7. So it is in the eternal new creation when God breathes the eternal Spirit into the body of the new man.

39. 1 Corinthians 12:7

40. Galatians 5:22

a hill, a colony of heaven on the earth. Are you a Kingdom seeker? – then you’ve just found it. Just... make sure you do it.

● **How good! How pleasant!**

Centuries before Jesus, David, who was a prophet, looked right into the Kingdom of God. Trapped in the cave of Adullam, with a murderous King Saul hot on his trail, he drew to himself a motley crowd of “brothers” – “all those who were in distress or in debt or discontented”⁴¹ and in the midst of their shared lifestyle he opened his mouth and sang:

How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity!
It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard,
on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes.
It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.
(Psalm 133)

We see clearly in Acts 2 what David glimpsed. Here is Psalm 133 in the light of the Kingdom:

How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together sharing one Life!
It is like precious oil, the anointing poured on the Head, poured onto Christ, the high priest, yet running down onto his Body, onto his Church.
It is the resurrection dew⁴² falling on the city set on a hill, falling on Mount Zion.
For there the Lord bestows his blessing: the eternal life of Christ, life forevermore.

41. 1 Samuel 22:1-2 – foreshadowing the Kingdom which belongs to the poor – Luke 6:20

42. Psalm 110:3 – a prophecy of the resurrection.

● Community

The Greek word for this common life is “koinonia” which we usually translate, rather weakly, as “fellowship” (having a cuppa after the service). In fact this word carries the meaning of *sharing*, of a common interest – a common unity, or comm-unity (imagine it – “after this morning’s service, we will have an informal time of all things in common”). Koinonia is revealed to us most clearly in Acts:⁴³

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to koinonia... all the believers were together and had all things in common.”

The apostles’ teaching, of course, was “all that Jesus had commanded them”.⁴⁴ Yes, this koinonia in Acts is the direct result of Jesus’ teaching:

“Sell everything you have... and come follow me... Truly, no-one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and for the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much *in this present age* (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – and with them persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.”⁴⁵

And so, when Barnabas put his money at the apostles’ feet⁴⁶ he forsook it, for the sake of Jesus and the gospel – he could not bear to have what his brothers and sisters lacked – and yet, in doing so, he gained “a hundred times as much in this present age” as he gained the koinonia, the big spiritual family and all that it shared together (including its persecutions).

43. Yet it is not only apparent in Acts: the epistles make references to this common life. Unfortunately modern versions tend to play down the references to radical sharing through bland translation, but consider such verses as Romans 12:13 which amounts to “share things and live together” and Hebrews 13:16 - “make sure that you practise koinonia because God is pleased with this sacrifice”.

44. Matthew 28:20

45. Mark 10:21 & 29-30

46. Acts 4:36-37

In Acts we can see two vital components to the working out of this radical common life:

- “They were all together in one place”
- “...and had all things in common.”

Together: Now, this doesn’t have to mean under one roof, but certainly in the same vicinity – and we know that there *was* common living in houses which used to belong to someone (before they were grabbed by the pentecostal power of a Spirit determined to fashion a koinonia!) This practice continued for many years and not just in Jerusalem. Look in Romans chapter 16 verse 5: “Greet the church in their house,” and in Philemon verse 2: “the church in your house”. It is unfortunate that the NIV waters the Greek down by inserting the word “meets” – the Holy Spirit came to produce something a little more radical than housegroups.

All things in common: It has to be this way if the church is to bring the lifestyle of heaven to earth. “In this world we are like him.”⁴⁷ As he loves, so do we. If he shares all he has, so do we. If he lays down his life for his friends, so do we. We cannot ignore his command. “This is my command: love one another as I have loved you.”⁴⁸

● Love means Justice

Love cannot bear iniquity.⁴⁹ One of the root meanings of “iniquity” is “inequity,” that is *inequality*. Love must live in equality, possessing nothing that a brother needs. It is, frankly, iniquitous that someone should have while another has not. This is *not* how it is in heaven – yet our prayer and our life is to be “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” it is not the “perfection” of love.⁵⁰ Now Jesus reproves us if we love *only* our brothers

47. 1 John 4:18

48. John 15:12

49. 1 Corinthians 13:6

50. Matthew 5:48

and sisters in the church – we are to love all people, even our persecutors.⁵¹ However, it is particularly *in* the church, in God's Kingdom people, that God wants to demonstrate true love and justice.⁵² Then those who are needy can come and find value and worth within a radical alternative to the world's "charity" (buy a red nose, buy a lottery ticket and so on *ad nauseum*).

We cannot truly begin to effectively love the world's people unless we first become a radical love church-community. In Acts there were "no needy people among them"⁵³ – but not because they were all middle class! No, there were no needy people among them because all were equal: in value before God and *economically*. There were no divisions of class and wealth. Today we may kid ourselves that we have equality because all the people who happen to be in our church are all middle class or all working class – this is a mockery of the Kingdom. In the Kingdom no-one owns anything nor is anyone needy. God will provide for the needs of his children – he blesses with prosperity a community within which individuals have nothing. All is shared. All is for the gospel. "Prosperity", in God's thought, is not the selfish tosh we often come across ("name the car you want brother"), it is God blessing the Kingdom selflessness of a people whose treasure is in heaven. Yes, God will bring financial blessing to his church – *because he knows that it will be used righteously and for the gospel*. This must, it must, be the case, or we rob God. Remember Ananias and Sapphira? They wanted the Kingdom on their terms and received judgement.⁵⁴ More on money later – we haven't finished with justice yet.

● **Justice means Equality**

As the Kingdom of heaven first began to dawn on this wilderness of a planet, a voice cried out in the wilderness:

51. Matthew 5:43-48

52. Galatians 6:10, Matthew 5:14-16, John 13:35 etc.

53. Acts 4:34

54. Acts 5:1-11

“Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain made low!”⁵⁵

What does all this mean? What’s the landscape got to do with the thing? In fact, this is a picture of the justice which is to arrive with the King – in effect, the rich and haughty (mountains) will be humbled and the poor and needy (valleys) lifted. The reign of heaven is arriving. Justice means equality. Mary, herself a prophetess, sang out her vision of the Kingdom that her son was to bring:

“He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but the rich he has sent empty away.”⁵⁶

When Jesus himself begins his ministry, he announces it with a quote from the prophet Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor...
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”⁵⁷

The “year of the Lord’s favour” hearkens back to the “year of Jubilee” which was the year when, according to old covenant law, all the property would be re-distributed to stop the inevitable trend of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.⁵⁸ Jesus Christ is the “anointed one” (this is what “Christ” means) – anointed for what purpose?

55. Luke 3:4-5

56. Luke 1:52-53

57. Luke 4:18-19

58. See Leviticus 25

To announce the new Jubilee, the Kingdom of justice and righteousness which he is bringing in.

Christ appeared to “destroy all the works of the devil”,⁵⁹ to rout the injustice of the serpent rule and to establish the reign of heaven on the earth. This means change! Thus the Baptist bellows:

REPENT!

And the Christ proclaims:

REPENT!

To repent⁶⁰ means to change: a new order is near, a new lifestyle is arriving. John the Baptist spells it out for us:⁶¹

“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance... the man with two tunics should share with the one who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.”

In this he agrees with another John. (Remember 1 John chapter 3, verse 17?!) The Kingdom of heaven lifestyle is God’s chosen fast⁶² (his chosen life and way of worship). It is...

● **Justice and Righteousness**

God is into justice and righteousness and he hasn’t been quiet about the fact. Check these out:

- “He has made a king to maintain justice and righteousness” (1 Kings 10:9)
- “Maintain justice and righteousness” (2 Chronicles 9:8)
- “... his justice and righteousness” (Job 37:23)

59. 1 John 3:8

60. Matthew 3:2 & 4:17

61. Luke 3:11

62. Isaiah 58

- “The Lord loves righteousness and justice” (Psalm 11:7)
- “The righteous care about justice” (Proverbs 29:7)
- “Full of justice; righteousness...” (Isaiah 1:21)
- “Zion will be redeemed with justice, ...with righteousness” (Isaiah 1:27)
- “He looked for justice, ...for righteousness” (Isaiah 5:7)
- “He will be exalted by his justice... [and] his righteousness” (Isaiah 5:16)
- “Establishing his Kingdom with justice and righteousness” (Isaiah 9:7 and also throughout Isaiah!)
- “Justice and righteousness on earth; in these I delight, declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:24)
- “I will betroth you in righteousness and justice” (Hosea 2:19)
- “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-ending stream” (Amos 5:24)

And so on and on and on. And that’s just the ones where justice and righteousness are mentioned together! If you were to go through the Bible highlighting every mention of “justice and righteousness,” your highlighter pen would have run out before the end of the prophets! God’s righteousness is about true justice. We are to “seek first the Kingdom *and his righteousness*”.⁶³ In fact, “the Kingdom of God *is righteousness*”!⁶⁴ We know that our righteous deeds are of no value before God – but this is no excuse to let evil prevail! We are to seek *his* righteousness, “righteousness *in the Holy Spirit*”.⁶⁵ When we are together *in Christ*, we have the ability to be righteous. If anyone is in Christ there is a whole new creation – the old order has gone

63. Matthew 6:33

64. Romans 14:17

65. Ibid.

and the new has arrived!⁶⁶ When he preached the Kingdom, Jesus promised that those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” would be filled.⁶⁷

How?

In the Kingdom of heaven! In the Jubilee community!

This has nothing to do with trying to earn some favour with God. Jesus has settled that at the cross where we were all slain in him!⁶⁸ God has pronounced us incapable of righteousness and killed us off on the cross with Christ! When they shouted “away with him” and crucified the last Adam, they killed off a useless humanity! Useless, sin-bound you – kaput! But in his resurrection...⁶⁹

We live a new life, alive to God, in a new Adam, part of a new humanity!⁷⁰

So it is possible. Newly “created in Christ Jesus” we find that there are “good works” he has prepared for us.⁷¹ This is so often overlooked – we are not, not ever, never could be, saved by good works – but we *are* saved *for* good works! If you’re a “new creation in Christ” then you don’t belong to the old order of things – you’ve entered a whole new order!⁷² You live a whole new way! In short, you are able to “do the will of the Father” and “enter the Kingdom of heaven.”⁷³ So,

66. 2 Corinthians 5:17 (The NEB is a good rendering of this verse.)

67. Matthew 5:6

68. 2 Corinthians 5:14, Colossians 2:20, Galatians 2:20 etc. Our death with Christ is a big and important topic, but here I just want to emphasise that it liberates us into new righteousness!

69. See Romans 6:7-10 and 1 Corinthians 15:45-69 (ditto with previous footnote!)

70. The topic of new creation in Christ will be explored more fully in Part Two of these notes.

71. Ephesians 2:10

72. Corinthians 5:17 (NEB)

73. Matthew 7:21

“Forsake all you have and come follow me!”

Yes, with man this is impossible, but with God (and in Christ!) all things are possible.⁷⁴

● **Jesus on Money**

Joe Average wouldn't deny that he loves money. Just about everyone does, don't they? At least this has the advantage of being honest. Most Christians would strenuously deny that they love their cash – so they make up pretty little sayings to excuse themselves. This is the standard Christian line on money:

“It's all right to possess money, just don't let it possess you.”

Now this is OK as far as it goes. Which is the problem really. It doesn't go far enough and looks a little weak compared with Jesus whose line on money seemed to approximate to:

“Get rid of it.”

Jesus taught the supreme value of the Kingdom pearl,⁷⁵ of the treasure in heaven.⁷⁶ Paul warns us that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil – this verse is fairly often quoted by Christians. “We mustn't *love* money” they say. Jesus, ever straight-forward put it like this:

“Look, you'll either love God and hate money or the other way around. You choose.” (My paraphrase of Matthew chapter 6, verse 24!)

Jesus says that if you love God you will hate money! (This is less often quoted by Christians.)

74. Mark 10:27

75. Matthew 13:45

76. Matthew 6:20

Now look, I'm not suggesting that we should never touch the stuff – Jesus had his needs met by the miraculous four drachma piece⁷⁷ and he clearly taught his disciples that they would need to use money (although only after he had taught them to rely on God for it – compare Luke 10:4 with Luke 22:36). In fact our hatred for the strong man, Mammon, ought to drive us to want the church to prosper so that we can enslave money to God's purposes! Take money captive for the Kingdom! Use it for the gospel! Plunder the enemy's goods! But hate it.

Money keeps two thirds of the world in poverty for a fat minority. Money causes murder, divorce, slander, selfishness... Money drives the people of the world to an early grave, promising much and never yielding what it promises. Money brings out the ugly in humanity. The first signs of Mammon's strongholds – food, entertainment and industry⁷⁸ – were found in the sons of Lamech, a murderer, and the ancestors of Cain, the first murderer. Money kills.

● **One or the Other**

“No-one can serve both God and Mammon.” If you want a running definition of what Mammon is then try this: it is *wealth and self*. Many Christians may say that they have no problem with love for money – but touch their “rights” about how to spend it and you'll discover the lurking influence of Mammon. Some people will give their money quite generously – but will they surrender their independence? Not on your life!

Where are those who, like Barnabas, will lay their money at the apostles' feet and say, in effect, “Do with it what you will”? Here is the true binding of Mammon. Not ruled by wealth, not ruled by self. I love the story of the nun who when asked to define her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience said,

77. Matthew 17:24-27

78. Genesis 4:20-22

with a twinkle in her eye, “Got no money, got no man, do as I’m told!” She had bound the strong man.

Look at this another way, in a prophetic way. In the scripture there are two kinds of purse: firstly, the futile purse, the “purse with holes in it”, and secondly, the common purse of the household of God. The first is the purse for self, the “treasure stored up on earth”. The second is the resources of God’s people. Look at it in Haggai, chapter 1:

Give careful thought to your ways. You have harvested little but planted much. You eat but you never have enough. You drink but never have your fill. You put clothes on but are not warm. You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it...

This is the futility of wealth for self. The scriptures resound with condemnation for the collection of wealth. Jesus said it was for the moth and the thief.⁷⁹ James warns that its corrosion will take its owner with it.⁸⁰ Back to Haggai:

“Why?” declares the Lord Almighty. “Because of my house which remains a ruin while each of you is busy with his own house...”

Don’t have a purse with holes in it. Have a common purse and build up the house of God. Don’t be busy doing your own thing. Lay down your life for some brothers and sisters and get on with building the house of God.

● **Death to wealth for self!**

Let us stop ignoring Jesus. Many songs are sung Sunday by Sunday which applaud him and decorate him with titles – but the singers too often ignore large sections of what he taught. The church in Acts, with its common purse, fulfils the (at first, seemingly impossible and contradictory) double injunction of Jesus:

79. Matthew 6:19-20

80. James 5:1-3

To plunder the enemy's goods (including finances) and to use money for the gospel.⁸¹

To forsake everything you have.⁸²

How?

Those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet.⁸³

Money is channelled into the apostolic work of building up the house of God and the justice of providing for the needy in the community. It is surrendered "for the sake of the gospel".⁸⁴

I challenge anyone to find a way of obeying the commands of Jesus without ending up with some form of common purse community.

"And God appointed Christ to be head over *everything* for his church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."
(Paul, Apostle of God.)

Love justice and righteousness!

81. Matthew 12:29 and Luke 16:8-9

82. Luke 14:33

83. Acts 4:35-36

84. Mark 10:29

TO KINGDOM SEEKERS

PART TWO – THE COVENANT CHURCH

We've looked at some of what being a "Kingdom" people means and how this impacts our understanding of what church is about – now it's time to focus more deeply on the church, not just as a sharing people under King Jesus, but as a people presented to Christ as a bride, as the body of Christ, as the fulfilment of God's plan, as a "Covenant" people. First we'll deal with some big themes and then we'll get down to the nitty-gritty of how they impact our lives. Here we go...

● **The Two Movements**

Since the fall of creation, there are two discernible "movements" within which God has moved to reclaim what was lost and the two are linked. The first movement of God into this fallen creation is that of the *Kingdom* – the rule of heaven advancing through the earth. This movement of God's authority centres on the office of *King*. The second restorative movement in the divine plan is that of the *Covenant* – God's contractual relationship with a people that he calls his own, a people that he has redeemed (literally "bought"). This movement of God's desire centres on the office of *Priest*. Both of these movements can be seen at work in the dealings of God with Israel in the Old Testament.

● **The Kingdom Movement: Kings**

God revealed his Kingship on the earth through the Kingship of David and the other Kings so that it could be said that the Lord sends forth his mighty sceptre (that is, his ruling authority) "*from out of Zion*".⁸⁵ As long as God has

85. Psalm 110:2

“installed his King on Zion”⁸⁶ his rulership is expressed on the earth and he is described as “the Lord of all the earth”.⁸⁷ However, when that office of King is removed, as it was at the time of the exile, God’s Kingdom advance is frustrated for a time. In the books of the exile (Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah) God is frequently described as “the God of heaven”. While he always remains “sovereign over the kingdoms of men”,⁸⁸ his specific, focussed Kingdom of heaven expression *on the earth* is only accomplished through the King installed in Zion. Of course, when Jesus came he was the perfect fulfilment of God’s need to have a King to rule the earth everlastingly. Previous Kings – Adam, Saul, David, Solomon, and so on – had all failed to represent God’s rule perfectly. Jesus is a new King and today he rules from his Zion: the city on a hill that we have explored.⁸⁹ Jesus brings the full justice, power, and authority of God to the earth. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him.”⁹⁰ Jesus is the great King.

● **The Covenant Movement: Priests**

However, there is always, alongside this Kingdom movement, that which has to do with God gaining a people for relationship, a people to be his, a companion or a bride,⁹¹ given to him in purity. Whereas the Kingdom advances (with force!)⁹² slaying enemies as it does, God gains his people by redeeming them from the fallen earth and making a mutual pledge, a covenant, with them. This is not without cost – redemption is costly – it is

86. Psalm 2:6

87. Psalm 97:5

88. Daniel 5:22

89. Matthew 5:14

90. Matthew 28:12

91. See numerous references in the prophets to God’s people being his bride - especially in the book of Hosea. As we shall see, this is all brought into sharp focus with the arrival of Jesus and the formation of his bride.

92. See Matthew 11:12

marked by sacrifice, by the shedding of blood for the removal of sins.⁹³ This Covenant movement is first very apparent in Abraham, to whom God promises, “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants”⁹⁴ but it is foreshadowed before this in Noah to whom God made covenant in the rainbow⁹⁵ and in Adam to whom God made covenant in the shedding of animal blood to cover his shame.⁹⁶ Abel, too, was accepted because his sacrifice involved the shedding of blood.⁹⁷ The office of this Covenant movement is that of Priest. Where an anointed King provides victory and rulership, an anointed Priest provides purity and relationship with God through right sacrifice.

God purchases his people, then, and makes his covenant with them. He always covenants with a *people*, rather than independent individuals. Even when he covenants with individuals, he always has in mind the offspring, the “seed”, his people. This can be said of Adam (where God has in mind the redemption of humanity), of Noah (where God has his mind on the “people”

93. See Hebrews 9:22 etc. – the principle is that sin demands the price of death. Why? Only death “cleanses away” sin. Sin must be removed from God's presence by death (the ultimate removal!) The blood of animals achieved forgiveness in that it pointed to the blood of Christ, which in turn, represents the death of Christ before God - and in Christ all of sinful humanity was slain and a new life, a sinless life was attained instead. But at what cost to the Lord! Yet this is why his blood today can cleanse us (it signifies the death of sin) and brings us new life in him.

94. Genesis 17:7. A covenant ratified by circumcision, which prefigures the “cutting off” of an old humanity and the “putting on” of a new humanity in Christ - Colossians 2:11-12

95. Genesis 9:8-16. Notice that God's covenant with Noah is worded in an almost identical way to that of the original (now broken) covenant with Adam (cp. Genesis 1:28-30 & 8:16-17). This is because God's dealings with Noah prefigure the new creation in the ark which is Christ and through the waters of baptism. Entering into Christ through faith and baptism, we enter a new creation and a new Adamic covenant.

96. Genesis 3:21

97. Genesis 4:2-5

in the ark), of Abraham (where God promises a people in number like the stars), of David (where God promises to bless his son who will “build a house for the Lord’s name”, a theme picked up in the New Testament and applied to the church), and, supremely, of Jesus. When Jesus offered up his own blood, “the blood of the covenant”,⁹⁸ on the cross, God made covenant with him *and with the people that were in him*. In the covenant God made with each of these men, he had his mind also on the people that were “in them”. Jesus is unique, however, in that he is not only the object of God’s covenant, he is also the priest who maintains it – and also the sacrifice itself! Jesus is God’s permanent and perfect bringer of Covenant relationship between God and his people. He is the perfect and everlasting Priest, perfectly uniting God and his people through his own flesh and blood.⁹⁹

- Jesus is the everlasting King. He has brought the Kingdom to earth.
- Jesus is the everlasting priest. He has brought a Covenant people to God.

● **BUT... not him alone.**

Had Jesus not died he would have remained alone – but as he died, the seed which is his body has cracked open and borne the fruit of a people.¹⁰⁰ An apple pip produces apples. An acorn produces acorns. The Son of Man produces men. More astonishingly, the Son of God produces sons of God. Thus, after his resurrection, Jesus arrives and sends for his disciples, calling them an astonishing thing:

“Go and tell *my brothers* to meet me at Galilee.”¹⁰¹

Never before had he referred to his disciples as family – he made reference only to his Father. But having died and been raised, he has “brothers”, he is

98. Matthew 26:28

99. See Hebrews 8

100. John 12:24

101. Matthew 28:10

the “firstborn among many brothers”.¹⁰² For ever, Jesus will remain the only begotten Son of God, taking his place in the Godhead,¹⁰³ but as far as he is the head of God’s race of people, he has many who are like him. Why are they like him? *Because they are from him!* The seed that died has born its fruit!

- As was the earthly man so are those who are of the earthly man.
- As is the man from heaven so are those who are of the heavenly man.¹⁰⁴

We will look in a whole lot more detail at what it means to be “of” and “from” him later (these questions touch on the deep things of the church) and we will look at how we get there, but for now, just notice this – because we are one with him, we share his great twofold office of King-Priest:

- “...You are a royal priesthood”¹⁰⁵
- “He has made us to be kings and priests to serve our God and Father”¹⁰⁶

We share in the Kingdom rule – as we have seen, we *become* the light with Christ. We bring the justice of heaven to earth by praying and living the great cry, “on earth as in heaven!”

We also share in the Covenant ministry of priesthood. We make the “spiritual sacrifices”¹⁰⁷ such as the offering of our bodies to God (like Jesus), turning our back on the world’s ways, and the sharing of all that we have.¹⁰⁸ Just as the fact that we are Kingdom people has a huge impact on everything we are, so does the fact that we are a Covenant people.

102. Romans 8:29 & Hebrews 2:11

103. John 1:18 etc

104. 1 Corinthians 15:48

105. 1 Peter 2:9

106. Revelation 1:6

107. 1 Peter 2:5

108. Romans 12:1-2 & 13, Hebrews 13:15-16 - the “sacrifice” is *koinonia!*

You see a Covenant people have been “bought with a price”¹⁰⁹ and their identity is totally to belong to the buyer. What does all this mean? Well, first we have to understand what we’ve been bought from. To do this, let’s take a trip back to the beginning of history...

● **The World, the Flesh and the Devil: The Devil**

When God created the world it was “very good”.¹¹⁰ The only hint which we are given by the Bible that everything was less than rosy at this stage is that the “very good” creation of the earth (the one which took seven days) seems to have been more of a redemption than a creation. If you look very closely at the first two verses of Genesis you will see that God “created the heavens and the earth” in the first verse! But the earth seems to go wrong somehow – it becomes “formless and empty”, chaotic. God causes a renewed earth to rise from the water in the act which we traditionally call “the creation”, which is really, it seems, a re-creation!¹¹¹ Why did the original earth go wrong?

We’re not told in Genesis chapter one, but there is plenty from other parts of the Bible, to support the idea that it was the fall of Lucifer and the rebel angels and their being cast to earth which caused the earth to go chaotic.¹¹² In any case, in chapter three of Genesis, we meet Lucifer in his subtle serpentine disguise and there is no other indication of where he came from. So, by the end of the seven redemptive-creative days, God has made a “very good” earth, with a man, Adam and Eve, created to rule upon it.¹¹³ (Yes, “a *man*, Adam and Eve” – for man and woman were one new man, one body,

109. 1 Corinthians 6:20

110. Genesis 1:31

111. Interestingly this work of re-creation in Genesis 1 parallels the work of new creation which God achieves in Christ. We are reborn out of water by the same Spirit of God - see John 3:5 - which hovered over the waters in those early moments of time.

112. See Luke 10:18, Rev 12:7-9 etc.

113. Genesis 1:28

one flesh.)¹¹⁴ And this man was in covenant with God – he would rule as long as he didn't eat from the tree of knowledge, in which case he would die.

Yet, this ruling man, Adam-Eve, was tricked by Lucifer into breaking covenant with God. At this point, Lucifer was, in a twisted sense, “promoted”. He became Satan, which means “accuser”. You see, he was now chief “witness for the prosecution” of Adam and Eve. He saw them break God's covenant and was given at that moment a legal right to demand their death. And since the King and Queen were now condemned to death, Satan took control of the earth and made it his domain. An empty throne can be filled by the one who has the “authority” of the evidence for the prosecution behind him. God's word at the judgement confirmed this as legally the case. To Adam, confirming the death-penalty, he says:

“You are dust”

Turning to the serpent, he says:

“You will eat dust”

Man is the food of the serpent. He is driven out of God's garden and utterly given over to Satan. A sword flashing with fire separates man from the garden. Man resides in the world outside, a slave of Satan, the accuser and his devourer. The serpent rule is characterised by injustice, suffering and pain. This system is what the New Testament refers to as:

● **The World**

“The whole world is in the control of the evil one” according to the apostle John.¹¹⁵ Paul puts it in no uncertain terms when he describes Satan as, “the

114. See Genesis 2:21-24. The new creation implications of Eve's creation “in Adam” I will come to later.

115. 1 John 5:19

god of this age”.¹¹⁶ The world system controlled by Satan includes agriculture, commerce, entertainment, education, science, medicine, music, ways of thinking, priorities, natural families, religions, the organisation of time and so on – in fact, “Everything that is in the world... comes not from the Father.” We are not seeing the full picture if we assume that it is only *some* things in the world that Satan is in control of. He is the mind behind the whole system. Many things within that system may have the appearance of good – they may even *be* good, in certain ways (think of family, or art, or medicine, or the precepts of religions). But the point is that the whole system is set up in opposition to God. Satan is the mind behind the whole shebang. More on this later – first a word about the kind of humanity that populates this old earth.

● **The Flesh**

Not only is mankind the “food of Satan”, we are also by nature incapable of pleasing God. Adam has broken covenant with God.¹¹⁷ At that moment, not only did Adam lose his connection to God, but so did the entire humanity that was in him. In terms of living spirit such as Adam had received from God,¹¹⁸ humanity died. All that was left was a lump of animate dust, soon to return to the ground – called the flesh. “The flesh” sums up humanity apart from God, humanity outside Eden, humanity in the world.¹¹⁹ “The flesh” is man – body, soul and spirit – in opposition to God and independence to his fellow man and alienation from both. John tells us that this kind of fallen humanity is “in the world”:

116. 2 Corinthians 4:4 - the words “world” and “age” have similar applications in the New Testament: they mean the world’s system, at this present time.

117. See Hosea 6:7

118. Genesis 2:7

119. See Romans 8:1-14, particularly verse 8 — the NIV calls the flesh the “sinful nature” for some reason.

Everything that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world.¹²⁰

Total sin: *Body* – the lust of the flesh (here “flesh” refers specifically to the body, whereas in other places it refers to the whole fallen man), *soul* – the lust of the eyes (the attractive and alluring things of the world), and *spirit* – the pride of life (though it is ridiculous that man should take pride in his life, since his spirit is essentially dead to its created purpose – to live in communion with God). These are the areas that Adam and Eve yielded to Satan at the fall. Look at Genesis chapter 3, verse 6:

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was *good for food* (lust of the flesh), *pleasing to the eye* (lust of the eyes) and *desirable for gaining wisdom* (pride of life) she took some and ate it.

This is the verdict then: fallen angel rules fallen world containing fallen man. Devil, world, flesh. Meanwhile at the throne of God...

● **The Overcomer**

God, true to his eternal plan to save a people in Christ,¹²¹ includes with the judgement pronounced on Adam in Eden, a promise.¹²² Speaking to the serpent, he says:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.”

Man will again express the rule of God in the earth – how? Through the offspring.¹²³ This is the promised Messiah-Deliverer that the scriptures promise right up until the bellowing Baptist shouts in the wilderness:

120. 1 John 2:16

121. Ephesians 1:4

122. Genesis 3:14-15

123. This is the same offspring as is depicted by the vision of the mother and man-child in Revelation 12, except there the “woman” is not Eve - the “mother of the

“PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD!”

And so arrives Jesus. Jesus is the promised deliverer from heaven who wrests the usurped authority of the devil, winning it back for humanity, and therefore for God, who loves humanity. Jesus is the Son of Man who triumphs where Adam fell. He was “tempted in every way”¹²⁴ yet overcame. Now, “tempted in every way” does not mean that every single possible temptation came to him – logically, for instance, in first century Judea he was never tempted to steal a car! By “tempted in every way” we are to understand that he faced the full onslaught of Satan in all three fundamental areas (body, soul and spirit) just as Adam and Eve had. Yet Jesus is fully obedient to God’s word and rejects the spurious authority of the serpent, crushing his head as God had promised he would. (The head, in the Bible, represents authority.) Notice the battle between Jesus and Satan in Matthew chapter 4, which operates in the three areas of body, soul, and spirit:

- Eat what is forbidden: “*Tell these stones to become bread*” (body sin, lust of the flesh).
- Impress people with what looks good: “*Throw yourself down*” (soul sin, lust of the eyes).
- Live for this world: “*Worship me and I’ll give you the kingdoms of the world.*” (spirit sin, the pride of life).

Jesus defeats the enemy by the truth of God’s word which obeys even when the devil tries to twist it like he did with Adam and Eve.¹²⁵ Ultimately, Jesus’ obedience to his Father’s word sent him to the cross, where the head-

living” (in Adam) but Jerusalem the “mother” of the living (in Christ), because John is seeing from heaven to earth - the eternal Church view - whereas the serpent is hearing on earth from heaven - the temporal Eve view. (See Genesis 3:20 & Galatians 4:26). In a real sense Christ is the offspring of both - he is the last of one kind of human being and the first of a new kind. Just for your information!

124. Hebrews 4:15

125. Notice that in both Genesis and the Gospels, the devil misquotes God’s word.

authority of the serpent was finally and completely crushed because Jesus took away Satan's ground of accusation by his blood.¹²⁶ Jesus crushes the serpent's head, is raised victorious and is "caught up to God" where he reigns over all the earth.¹²⁷

- **One New Man**

ONE MAN has defeated the enemy. This ONE MAN was from heaven and returned to heaven. This ONE MAN will return to earth to reign. The devil has no hold over him. All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to this ONE MAN. ONE MAN has entered the Kingdom. ONE MAN has entered into covenant with God.

- **"Get into Jesus!"**

This doesn't help us much, though, does it? God's got his ruling man again, a new Adam, but we're in old Adam. We and the rest of humanity were created in old Adam and when the time came we were born into a fallen world, in old Adam. As Jesus put it, "Flesh gives birth to flesh."¹²⁸ We were born outside the Kingdom because that is Adam's fate. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God."¹²⁹ Our only possible hope is to be born again in a new Adam, one who has entered the Kingdom... Aha!

"No-one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born again – and born from above"¹³⁰ – who was born from above? – Jesus Christ! Could it be possible to be born again IN JESUS CHRIST? This is the key, the good news, the amazing thing that Christ has accomplished for us – through his death he has finished off the old humanity and through his resurrection he has begun

126. Colossians 2:15

127. Philippians 2:6-11, Revelation 12:5

128. John 3:6

129. 1 Corinthians 15:50

130. John 3:3

a new one. If we go through his death and resurrection with him, then we too have died, we too have been raised in a new humanity.¹³¹

This is why Jesus said that “whoever believes into him will have eternal life”¹³² and that if we come “into the light” (that is, come *into* Christ) it will be seen that we are “created in God”,¹³³ that we are “born of God”.¹³⁴ Just like the gone-wrong world in Genesis chapter one, we are “birthed out of water by the Spirit”.¹³⁵ It’s a work of new creation: “created in Christ Jesus”!¹³⁶ Paul puts it like this:

We are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died... So from now on we regard no-one from a worldly point of view (because that old “worldly” person has died) ... if anyone is in Christ then he has been newly created: the whole old creation has passed away and a new creation has arrived! (2 Corinthians, chapter 5)

And so we enter into the covenant between God and the new Adam “in Christ Jesus”. This “one new man”¹³⁷ reigns in the heavens (the ascended Christ, the head) and on earth (the church, Christ’s body).¹³⁸

Let’s take a closer look at the means by which we are “transferred”,¹³⁹ by which we are brought into covenant in Christ.

131. Colossians 3:3, Romans 6:8, 1 Corinthians 15:45-50 etc.

132. John 3:16

133. John 3:21

134. John 1:12-13

135. Genesis 1:2-3, John 3:5

136. Ephesians 2:10

137. Ephesians 2:15

138. Ephesians 1:22-23

139. Colossians 1:13

● **Blood, Water, Spirit... the Covenant “testimony”**

For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood and these three agree (or make covenant)... And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. (1 John, chapter 5)

God brings us into covenant “in his Son”, in the new man, through the agency of a potent threesome: blood, water and spirit. These speak of the complete work of Christ in death (blood), burial (water), and resurrection (spirit) which we enter into, as we have seen. The *blood* of Jesus redeems us, buys us, the *water* of baptism buries us with Christ, the Holy Spirit seals us as belonging to God. Together these three testify that we have entered into the covenant.

We find a prophetic window in this covenant redemption through blood, water, and spirit in the exodus of God’s old covenant people from Egypt. They were delivered from their slavery under the tyrant Pharaoh by blood, water and spirit – the blood of the Passover lamb kept them from judgement, the water of the Red Sea which separated them from their enemies and literally “buried” their past, and the cloud and fire (a picture of the guiding Spirit) which led them to the promised land. They were “baptised into Moses”¹⁴⁰ their great deliverer, head of the Covenant people. We are “baptised into Christ”,¹⁴¹ a better deliverer. We make our exodus from the old creation world in him.

Blood: THE PASSOVER. We have already dealt with the significance of the blood as God’s redemptive and cleansing instrument.¹⁴² By the blood of Christ, God’s judgement passes over us. “Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed!”¹⁴³ The blood also buys us into a new family – notice that the

140. 1 Corinthians 10:2

141. Galatians 3:27

142. See Matthew 11:12

143. 1 Corinthians 5:7

firstborn Israelites that were saved by the Passover blood were later offered to the Lord as “belonging to him”.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, the blood of Christ buys us at great price.¹⁴⁵ *The blood testifies: we’re in the covenant, our life is in the Son!*

Water: THE PASS-OUT-OF: The church is described in the New Testament by two principal words: *ekklesia* (usually translated “church”) and *koinonia* (usually translated “fellowship”). We have looked at what it means to be a *koinonia*, a sharing people. The word “ekklesia” comes from a combination of “ek” which means “out of” and “klesia” which means “called.” The church is “called out of”! Called out of what? *Called out of the fallen world system under Satan.*

- *Ekklesia is a negative title: “not of the world”*
- *Koinonia is a positive title: “of the Kingdom brotherhood”*

The two belong together – you cannot properly enter the Kingdom unless you properly exit the world (the world system and ways – you remain on earth for the time being!). The kingdom of this world cannot be mixed with the Kingdom of heaven. Remember that right back at the beginning, when Adam and Eve first left Eden and “entered the world”, God placed a fiery sword to guard the way back to life. *A separation took place.* The dominion of Satan and the dominion of God are unmixable. It is God or Mammon.¹⁴⁶ It is Christ or Belial.¹⁴⁷

That is why Jesus said that in order to enter the Kingdom of God, one must be “born of water and the Spirit”. The Greek word for “of” here is often better translated “out of” (it is the word “ek” again!) – “born out of water”. Water, in this sense, represents the judgement of God (death and burial) which we

144. Exodus 34:19

145. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

146. Matthew 6:24

147. 2 Corinthians 6:15

come “out of” in Christ. The New Testament makes it clear that at the crucifixion, the world under its prince was judged, yet also that Jesus, lifted up has “drawn men” to himself, where they pass out of the world in his death and into new life in his resurrection.¹⁴⁸ The whole world was drowned in judgement, the world was crucified in the cross of Jesus.¹⁴⁹ All of us, including Jesus, were placed under the death and burial water – yet, in Christ, we come out of the water, leaving the world and its prince behind us. It’s just like the exodus: both Moses and the people of Israel *and* Pharaoh and the Egyptians entered the water – but only Moses and the Israelites come out of it! Likewise, the water of our baptism in Christ saves us from the entire system that we were born into in Adam, under Satan.¹⁵⁰ *The water testifies: we’re in the covenant, our life is in the Son!*

Spirit: THE PASS-INTO. Just as the cloud and the fire led the Israelites to the promised land, so the Holy Spirit leads us into our inheritance today. He comes and “seals” us as inheritors, as sons of God,¹⁵¹ as he baptises us into

148. John 12:31-32, Romans 6:5 & 8

149. Galatians 6:14 etc.

150. In the scripture, salvation is a concept more often related to the world than to sin or hell. When Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptised will be saved” (Mark 16:16), he was saying that baptism is the means of our salvation from the world. He did not say, “He who believes and is saved shall be baptised”! Salvation relates to our exit from the world order and this involves the passage through water baptism. Forgiveness of sin or justification can be said to be by belief alone – hence Jesus concludes his statement, “He who does not believe will be condemned” (no mention of baptism). Put another way, the blood can ensure the “passing over” of the condemnation – but why stay in Egypt?! When Noah got into the Ark, he was “safe” (as we are when we believe in Christ) - but he was not separated from the world until the waters came: only then was he “saved”. Peter tells us that, in a similar fashion, baptism “saves us now” (1 Peter 3:21). The same Apostle urged the penitent crowds at Pentecost to “save themselves from this corrupt world” - and how? “Those who accepted his message were baptised” (Acts 2:40-41). If you want a thoroughly excellent read about all this, then “Love not the World” by Watchman Nee is unmissable!

151. Ephesians 1:13-14

the body of the new man,¹⁵² he makes us able to take the land, to be the “Israel of God”¹⁵³ (rather than the old Israel of the flesh – “flesh gives birth to flesh”). The Spirit makes us “a holy nation, a people belonging to God”¹⁵⁴ and this is the reason for the New Testament emphasis on the gift of tongues as a sign of having received the Spirit: when God divided humanity into the peoples of the earth he scattered the languages¹⁵⁵ – and when he created one spiritual nation out of the many, he removes the language barrier. The Spirit gives the ability to “speak in new tongues as [he] enables”.¹⁵⁶ It is the Spirit who bears witness that we are children of God, by crying out “Abba, Father” in our living, regenerate, spirits.¹⁵⁷ *The Spirit testifies: we’re in the covenant, our life is in the Son!*

● **Covenant brotherhood**

John makes it clear: “God has given US eternal life.”¹⁵⁸ We must not see the life we receive in Christ as something we receive in isolation. No! When we enter into the covenant, we are joined to a people, we are covenanted in Christ with our brothers and sisters in him. It is not untrue to put it this way: “No brethren, no body of Christ; no body of Christ, no salvation!” We cannot receive the promises of God’s covenant except by entering into *peoplehood* or *brotherhood*. “We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers” says the Apostle.¹⁵⁹

- **Think of the Ark – it was A PEOPLE that were saved in it.**

152. 1 Corinthians 12:13

153. Galatians 6:16

154. 1 Peter 2:9

155. Genesis 11:1-9

156. Acts 2:4. This prophetic dimension to the gift of tongues is often overlooked. Yet Luke goes out of his way, in the narrative of Acts, to emphasise the link between tongues and prophecy and the significance of the two in receiving the Spirit.

157. Romans 8:15-16

158. 1 John 5:11

159. 1 John 3:14

- Think of the Red Sea – it was A PEOPLE that was birthed from it.
- Think of the Seed that died – it was A PEOPLE that sprang from it.

This is very, very important. Christians have missed the point here for far too long. If we are to “overcome the world”,¹⁶⁰ and live out the Kingdom and Covenant call of God, we cannot “go it alone”. The purposes of God are to join people together in redeemed communities: *our commitment to God and our commitment to one another are inseparable*. “He who loves the Father loves his child as well,” John insists. We only experience the fullness of our covenant God if we have covenant brothers to experience him with! Look at the blood, water and the spirit again:

- *Blood* – Better than the blood of Abel which spoke of hatred and murder,¹⁶¹ the blood of Christ redeems us into blood brotherhood: a new “blood type J” family. Unlike Cain, we *are* our “brother’s keeper”¹⁶² – that is, our brother belongs to us and we belong to our brother. *Covenant brotherhood!*
- *Water* – a *people* come out of the water with us as we are baptised. Baptism is an act of pledge-making,¹⁶³ a covenant act which, like circumcision, marks us as a part of a people. We are baptised into a community, just like the community in Noah’s ark. *Covenant brotherhood!*
- *Spirit* – Just as God breathed life into the body of old Adam,¹⁶⁴ he breathes life into the body of new Adam, the body of Christ. We cannot truly receive the Spirit in isolation. He “baptises us into the

160. 1 John 5:1-5

161. Hebrews 12:24

162. 1 John 3:12, Genesis 4:9

163. 1 Peter 3:21 - more on “the brotherhood pledge” to come!

164. Genesis 2:7

body” and “knits us together, one heart and soul.”¹⁶⁵ Body, soul and spirit, we are one man! *Covenant brotherhood!*

● **Brotherhood Pledge**

Now this brotherhood is brought into being by the covenant blood, water and Spirit. Yet, it remains for us to ratify this, to confirm it, and make it real in our lives by making a brotherhood pledge to one another. Ever been to a wedding? Just listen to the words as the wedding vows are made: “till death do us part,” “everything I have is yours”... If marriage is sealed by vows of this kind how much more ought we to seal our relationships in the body of Christ? A husband and wife are “one flesh”, a powerful union. Yet brothers in Jesus are called to be “one as the Father and the Son are one”¹⁶⁶ and this is a *spiritual* union; more lasting than marriage, since in eternity there will be no more marriage,¹⁶⁷ but everlasting brotherhood! King David, catching a glimpse of this kind of brotherhood in his covenant relationship with Jonathan,¹⁶⁸ cried out with grief at his death:

“I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother, you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.”¹⁶⁹

Brotherhood in Jesus is to be a sealed love, committed, “strong as death”, as Song of Songs puts it.¹⁷⁰ The Master himself taught this. When he referred to us as the “salt of the earth”, this was a reference to covenant brotherhood, the flavour of our unity...

165. 1 Corinthians 12:13, Acts 4:32

166. John 17:11

167. Matthew 22:30

168. 1 Samuel 18:1-2

169. 2 Samuel 1:26

170. Song of Songs 8:6

● The Covenant of Salt

In the Old Testament there is mention in the Law of “the salt of the covenant” and the “covenant of salt”.¹⁷¹ This is in connection with the preparation of sacrifices.¹⁷² Later, we read that the covenant between God and David is an “everlasting covenant of salt”.¹⁷³ Salt was frequently used as a *preservative*, which explains its use as a sign of covenant-making, since a covenant, by its nature, *preserves* an agreement or a relationship. In the Old Testament, (and, presumably, at the time of Jesus) when two parties wanted to affirm a covenant to one another, there would be an exchange of salt as a way of saying, “Let there be lasting peace between us; let the peace between us be preserved forever.” Such covenant pledges may be sacrificial in their nature (like the covenant relationship between David and Jonathan, which involved a degree of material sacrifice on Jonathan’s part).¹⁷⁴

When Jesus came, he taught his followers to love one another. Naturally, this “laying down of your life” would involve the sealing pledge of a covenant – this had been the God-taught way of making relationships since Noah. Therefore, it is not surprising that Jesus taught that we ought to pledge covenant between one another as a “preservative” of our lives – and he did, quite explicitly, but we would perhaps only see it if we understood the significance of salt as a covenant sign. Look at Mark, chapter 9, verses 49 and 50:

“Everyone will be salted with fire. Therefore have salt between yourselves and be at peace with one another.”

Read this in the light of your new “Jewish” understanding of “salt” as covenant:

171. Leviticus 2:13, Numbers 18:19

172. See Ezekiel 43:24

173. 2 Chronicles 13:5

174. 1 Samuel 19:1-4

“Everyone will be covenanted by fire. Therefore have covenant between yourselves and be at peace with one another.”

Now, as we have explored, it is true that the fire of the Spirit joins us as one covenant people, one body – it happened at Pentecost! Yet there remains a need for us to confirm or to *preserve* the covenant that the fire makes. You’ll have heard too many Christians who have said, “Hey, isn’t it *coool* to be one body” but who know very little of the practicalities of “laying your life down” style commitment. There remains the need to “have (or ‘hold’, ‘confirm’ or ‘preserve’) covenant between yourselves and therefore be at peace with one another”.

Jesus is not alone in teaching us to make covenant pledges. Paul urges the Ephesians to “keep (or ‘*preserve*!’) the unity of the Spirit (the covenant made by the fire) in the bond (or ‘pledge’) of peace”.¹⁷⁵ It’s not enough to say, “Hey, we’re all one!” – make it real by a pledge. Preserved, everlasting, salted, peace-powered, covenant brotherhood! That is what the Lord taught:

“You are the salt of the earth... but if the salt loses its saltiness, it is no longer good for anything...”¹⁷⁶

So let us make and keep the pledge of our brotherhood!

175. Ephesians 4:3

176. Matthew 5:13

- **New Creation: the Body, the Bride**

He who loves his wife loves himself. After all no-one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery – but I am talking of Christ and the church. (Ephesians chapter 5, verses 29-32)

There are two prophetic pictures of the church in view in this passage – the church as Christ’s body and the church as his bride. The two are, in fact, one picture: think of the original marriage in Genesis – Eve was Adam’s body (a part of his side), then, as Adam slept, Eve was taken from him and became his bride. In her union with him, they became one flesh again, one body. Eve was the “mother of all the living”,¹⁷⁷ from her was born all humanity. Yet she herself was not born, she was made: and she was not made out of clay, *she was made out of Adam. She was created in Adam.* God fashioned her from out of the sleeping Adam. She was of the same substance as Adam – “living soul”.

We know that, due to the fall of man, Adam and Eve were given over to sin and death and Eve became, in a manner of speaking, “mother of all the dead”. However, God’s deepest plan was to fashion a new, eternal “mother of all the living” – and he would fashion this new Eve from none other than the side of his Son, who would be a new Adam, an eternal Adam. The Son of God, with his eternal divine life was to be the substance from which God the Father would create an eternal divine bride.¹⁷⁸ She would be of the same substance

177. Genesis 3:20

178. I am not suggesting that the bride of Christ is divine in the sense that she is some kind of a fourth person in the Trinity! God is Father, Son and Spirit only, and we are human. However, the life of the bride is the divine life, the church receives a “participation in the divine nature” - 1 Peter 1:4 - and there is a sense

– “life-giving spirit.”¹⁷⁹ New Adam’s name and title was JESUS, PRINCE OF PEACE and his bride was named JERUSALEM which means CITY OF PEACE. She is a city in the sense that humanity dwells in her, the new humanity – just as the old humanity dwelt in Eve. Jerusalem is the mother of all the living now.

The Jerusalem which is above is free and she is our mother.¹⁸⁰

See the beauty and eternity of the church!...

- The church is the Body of the New Man.
- The church is the Bride of the Christ.
- The church is the City of the new humanity.
- The church is the Mother of all the living.
- The church is the New Creation in Christ.

● The Creative Cross

All this is accomplished through the cross. On the cross, Jesus was broken open. He lay in the “sleep” of death for three days and when he emerged, he was not alone. In his resurrection, he gained the fruit of his sufferings – his redeemed Body-Bride, “created in Christ”. It is possible for us, having died with Christ, to be risen with him, to be incorporated into the new creation Body and Bride of the Christ. So when we come and enter into or be “baptised into” Christ,¹⁸¹ we leave the old creation in Adam and enter a new creation under the headship of new Adam. Nothing of the old flesh counts (even such things as religious merit or natural abilities – see Galatians 6:13-15 and Philippians 3:2-11: these are key scriptures!) – “what counts is a new creation”! This is why Jesus says, “Hate your father and mother, your wife

in which one can say that she has always been “in Christ” just as the pre-created Eve was “in Adam”.

179. 1 Corinthians 15:45 & 48

180. Galatians 4:26

181. Galatians 3:27

and children, your brothers and sisters – even your own life”¹⁸² – why? Because this is the flesh, relationships in the old creation! It is through “taking up our cross”, that the old creation is crucified and we enter into the new creation.

THE CROSS AND THE TOMB STAND BETWEEN US AND THE WHOLE WORLD!¹⁸³ We are dead and buried with Christ and raised to a new life.¹⁸⁴

This principle must impact every part of the way we live. The workings of the cross must cut away that which is old and replace it with the life in the church of Christ. Everything must be taken to the cross and die there. Only that which God brings into resurrection must continue.¹⁸⁵ God builds on resurrection ground only. He will not use the old. Let us see this in terms of the new creation lifestyle of the Body-Bride.

● **The Body: accountability and deep unity**

When Paul addresses the Corinthians he writes, “Now you are the body of Christ.” Many these days would want to correct him – “No, Paul, they are *part* of the body of Christ – what about those believers down the road at Ephesus or further away in Rome and all the other Christians?” They have missed the point that the body of Christ is a reality, first and foremost, where there is a people together! It’s all very well saying “I’m a part of the whole body of Christ across the globe,” but if we don’t actually *belong* to a specific people, then it’s fairly pointless and academic – in fact, I’d question how much you belonged at all! The more committed you are to the saints at hand,

182. Luke 14:26-27

183. Galatians 6:14

184. Colossians 2:20 & 3:1

185. Note that God may well bring certain natural talents, skills and relationships into resurrection - such as the intelligence with which I am writing these notes, or an ability to write music, or a marriage relationship - but the principle of the cross must work death into it if God is to anoint and use it. Apart from the cross event the “good” things of the world are dead to God.

the more committed you are to the body of Christ. The whole body was at Corinth. The whole body was at Ephesus. The whole body is a reality when there is true commitment to God and to one another in one place. God has not scattered limbs and organs across the world. Whenever even two or three gather (that is, a committed, permanent gathering, not a brief encounter!) Then Christ is there¹⁸⁶ – all of him! When we are committed to the body in these specific terms then we are accountable and the bogey of independence is vanquished. Get rid of the nonsense we so often hear in Christian circles – “I’ll do what the Lord says” (i.e. “I’ll go here and there and never limit my options”). Christians often seem very concerned to be “called” by the Lord. Sadly, this is often very independent. In the New Testament, people were very rarely “called” if by “called” you mean getting a personal set of directions from God. Even Paul who frequently referred to his having been “called to be an apostle” received this call through God’s word to the body that he was in at the time, the church in Antioch.¹⁸⁷ In the New Testament people were *called* when they were *sent*! This is because they belonged in covenant loyalty to the body they were in – they would never leave until they were commissioned and sent. *Let the experience of the body deal the death blow to your independence.*

What is more, relationships in the body go very deep. As it says in Romans chapter 12, “in Christ, we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others” or as other versions put it, “we are members of one another” – *members of one another!* Thus, “if one member suffers, every member suffers; if one member is honoured every member rejoices.”¹⁸⁸ This is deep oneness. If I am a member of my brother, how can I leave him and how can I not share all with him, and how can I not feel his pain and share his joy? And how can I not submit to my brothers? And if we are one body,

186. Matthew 18:20

187. Acts 13:1-3

188. 1 Corinthians 12:26

members of one another, how can I not share with my brothers? (Ever seen a thumb which won't share a glove with the fingers? Ridiculous!) *Let the experience of the body deal the death blow to your independence.*

● **The Bride: unspotted by the world**

Just as the Lamb of God is without blemish, so is to be Jerusalem, the wife of the Lamb. Jesus has taken us from the world. This is why we are “adulterous” if we have “friendship (the word has amorous connotations) with the world”.¹⁸⁹ A bride doesn't sleep around, she is set apart for her husband. In the same way, if we love the Lamb, we will “not love the world or the things in the world”.¹⁹⁰ Now face the issue! Here's a good yardstick to judge whether something is of the world:

*What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.*¹⁹¹

Right (he says, rolling up his sleeves)... money, holidays, music, independence, sport, TV, family-first mentality, education – and then there's religion! Think of Christmas and special days and seasons, architecture, hierarchy, ritual, pompous ceremony, education (again) and so on. Nothing to do with the church, any of it! God says to his bride:

*Come out from them and be separate... touch no unclean thing and I will receive you.*¹⁹²

When the Israelites were taken captive by the Babylonians (Babylon is the Old Testament apotheosis of the world system), a psalmist wrote these rather forceful words:

189. James 4:4

190. 1 John 2:15

191. Luke 16:15

192. 2 Corinthians 6

O daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he...who seizes your infants and dashes them on the rocks.¹⁹³

Unpleasant, you may think, if you're looking at it unspiritually. In fact, this is how forceful we must be in rejecting the world's little "cute" things, those things which "can't be that bad surely". Allow me to translate Paul's Greek accurately in Philippians chapter 3 – "I consider everything to be crap that I may gain Christ." Paul was also forcefully realistic when it came to his estimation of the "good" and "nice" things of the world. Our education, our natural family, our class – all these things have no bearing whatsoever on our new creation identities. Give yourself to the church, prioritise the church, live as to the church. Live in church and go to the world, don't live in the world and go to church. Of course, there is the need to look after the affairs of the world (Christians are not to be plain irresponsible) – so visit your parents, pay your taxes, read the paper, earn a living... but live only for new creation. Here's an issue which is often brushed under an old creation carpet:

● **Marriage and Celibacy**

At the centre of God's purposes in the new creation is the marriage between Jesus Christ, the head,¹⁹⁴ and his church.¹⁹⁵ Marriage, then, is of central importance but old creation marriage, "Adam and Eve style", is passing away. The old creation commission was one of the natural flesh (essentially, "rule over the animals and have babies"!)¹⁹⁶ whereas the new creation commission is spiritual ("All authority is mine – go and make disciples, baptising them

193. Psalm 137:8,9

194. In the scriptures "head" is a title which refers to authority over a body and over a bride: it carries the meaning of "husband" with it. Jesus is the "head-husband" and we are the "body-bride".

195. Ephesians 1:10 & 22

196. Genesis 1:28

into the name...”) ¹⁹⁷ The first involves a reproduction of the natural by natural birth multiplication, the second involves a reproduction of the spiritual by spiritual birth multiplication. The first involves human beings born of the flesh, the second involves human beings born of water and the Spirit. “For the spiritual did not come first but the natural and after that the spiritual.” ¹⁹⁸ Thus, the dynamic of the new creation is that of *spiritual reproduction* through people coming to new birth.

Now this is where the New Testament teaching of the gift of celibacy comes in. In the Old Testament, marriage and family were the norm and only prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah caught a glimpse of anything else. ¹⁹⁹ However with the arrival of a new covenant with the spiritual “Israel of God”, announced by unmarried John the Baptist and brought in by unmarried Jesus the Messiah, there was a new dynamic arriving. The marriage that is coming is the marriage of the Lamb. It would be, literally, the marriage to end all marriages – the entire new humanity will marry the Lamb and so “neither marry nor be given in marriage” in the old creation sense anymore. ²⁰⁰ Since the emphasis is on the marriage of the Lamb and *new* birth, we find Jesus, Paul and John all making reference to the celibate life as a desirable alternative to marriage.

- There are some who will renounce marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. He who can receive this, let him receive it. (Jesus, in Matthew 19)
- It is good for a man not to marry... an unmarried man or woman is concerned for the Lord’s affairs... the world in its present form is passing away. (Paul in 1 Corinthians 7)

197. Matthew 28, Mark 16 etc.

198. 1 Corinthians 15:46

199. Isaiah 56:3-5; Jeremiah was commanded not to marry as part of his prophetic office.

200. Matthew 22:30

- They are virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. (John in Revelation 14)

Now, in the church today, we live in the cross-over between the “marry one another” age and the future “marriage of the Lamb” age. Marriage, in the church, can have a prophetic significance in that it “speaks of Christ and the church”,²⁰¹ but celibacy can reach further into the age to come: those who “remain virgins” through their dedication to the Lamb are offered as *firstfruits*, John tells us. That is, they are offered to the Lamb as a token of the rest which are to follow just as the firstfruits of the crop was offered before the rest of the harvest. Celibates marry the Lamb now! If marriage can be prophetic of that which is to come, how much more celibacy! In new creation life celibacy is normal, marriage to the Lamb! Please understand I’m not rubbishing marriage. Yet marriage in the church must be dealt with by the cross lest it is a natural union based on Adam’s desire rather than a ministry partnership on resurrection ground. I have seen many (initially fervent) married people get bogged down by cares or distracted by subtle selfishness. True, a marriage which truly “speaks of Christ and the church” and which is founded on obedience to Jesus is a good thing. It gives the opportunity to bring up natural children in the fear of the Lord and to “father and mother” spiritually in the church. Celibates need married people and we fall into dangerous overbalance if we consider marriage to be over and done with before it is (to forbid marriage – as some heretical teachers have over the years – is “demonic” according to 1 Timothy 4:1-3). Nevertheless, let us avoid the more common error of relegating celibacy to a tiny footnote reserved for missionaries from the nineteenth century. Celibacy reaches into new creation and the Kingdom of heaven in a way that earthly marriage cannot – not to mention the freedom it brings to serve the Lord. Consider:

- “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Jesus)

201. Ephesians 5:32

- “that you may live in undivided devotion to the Lord” (Paul)
- “they follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (John)

If modern evangelicals have got the balance wrong by overemphasising marriage and the monastic orders got it wrong by overemphasising celibacy, then what *is* the right balance?²⁰² Well, celibacy has some fairly powerful role-models – John the Baptist, Paul, possibly John and Timothy, probably Barnabas, and Jesus himself, on earth. Marriage? Peter was married (we meet his mother-in-law and Paul makes reference to the fact that he takes his wife with him on apostolic missions), then there’s Priscilla and Aquila, a powerful couple. There are roughly twice as many direct references to marriage in the New Testament as there are direct references to celibacy (although marriage references usually just describe marriage, whereas celibacy ones often exhort the reader to consider embracing the gift) – so perhaps there should be twice as many married people as there are celibate (after all, it takes two to get married!). So – a third of the church committed to celibacy? What a testimony to the power of the love of the Lamb! Celibates make a big impact and many of the saints through the ages have found power in the gift.

Face it. This is not the emphasis of most churches, these days. Yet the Kingdom community, the Covenant church lives for eternity and the spiritual commission. Finally the words of the master:

202. Helpful historical role-models on this score are the Celtic Christians of the 4th - 6th centuries who combined natural married people and celibates in their communities to great effect in the gospel.

Not everyone can accept this word but only those to whom it has been given... there are some who will renounce marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. He who can receive this let him receive it.²⁰³

- **Receive it?**

This principle applies to every part of Kingdom life. If you can receive it, if you can overcome the world by taking the Kingdom, if you can – then do.

203. Matthew 19:11 & 13

AFTERWORD

When we met together, the beauty of it was that it wasn't just theory – we tasted the reality of brotherhood, Zion-potency, Kingdom vision. We shared sacraments in bread and wine, foot-washing, anointing with oil, pledging with salt, and sharing meals together and the Kingdom became clear in a real way. God is calling us.

Come seek the Kingdom was the call, lose your life, give up your all
That individuals together would, lose themselves in brotherhood.

Right at the start the warning came, through prophetic wisdom in God's
name

“Love is not soft, nor pink and ‘nice’” – to live demands we pay the
price

Worship rose with holy fire, the King of kings our one desire
Not by accident these souls are here, destiny speaks! The Lord is
near!

The Kingdom word is brought with power, the “Ah!” experience, vision's
hour.

Overcomers live out his will and form a holy Zion hill;

Light shines out and men are drawn as heaven's new Man from heaven
is born

And in him so his bride is birthed, the body of Christ descends to
earth.

Live out the life of heaven above! We're truly his if we will love!
This love demands community! Fulfil the justice Jubilee!

The laid-down life of Jesus Christ teaches us the true love price.
For our brethren now we live, in covenant loyalty all we give.

Threefold cords bind us in One, just as the Father, Spirit, Son.

Blood, water, Spirit: dipped in Christ, the testimony delivered
thrice!

Further still the vision unfurled: To live the church, escape the world!
Escape the world, e'en when it's dressed in Christian garb or carnal
"best".

The new creation's eighth day dawns – Eight in the ark through water
born.
Eighth day's circumcision's knife cut off the flesh and prophesied
"Christ."

No more does circumcision count but new creation: Zion's mount –
New Israel we: world crucified, the church is spiritually multiplied.

The Lord's prayer now becomes so real (The passion of our master feel):
"Our Father, may your Kingdom come, on earth, as heaven, your
will be done!"

As time goes by, more friends belong, decisions are made and hearts are
won.

No longer words, we're into deeds: We're the wheat and not the
weeds!

The High Priest's knife causes us pain (We know our loss must be his
gain)

Yet as the sword cuts deeper still our hearts resolve to *do* his will.

Drinking from one vision's cup together we move on and up;
We realise with an inner sigh, "For each one here, I would die."

We're history makers in the land, a Jesus team, a brotherhood band.
Lifting our hearts together in song, we'll seek your Kingdom, Holy
One.

● Possible Further Reading

Kingdom Life

- *Fire in our Hearts* (the Jesus Army story) by Simon Cooper & Michael Farrant
- *The Pilgrim Church* (history of radical churches) by EH Broadbent
- *Restoring the Woven Cord* (a Celtic exploration) by Michael Mitten
- *Disciple* (a look at what it means to follow Jesus) by Juan Carlos Ortiz

Community

- *Pilgrims of a Common Life* (history of community) by Trevor Saxby
- *Brotherly Community* (strong stuff – the Anabaptists) by Andreas Ephrenpreis
- *Living in Christian Community* (an overview) by Art Gish
- *Community and Growth* (meditations on community) by Jean Vanier
- *A New Way of Living* (20th century charismatic community) by Michael Harper
- *St Francis of Assisi* (story of a radical) by Elizabeth Goudge

New Creation and separation from the world

- *Love Not the World* (baptism and its meanings) by Watchman Nee
- *The Normal Christian Life* (the effects of the cross on a believer) by Nee
- *The Centrality of the Cross* (ditto) by Jessie Penn-Lewis
- *Your Baptism into Jesus Christ and his Church* by Noel Stanton