

His Workmanship

Christian **Salvation** is the greatest miracle which can take place in any human life. It is, or at least should and must be, a total and wonderful life changing experience. One of the problems in the Christian Church, even in the evangelical Bible believing churches, is that "Salvation" is misunderstood and the teaching and preaching about it is weak and compromised, and lacks a real understanding of the grace available to the Christian through the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result, at least in the Western World, and possibly in many parts of the world, Christian lives are weak and, except perhaps in the rare times of real true revival, testimonies lack confidence, and therefore the expectation of what "**Salvation**" can be and do in a life is low. Many Christians live lives of which they are disappointed, or alternatively they cover up the realities of their poor experience, and none come anywhere near an experience of the testimony of the apostle Paul, "*God works in me mightily*", or "By the grace of God I am what I am".

The answer today, as it always has been, is to go back to the Bible and see exactly what it says about the testimony and the understanding of the early Christians, and what the "Great Salvation" spoken of in the book of Hebrews really accomplishes in the lives of those who receive the Lord Jesus. The Bible has to be our source of both truth and inspiration, and if we compromise on what it says to us, and try to make excuses, or say it is not for today, we lose all hope of ever living lives which are a testimony to the work of our Lord Jesus. We also move away from one of the basic pillars of Christianity, that the Bible is the 'Word of God' and must be believed as profitable for instruction in righteousness and so on. Peter in his second letter says *he "Stirs up their pure minds to remember the living words spoken by the prophets and the apostles of the Lord and Saviour"*. So here we have the words which could be described as "Apostles' Doctrine" at the **commandment** of our Lord and **Saviour**. We have the words of **the Saviour** to His church, His people, to bring back remembrance of the true gospel so that there is no loss of its truth and power. This is a commandment as a soldier would receive from his commander, not a matter of choice or opinion but a matter of requirement. Paul says that he was "*Not ashamed of the gospel of the Lord Jesus which is the power of God unto **salvation** for everyone that believes, for in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith*". This links power with righteousness, and if we are to see real power in Christian lives there has to be righteousness revealed not only to Christians but also in their lives.

To return to Peter's second letter, in the opening words we read "To those who have obtained the same precious faith *through* the righteousness of God and our **Saviour** Jesus Christ". So this faith, Biblical Christian faith, comes only one way and that is *through* the righteousness of our **Saviour** Jesus Christ. Paul in Romans 3 tells us God declares this righteousness as His own i.e. the righteousness of His Son Jesus Christ is God's righteousness, so we have a link again with our **Saviour**. We have had the *command* of our **Saviour**, and now His *righteousness*, showing us that Jesus Christ is our **Saviour** and was and

still is totally involved in this great **salvation**. Peter tells us then that *“God has given us everything we need for life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who has called us to glory and virtue (moral goodness and eminence), because there are exceeding great and precious promises whereby we should be partakers, or become or be made partakers (one with) of the divine nature”*. So the outcome is that a Christian has everything He needs, given by God, and amazingly should become a partaker of the very nature of God Himself; their nature should and must be God's nature; that is what being a Christian means. *“If you have not the Spirit of Christ you are none of His”*, as indeed the ‘becoming a partaker of the divine nature’ happens when we receive the Lord Jesus. Jesus said, *“As the Father has life in Himself, so He has given the Son to have life”*, i.e. the same life is in God the Son as in God the Father, and that life comes to all Christians; it applies to all God's true sons; if everything is given to Christians for life, then they must be given the same life which is in God Himself. These promises are not only for life but for godliness, or 'godlikeness', so you can't have a real Christian life without there being godliness or 'godlikeness' in its behaviour. The truth is, and Peter tells us so, under the command of our Lord Jesus, we **become** partakers of the divine nature, bringing us to the understanding that such an experience **must bring a** radical and wonderful change in our lives.

Jesus told Nicodemus about new birth, a new spiritual birth; *“You must be born again”*. It is just another way of expressing this same wonderful truth and shows how consistent the Bible is. The truth of "New Birth" has been misunderstood by the Christian Church in the same way that it has misunderstood "**Salvation**", and as a result the ability, or power, and expectation of the power of regeneration has been diminished in the hearts of those who believe. So we are to understand it is ‘becoming a partaker’, the word ‘partaker’ really means to have the same thing in common, and having the same spiritual life as God Himself is the truth of and the key to the Christian life. It is a wonderful truth, but for it to be true in us there must be evidence in our lives; the apostle John tells us *“Which thing is **true** in Him and in you”*. Of course, faith without works is dead and unless there is evidence of a transformation in a life surely there can be no evidence that the power of God has really come into that life. Truly, no longer can the church make excuses and blame the limitations of their own humanity when the gospel reveals the righteousness of God and makes us partakers of His nature. Paul the apostle tells us that *“The excellency of the power is to be of God and not of us”*, even though ‘this treasure is in earthen vessels, human bodies’; the conclusion is that Christians have huge potential in their lives, for their service of the Lord Jesus, looking for His coming again.

So it is agreed we have a great **salvation**, therefore we go back to our Bibles to see how great it really is. Acts 2 tells us that the *“Lord added to the church such as should be **saved**, or the **saved ones**”*. So it is the Lord Jesus who adds to His church. This is not the work of human beings, however great their position or reputation they have in church. Only a personal life changing encounter with Jesus Christ Himself can add us to the church and make us "**Saved ones**". So Jesus makes us saved ones; we are those who have experienced

His salvation; He becomes our **Saviour**. The word **salvation** not only means 'to rescue or deliver' but also 'wholeness and soundness'; it is even used for the healing of bodies, and means that our 'rescue' brings us to wholeness of body, spirit, soul and mind. So "**saved ones**" are those who should have been made whole in every part of their lives; there is spiritual wholeness in their hearts; gone is the old nature, which makes humans spiritually corrupt, and in has come the new nature, the new man, described by Peter as "incorruptible seed". This does not produce an outward illusion, or perhaps delusion, of holiness common in some religions and Christian groups who concentrate on religious ceremonies, rites, outward practices and the clothing they wear and so on, but the inward holiness which comes as the outworking of the righteousness of God in each life. The new man, the new nature, must produce "*after its own kind*", producing good fruit unto God.

We have already identified the new man or the new creation. The Bible tells us that this new man "*Is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him*". So the new man has been created, it has been made, and it can be of no surprise that it is God who has created this new man and God makes the new man after His own likeness, after His own image. In the beginning God made man in His own likeness, and again, with the new man, we have the creative work of God, but on a better and greater level; the nature of God enters into our hearts as we receive the Lord Jesus. In the original creation God placed the tree of life in the Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve to eat of. They were to eat and live forever, but instead they ate of the wrong tree and received spiritual death into their lives. When we receive the Lord Jesus we 'eat of the tree of life' and receive the nature, the new man, which God always intended for us. Ephesians talks of God **making** one new man. God is the creator of the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, but with the first creation being marred by sin, God sets about making a new creation, after his own image and likeness. It is all about God's workmanship.

The word for 'workmanship' comes only twice in the whole New Testament. This is the extract from W E Vine's dictionary of Bible words:

,Noun, , poema; whence Eng., "poem," denotes "that which is made" (from poieo, "to do, make"), Rom. 1:20, "the things that are made;" Eph. 2:10, "(His) workmanship."

So we have God making all things in the old creation and making all things in the new creation. John tell us that "*All things were made by Him.....and without Him nothing was made that was made.*" This all fits in with a total understanding of God as supreme and creator of all things by His Son Jesus Christ and again shows us how reliable our Bible is. And although not to be considered here, there is a New Heaven and a New Earth to come, all of which are God's creation.

So we have a new creation; "**Saved ones**" are new creations, so let's look more closely at how **salvation** and the new creation come together. Ephesians 2 tells us, "*For by grace are*

*you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast; for we are His **workmanship, created** in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them".*

Christians, at least Bible based ones, are all on common ground with *"By grace are you saved"*; it is almost the most basic truth for evangelical Christians, that our **salvation** is by God's grace. It is God's unmerited favour towards us which brings our **salvation**, and it is interesting to quote from Romans chapter 10, *"I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me"*. Most Christians would recognise that it was the Lord Jesus who indeed looked for them and brought the gospel to them rather than them seeking for God, and, when the desire to seek after God was in their hearts, it was indeed the Lord who put it there, that He should draw them to Himself. That is why this **Christian salvation** is definitely not of works, but all of grace. Christians are also very much in agreement that it is all by faith. Romans chapter 4 tells us this **salvation** is *"By faith that it may be by grace"*. **Salvation** can only ever be by believing. There are only 2 possible ways by which **salvation** can come; by works, through our own efforts, or by trusting God on the basis of His work on our behalf; to do what we could never do for ourselves. So believing it has to be, our works would never be good enough. Romans 10 tells us of Israel going about *"to establish its own righteousness through the law and not submitting to the righteousness of God"*, as it is *"unto all and upon all who believe"*. Faith takes us where works never could and opens up, from a human point of view, the impossible to us as it brings in the possibilities of God and what He can achieve with our lives; 'Faith makes the impossible possible'. Romans 1 and 16 talk of the *"obedience of faith"* as we *"obey from the heart"* when the word of God comes to us. This enables us to do what was never possible under the law, which depended on our own abilities to obey, but rather to be able to obey by believing, when the word of God comes and ministers faith to our hearts. We then obey God by trusting Him, taking Him at His word, we submit to His righteousness and are then in the place to receive and enter into all that He has for us in our lives.

In the beginning, sin originated when satan said *"Has God said?"* and put doubt in the heart of first Eve and then quickly Adam. The *'obedience of faith'* does the opposite; Yes God has said and Yes, I trust Him.

Paul speaks, in Romans chapter 10, of 'preaching the word of God', *"The word is near you, even in your mouth, and in your heart: that is, **the word of faith**, which we preach; that if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall **believe** in your **heart** that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be **saved**"*. In the old King James Bible the word used for 'you' is 'thou', showing it is singular and therefore it is necessary for each individual person to believe for themselves; so we all have to believe God for ourselves and receive the Lord Jesus for ourselves, when God declares the Lord Jesus to us that we might trust in Him. *"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent"*. We find the word '**salvation**' or '**saved**' occurring again; **salvation** was so central to all the teaching in the New

Testament. Paul tells us *it is the 'foolishness of preaching'* which is the method of communication God uses; *"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to **save** them that **believe**".* The gospel may be foolish to the world, but is wise as far as God is concerned. Romans 10 helps us; it is with the heart, not the head/mind/brain/intellect, that human beings believe; **only** the **word** of God, when the good news of the gospel is proclaimed, can **enable** the heart to **believe** and thereby **receive**. The Bible talks about making us *"Wise unto **salvation**"*; wise in a godly sense, in that we see the wisdom of God in what He has done for us through our Lord Jesus and trust in that wisdom, seeing how amazingly wise God is and how much He has really understood the needs of humans and also how to provide a solution. It may appear foolish to human beings that someone should die for us, yet we see God had no other choice and the work of Jesus is indeed the wisest, and yet only, option if we are to be truly **saved**.

All Christians too are agreed that this **salvation** is the gift of God. Again, we see that if **salvation** is not of works, the only other option is that it is a gift; and a free gift too. No human could ever pay the price of Christian **salvation**. Peter tells us, *"We are not redeemed with silver and gold but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without spot or blemish"*. **Salvation** is in a basic way, although, of course, very wonderful, a **saving** from sin and the effects of sin. Sin is a spiritual problem which needs a spiritual solution and there is a spiritual cost to be incurred. Romans chapter 6 tells us that *"the wages of sin is death"*. That is the payback; the cost of sin; spiritual death. *"Dead in trespasses and sins"* we are told. What is needed is a payment greater than the price of death. *"The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"*. So here is the gift and the payment; God gave the life of His Son to replace our spiritual death, and this life, which is everlasting life, we are to receive as a gift. Jesus' life was offered freely, in order that the free gift of eternal life could be given to us all. Of course eternal life is exactly what we need; it does exactly what it says and must **save** us. We needed rescuing from the effects of sin and death, so eternal life is the perfect answer. As we have seen, it is the gift of God and should and must prevent any boasting of any merit or input on our part.

How then does it work and what then is required? The answer: *"repent, **and believe**"*, believe the gospel. Firstly, repentance is the recognition of our need, and repentance seems to be one of the unspoken or almost untaught truths when the gospel is preached in modern times. Of course "Come to Jesus" is the truth; "Come to Jesus and all will be fine" is the truth too, but maybe only part of the truth, and part of a truth or half a truth sometimes can be worse than no truth at all; it really can be a lie and lead us into deception. Peter, preaching the first ever gospel message on the day of Pentecost, when asked *"What do we do?"* says, *"**Repent every one of you**"*. So repentance is required by all who come to the Lord Jesus; there is no other way, no short cuts, no bypasses; this is the way and the only way.

Repentance really means a change of mind; to change the seat of moral reflection; literally to perceive afterwards. This is not in the intellect but more in the "mind," (Greek word *nous*) which denotes, 'the seat of reflective consciousness, comprising the faculties of perception and understanding, and those of feeling, judging and determining'. It is the place of conscience and consciousness, the place of 'knowing' and it is in that place where the change takes place. It is the proper, and only, place of a true recognition of what we are and what we have done, when God's spotlight shines on us and exposes our true state. We look with reflection afterwards at what we have done and what we are really like and turn to God. Previously our lives have been going in the wrong direction, away from Him, doing our own will rather than the will of God, and we come and turn to Him for mercy and forgiveness.

Perhaps the greatest passage in the Bible about repentance is Psalm 51, and David's cry for mercy after his adultery with Bathsheba and his conspiracy in the murder of Uriah the Hittite. It follows the intervention from the prophet Nathan bringing the word of God to David. It must be understood that, until Nathan came, David was completely oblivious of what he had done and was actually enjoying the fruit of his sin. The sin he had committed was quite awful in God's sight; in fact awful in almost every moral code. As we have said, David was unaware of what he had done, and human beings are generally unaware of their sin until it is revealed to them and they understand what they are like and what they have done. We look in the mirror in the morning and only see our outward form; we may like or dislike what we see. However we need a mirror so that we can look inside and reflect on our inward state; the Spirit of God provides such a means of reflection and allows us to understand our true state in the sight of God apart, that is, from His grace to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. We are told in John 16 that when the Holy Spirit comes into the world he will convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgement. In Acts, Peter tells those listening to him in Jerusalem, "**You have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain**". The people had no idea what they had done and the evil they had committed in killing the Lord Jesus. When they realised, they asked the question, "**What shall we do?**" The answer; repent, change your perception of your own morality and acknowledge your wrongdoing.

As we go through the confession of David, perhaps we will understand what true repentance accomplishes and why it is an essential part of **salvation**. Indeed Romans tells us that it is "*The goodness of God which brings us to repentance*", and therefore His goodness is very much part of "*By grace you are saved*" and "*His workmanship*". Too often this goodness is overlooked in preaching, and a failure to preach the reality of sin, and the need for true repentance, results in a lesser or even a different gospel being preached. Paul the apostle declares a choice when preaching the 'gospel', one which pleases God or pleases human beings, and whether a gospel is preached which is comfortable with people or meets God's requirements. The only gospel that pleases God is one that declares His goodness in bringing us to repentance and thereby to **salvation**. The one that pleases human beings, and satan too, is the one that allows them to continue, believing all is well, and never face up to the

needs of their lives in order to get right with God before it is too late. Although preaching a 'gospel' which does not challenge sin may seem to be attractive it does a disservice, in the long term, to those who listen as it provides no opportunity for the Lord Jesus to make them free from their sin and leaves them exactly in the same state as they are. John tells us, *"If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"* and a gospel preached which allows such a deception to continue is not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel when properly preached must declare God's righteousness as the answer to human sin.

So back to Psalm 51; it starts with a plea for mercy, *"According to the multitude of God's tender mercies"*. David had such a wonderful revelation of God; he understood that God was a God of mercy, and that there was real hope for him, in spite of all he had done. That needs to be the understanding of us all, and comes with the preaching of the true gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel states that Jesus' death and the shedding of His blood is the only basis for blotting out our transgressions, but that such mercy is available to us all. Every true gospel preacher must have had that experience him or herself; you cannot preach what you do not know. Having repented and having humbled oneself must also remove any hint of hardness or arrogance from the heart of any preacher; it must bring in a compassion and care for the lost when the word is preached. That word must create an expectancy that God can really change lives. The preacher must be a new creation and there is no hardness in the new heart.

David's request is, *"Wash me from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin"*. The plea is for the removal of transgressions, the breaking of the law of God, demonstrated by his acts of conspiracy to murder and adultery; so *"Wash me from my iniquity"*. David then asks for the cleansing from sin i.e. the very nature of the origin of the iniquity, the sin which David found in His own heart. *"My sin is ever before me"*; to say that identifies a real conviction of sin, a knowing in the conscience of the wrongness of our very human nature. Paul the apostle cries out with the same need, based on the same awareness, *"O wretched person that I am"*. The apostle Peter, when confronted with the glory of the Lord Jesus following the miracle of the multitude of fish, found the same need too, *"Depart from me for I am a sinful man"*. It seems that everyone who is to have a real experience of God and received true **salvation** needs such an experience. If one reads the books about the 'Famous Christians', such a confession of sin is common to all their testimonies.

David then continues with his confession. *"Against you and you only have I sinned"*. Yes, he had sinned against Uriah and also Bathsheba but ultimately David understood that his sin was against God. Such a recognition justifies God; it says 'God, you are right'. Romans chapter 3 says this, *"That you (God) might be justified in thy sayings, and might overcome when you are judged"*. So where there is an agreement with the Lord and with His word, it is the place where the recognition of our need starts, and the beginning of the solution. Jesus said, *"When He (The Holy Spirit) comes He will convict of sin, righteousness and judgement;*

*sin, because they believe not on me". Sin in its basic nature is against God, and not believing Him. For the world, anyone in the world, sin is basically that they do not believe on the Lord Jesus, whom God has sent. God has made things easy by sending His Son, not staying remotely in heaven, but revealing Himself in the Lord Jesus. "No one has seen God at any time, but the Son who is in the bosom of the Father He has declared Him". As a result of not believing, there is a refusal of the **salvation** from sin and all its outworkings. Romans chapter 3 again "There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God". In Psalm 51 however David's faith declares, "Wash me and **I will be clean**, create in me a clean heart, renew a right spirit within me". So for David there is an acceptance that God can do something about his need. For Paul it was the same too, "Thanks be to God who always causes us to triumph", and then, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free". So the believing in God is not only as a God of mercy, "By grace you are saved", but a **God of ability**, "I will be clean". It is this ability which must be declared in the preaching of the gospel. Preaching may seem foolishness, but it must declare the ability of God. Paul said "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power/ability of God unto salvation". The gospel declares God's righteousness that He might be the "Justifier of Him who believes in Jesus". The conviction, or convincing, of righteousness is "Because I go to my Father"; it is 'believing' that God raised Jesus from the dead for our justification. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be **saved**. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto **salvation**". God's righteousness provides us with a right standing before Him and it is a free gift.*

When David confesses his sin, he says, "I was shaped, (actually brought forth), in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me". This supports what is called the 'Doctrine of original sin', best declared in Romans 5, "Through the disobedience of one man (i.e. Adam) many were made sinners". The word 'made' means 'to be constituted', in other words the substance of which it is made up. Pasta is flour and water, ugali is maize flour and water, concrete is stones, cement, sand and water. Sinners are made, or constituted, spiritually of sin. Here we have the origin of sin; humans became sinners when Adam first sinned and sin entered into all the nature of mankind, and explains why there is a destructive and corrupt thing in human hearts and lives. Sin causes so much damage in the world in which we live. Sin is highly toxic and brings death and destruction everywhere it goes.

However, we have mentioned already that there is the possibility of becoming 'partakers of the divine nature'; this huge, life transforming work, to which we will come again a little later, gives the possibility of sin no longer having power in our lives. The doctrine of original sin is not popular in modern society, with all its humanistic concepts and the exclusion of God from its thinking. Society today takes a very different view of these things, and finds reasons and excuses for all the needs of human beings and the problems within society. It also tries to find answers by excluding God from the solutions. We live in what is called the "permissive society", allowing humans to do "that which is right in their own eyes", i.e. in

their own view or opinion. In other words you can do what you want and it does not matter. There is no consciousness of judgement at the end of our lives, and a selfishness which often takes little notice of what the effects of our behaviour are. However David agrees with God's view and opinion, "*That you may be justified when you speak*". That is where the gospel starts; as we have said, God is right, and there is agreement with that rightness. Paul says "*Let God be true and every man a liar*", so stating that, whatever humans say, it is God who is right about all these things. Amen.

David's prayer too was, "*Restore unto me the joy of my **salvation***". It is being **saved**, being made whole, with sin removed, that brings the real joy to our hearts, restoring God's presence in our lives and our relationship with Him. "*Open my lips and I will show forth your praise*". This is the outworking of the **salvation** which God brings, and compares with "*With the heart man believes and with the mouth confession is made*", this confession being one of joy and thanksgiving. John said he wrote his letter so that "*Your joy may be full*".

We must briefly mention "Bloodguiltiness"; that was the extent, as we have seen, to which David had gone in his sin; he was a murderer, having conspired to kill Uriah. Those to whom Peter preached on the day of Pentecost heard "*You have slain*" making them aware that had bloodguiltiness, and they knew it. Therefore "*What shall we do?*" **Repent**, is the answer; that is what David did; those who heard Peter and believed his words repented also. That is what we all must do too, as there is a sense in which every human has bloodguiltiness, as it was because of our sin that Jesus shed His blood. Therefore the responsibility for Jesus' death comes on us all and our cry must be "*Deliver me from bloodguiltiness O God, you are the God of my **salvation**; my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness*". It is godly sorrow that leads to repentance; this is true repentance, true **salvation** from the God of our **salvation**, bringing God's righteousness into our lives, so that we can sing aloud of his righteousness, through all His mercy and love towards us.

So we have seen the first step in this **Salvation** and have examined it in detail in order to understand the importance of repentance. In Psalm 51 David continues, "*Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem*". We saw earlier how it was God's pleasure to save those who believed through the foolishness of preaching. In Psalm 51 we have "*Do good in thy **pleasure** . . . and build*", or perhaps, "Work according to your good pleasure and build"; so building, or making, or creating is God's pleasure. As we have seen, God is in his nature a Creator and a re-creator. Philippians tells us that "God works in us to will and to do of His good **pleasure**". So the Apostle Paul writing to the Philippians agrees with the Psalmist, both writers telling us about God working or God building, and that it is His **pleasure** to do so. The book of the Revelation tells us, in chapter 4, that God made all things for His **pleasure**. Wonderfully, God's nature is one which only works that which pleases Him, and yet, having totally integrity, what pleases God is the very best possible for all things, and for human beings in particular. Hebrews 10 helps us in relation to God's soul having pleasure, or not having pleasure. This demonstrates that in the deep character of

Almighty God there is this wonderful capacity to feel in Himself the pleasure of the outworking of God as love, for God is love, in everything He does. Psalm 139 helps us from David's comments *"I am wonderfully and fearfully (awesomely) made"*. Just as God has pleasure in what He creates, David appreciates how wonderful God's creation is and takes pleasure in that realisation. Those who dismiss the God of the Bible as creator miss so much by not appreciating the wonder of his creation. They fail to understand what is possible with a God who makes all things and what potential that has for our lives.

We then need to return to Ephesians 2, almost where we started, *"By grace you are saved... For we are His **workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them"*. It is important not to take *"By grace you are saved"* out of context and fail to appreciate the full meaning and significance of what the apostle Paul is telling us. This is perhaps what Christendom seems to have done for centuries and, as we have said, reduced the dynamic power of **salvation** and thereby denied Christians the real power of the God of **salvation** working in their lives. The **salvation** is "for" or "because of"; it is because we are His **workmanship** and **salvation depends on** being His workmanship. There is no **salvation** without us being God's workmanship! And this workmanship involves creation, indeed it is creative; we looked at the word and its usage much earlier. God is the true creator and here He becomes the "New Creator". Right at the end of the Bible in Revelation 21 we read "Behold I make all things new". God is the re-creator; the comments in Revelation 21 relate to the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, the church of our Lord Jesus and we will come to that towards the end of our study; everything is a new creation. But God had no choice, as the old creation is ruined forever, and God cannot leave it like that. He is perfect and everything has to be perfect in the end.

Jesus tells us *"No one puts a new patch on an old garment or puts new wine in old wine skins"*. God is just the same, He does not patch us up; He does not put newness of life in old spirits. *"A new heart and a new spirit will I give you, says the Lord."* Here is the understanding. So we have to be God's new creation; nothing has any value, as far as God is concerned, but a new creation. So God, in a way, only recognises this new creation. We have looked already at the new man God has **created**, and that the new man is **created** in righteousness and true holiness. So how are we God's **workmanship**? Where did the new creation, our remaking, spiritually that is, take place? The answer *"In Christ Jesus"*, we are told, it is all in Christ. All has to be in Christ. We are told in 2 Corinthians 5.21 *"He (God, please read the context) made Him (the Lord Jesus) sin for us who knew no sin that we might be **made** the righteousness of God in Him"*, and in verse 17 *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, **he** is a **new** creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"*.

This is exactly what happened in the cross of our Lord Jesus; this is the wonder of the work of Calvary; it all happened there. Colossians tells us that *"Jesus **made** peace through the blood of His cross"*. Jesus **made** something which was not there before; peace was made,

peace is a spiritual thing, it is the opposite of war, of enmity, of opposition, and was **made** by our Lord Jesus. The process was Jesus being made sin, and taking into Himself everything which was wrong in us and disposing of it. He took all the rubbish, all the nature of sin, and became that sin. He took everything which was not of peace and took it out of the way. Romans chapter 8 tells us "*God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh*". Jesus condemned/judged/ passed sentence on, sin in the flesh, sin's nature in human flesh. Jesus passed the sentence of death upon it and put it to death in Himself. Jesus did it **once** and for all, **one** offering for sin, **one** sacrifice for sin; it was enough and it was amazing; but then it was God's plan. Hebrews tells us that when 'Jesus had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down'; sitting is a place of rest showing that the work was completely finished and peace had been **made**.

To do the work, Jesus obeyed the commandment of His Father so that we could be **made** the righteousness (have a right standing inwardly) of God; nothing in us once made righteous, cannot then stand in the light and the presence of God. The word for **made** in the Greek really means to **become**, so we become the righteousness of God and this is God's workmanship; we are His workmanship, His new-creation. God is able to change, rather remake, our nature so that spiritually we become different; we become new; we receive the new man, we become new creations, new men. Old things are passed away, they are over and gone. Hallelujah.

One of the most interesting words in the Bible is the word reconciliation. The true meaning of the word is lost in modern usage, as we think of reconciliation as the bringing together of 2 or more people that are alienated from each other. The Bible talks about humans being alienated from God and that Jesus reconciles us to God. In human reconciliation there is usually some form of compromise, but that never takes place with God. He cannot compromise with sin. We only have to look in the Old Testament and read about the requirement of the children of Israel, to totally destroy all the inhabitants of the land of Canaan when they went in to possess the Promised Land. God has a total abhorrence of all that is sin. We also see the dangers when that total destruction did not take place and compromise was reached. You can read it all in the book of Joshua, in fact in many places in the Old Testament, when the children of Israel forsook the Lord and turned to other Gods. Perhaps it is the same in these days when we resort to alternatives to the gospel to meet every need in our lives.

There are different words used for the word reconciliation in the New Testament although they come from the same root. W. E. Vine, we have already quoted his dictionary before, helps us this way

A-2, apokatallasso "to reconcile completely" (apo, from, and No. 1), a stronger form of No. 1, "to change from one condition to another," so as to remove all enmity and leave no impediment to unity and peace, is used in Eph. 2:16, of the

"reconciliation" of believing Jew and Gentile "in one body unto God through the Cross;" in Col. 1:21

And

B-1, katallage akin to A, No. 1, primarily "an exchange," denotes "reconciliation," a change on the part of one party, induced by an action on the part of another; in the NT, the "reconciliation" of men to God by His grace and love in Christ

The definition demonstrates that there is a thorough and complete change, from one condition to another, and the change is on the part of one party **induced** by another. This change removes all enmity and is accomplished in the one party, the human being, by the action of the other party, Almighty God. All this change was accomplished in Jesus Christ as we have quoted already, when Jesus became, or was made, sin for us, and we were made, or became, the righteousness of God in Him. It all took place on the cross of our Lord Jesus once, for all time. It leads Paul to comment, *"God forbid that I should glory/boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus, by which the world is crucified, or put to death, to me and I to the world"*. We can put it many ways, and the Bible does, but the essence of the cross and death of our Lord Jesus is this; in His death everything changed and we went through death with Him into newness of life, leaving behind all that was old and had spoiled our relationship with God. We become holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight (Colossians chapter I verse 21; NKJB). To maintain that place we need/must continue **in the faith**, in other words simply sustaining our faith in this **once for all** wonderful work. This is the new creation, this is **God's workmanship**; it is just a beginning but lays the true foundation in our lives. God can continue His work building up our most holy faith and building His Church, in that faith, both individually and the whole body of Christ. Jesus is building His church. Not only numerically, but above all spiritually, the church is God's habitation, or dwelling place by His Spirit, and we must all come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Perhaps we should briefly look at this new creation a different way, confirming the words of Jesus in John's gospel, *"If the Son shall **make you free** you will be free indeed"*. Paul in Romans 7 laments his unregenerate spiritual state, we have seen that above with David the King of Israel, but Paul also cries out, *"O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"* His realisation was that there was a law, he calls it 'the law of sin and death', working in him, in his members (all the parts of him which made up his whole self) bringing him into a captivity from which he could not escape. However religious Paul was, and however hard he tried to be different, this law was greater than him and his ability and he needed deliverance. This old law worked 'death' in Paul, *"The wages of sin is death"*, and where he wanted to be spiritually alive he found in reality he was spiritually dead. In Romans 8.2 Paul writes, *"For the Law of the Spirit of Life which is in Christ Jesus has **made** me free from the law of sin and death"*. Paul defines a greater law which had come into him

and **made** him free, it had created him again and created him spiritually free from the old law. A new spiritual law was operating in his life; a new law worked in his members enabling him to mortify, or put to death, the deeds or actions of his body, and as the new law worked, so he **lived**. The Greek word to 'make free' is '**eleutheroo**', not to 'set free' as in some versions and so often misquoted by preachers and hymns and choruses. The whole work is creative, or creational, and the creation is unto **good works**, as we are about to see, and only when we are made free from the old law is there a possibility of living in a new law, doing good works and bringing forth pure fruit to God. This supports what we read of 'being **made** righteous' in our Lord Jesus. God is not a 'Make do and mend' or a patch up God but rather the God of creation, and has worked His new creation in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The new creation is just the start, in the same way that trees come from seeds and develop into larger and more mature trees, so the Christian life grows, but the right foundation has to be laid and that foundation is Jesus Christ. "*For **other** foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*". He is the new creation; He is the 'stone which the builders rejected who has become the chief, or head, stone'. The whole spiritual building, and each individual member, is built on that stone, and the eternal life which all need as the source of the life we live unto God, is in that stone; for we are in Christ and Christ is in us. This is why Jesus told Nicodemus he had to be born again in order to see the kingdom of God, the things of the Spirit of God. Once God has worked His wonderful workmanship and enabled us to enter His kingdom and become one of His people, we can then begin to walk in the **good works** which are ordained/prepared for us. Although there are, of course, callings for individual Christians to fulfil, and those are important, in the main the **good works** are simply "*walking in newness of life*" or "*walking in righteousness and holiness all the days of our lives*", bringing forth fruit unto God. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, and so we glorify our Father which is in heaven.

The Bible, at least in the New Testament, describes good works as the opposite of dead, or wicked, works. We have mentioned dead works; these are the works of death, "*The wages of sin is death*", and are the outworking of sin in human lives. Adam was told "in the day you sin you will die". Death has passed on to us all from Adam and therefore we produce dead works. The book of Hebrews tells us that once we are **purged**, very thoroughly and totally cleaned out, **from dead works** by the blood of Jesus Christ, then and only then can we serve the living God. With Christ in us, rather than death and dead works, our spirits are life because of righteousness, and from that spirit emanates the works of life, living works, eternal works, **good works** is the phrase the Bible uses. These are the works we are prepared for and are prepared for us.

In the book of the Revelation, which contains the actual words of the risen Lord Jesus, from His throne in heaven, to His church, He says "*I know your works*". The book of the Revelation is a prophecy, and the prophet, a true prophet that is, will speak the true words of God as if it were God speaking them. "*I know your works*" is said to each church and shows us that

the Lord Jesus is very much aware of the things which we do, not only in our lives, but in some ways more importantly, in the life and function of each local church. Each church, Biblically, is defined by its locality and not by its denomination; indeed denominations practically cause division in the local churches and are based more on history than the planning of God. By saying 'I know your works' Jesus then goes on to bring to light the things which were wrong in five of the seven churches. It is interesting to note that the two churches without problems are those undergoing persecution and suffering for the gospel. Perhaps persecution keeps churches pure, as there is no room, or time, for not believing God, entertaining falsehood, false teachers and preachers. For the other five churches, where there were problems, some had compromised with different, false teaching and idolatry. With one church there was just the loss of first love, others were living on a false reputation, thinking they were better than they were. But to all the command is to **repent**. We have looked at repentance earlier and see it is 'to perceive from afterwards'. Jesus words enable the churches to look back at their mistakes, see where the problem lies, seek forgiveness and grace, turn from their errors and re-establish themselves in the truth. So **works** are important, very important to God; we cannot please ourselves, but must realise our obligations as God's people and ensure that we walk in good works; "working out our own **salvation** with fear and trembling".

However, the wonderful truth is that we are 'God's workmanship' and we are 'created unto good works which were ordained/prepared for us to walk in'. Would it not be very good if Christians really believed that God had **prepared** these works beforehand? 'Ordained' really means 'prepared' in the Greek language, and the works are **good** works, not bad works, or dead works. There would be the huge potential of expectation that Christian lives could be lived in victory and please God. This would be so much more positive, and true of course, than so much of the negativity ministered by many preachers and liturgies, based more on the wish to control congregations than any wish to please God. Of course the **good works** have to be real, with no pretence, and full of honesty and truth. "*The truth makes free*", so walking and living in the truth will enable us to walk in the **good works**. So it is by our works that we are known, and our Lord Jesus tells us to "*let our light so shine before men that they may see our **good works** and glorify our Father which is in heaven*". It is to these works we are created and therefore they are in our new nature, in the incorruptible seed we received, when we received the Lord Jesus. They are **outworked** as we walk in the Spirit, looking unto Jesus. Philippians tells us to "*work out our own **salvation**, ... for it is God who works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure*". So here is the outworking of our **salvation**, as we bring forth **good works**, which glorify our Father which is in heaven.

The phrase '**Good works**' comes a number of times in the New Testament, and it would take too long to look at them all. The famous verse, 2 Timothy 3.16, talks about the scriptures being inspired by God and being suitable for instruction etc., and goes on to say "that the *Man of God can be thoroughly furnished, or fitted out, unto all **good works***". So the outcome of reading and **understanding** the instructions of the scriptures is again **good works**. Perhaps

it could be said that, if we have properly read and understood our Bibles, under the teaching of the Spirit of God, then **goods works** must follow. It is *“The letter that kills and the Spirit that gives life”*, so if all we do is study to learn the ‘letter’ then that will kill us and we will bring forth dead works. Jesus said this in John’s gospel, *“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”*⁴⁰ *And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life”*. Perhaps that is a warning to us all. But if we come to Jesus and learn of Him, **good works** must follow.

Please note in the quotation from 2 Timothy the word is ‘thoroughly’, which probably is an alternative to ‘thoroughly’. The implication is that the preparation/fitting out goes right through us, into every part of our lives, and therefore is a **thorough** work as it leaves no part of body, mind and spirit which is not ready and fit for the work of God. This complements the ‘**good works** being prepared for us to walk in’, and shows how the scriptures, written in our hearts, by the Spirit of God, prepare us for the **good works** which God has prepared for us.

Again another contrast is the scripture in 2 Corinthians 9.8 *“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work”*. So it is grace which abounds towards us which causes us to abound unto every **good work**. Everywhere the Bible encourages us that **good works** are possible and indeed should be the normal, natural experience of the Christian Life. Whether the works come as God directs us to help our brothers and sisters, or those in the world, with their needs and cares, or whether He moves us in our prayers seeking His blessing and provision, materially and spiritually, for those we love and He puts on our hearts, it makes no difference. It is God’s will to which we are called, and He will work out His will for us as an individual in the specific callings of our lives.

Perhaps one more scripture about good works will help us again; this is from Hebrews chapter 13. *“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,”*²¹ *make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen”*. We see again good work, or good works, the theme is constant. It is the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, who is working in our lives. It is by the result of Jesus’ resurrection we were justified, and being justified we have peace **with** God through our Lord Jesus. So being at peace with God, God is **able** to make us perfect. We have just read how God is **able** to make all grace abound towards us, and here He is **able** to make us perfect in every **good work**, working **in us** that which is well pleasing in His sight. It will glorify Him and of course marries with Philippians chapter 2, *“For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure”*. So God’s workmanship, His creative ability, His making, His working in us, His preparation, all come together to produce the **good works** which He prepared for us and are well pleasing in His sight. This is great and wonderful work by the Almighty God.

No wonder we are told to "*Provoke one another to love and **good works***". So be encouraged, brothers and sisters, this is what God has done; walk in the **good works**, the works of faith. This is God's grace to us all; we are not intended to go away and lead a life trying to pay back God for His goodness to us, but rather to allow the works to which we are created, and which are prepared for us, to flow and flourish in our lives. So from Romans 6 the word is "*Yield your members unto righteousness and bring forth fruit unto God.... the fruit is holiness and the end, everlasting life*".

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 1.2 we read, "*We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; ³ remembering without ceasing your **work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father*". This contrasts with the verse in Revelation chapter 2 giving Jesus' description **of** the Ephesian church, "*I know thy **works** and thy **labour** and **patience***"; we see the 3 eternal things, faith, **hope** and **love** are missing. These are the eternal factors of the love and the life of the Lord Jesus which God works in us. Without them, as Paul tells us, "*If we have not love then it profits us nothing*". So the life, the eternal life of the Lord Jesus, as it works in us brings forth works of faith, and labours of love, with a patience which is based on the hope of eternal life. This must be the definition, at least partly so, *of **good works***. Works based on our faith in the Lord Jesus, trusting Him to outwork His will in us. Labours of love, the Greek word for 'love' is 'agape', which must involve sacrifice, as the love relates to the love of God for us, and that love is the basis for all our **good works**. The love of God is "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5.5) and overcomes all things, and leads us to an endurance of purpose, praying not fainting, looking for the return of our Lord Jesus. The hope is then that our **good works** will be recognised, not for our own ends, but for Jesus' glory, and we will hear 'in that day' "*Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of the Lord*".

Earlier we mentioned the 'law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus which has **made us** free from the law of sin and death'. It would be useful to understand how this spiritual law helps us to walk in the **good works**. Romans chapter 8 tells us, "*To be spiritually minded is life and peace*". For this law to work in us we must be 'spiritually minded' and have thought patterns which are full of faith and understanding of the things God has prepared for us. In 1 Corinthians chapter 2 we read, "*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath **prepared** for them that love Him.*" We find the word 'prepared' again and understand, as we read through 1 Corinthians, chapter 2, that the things which God has prepared for us are only revealed by His Spirit, to those who love Him. These truths have not entered into the natural heart of man and therefore cannot be part of 'natural human thinking'; they are not part of the 'minding of the flesh', or the 'carnal mind'. 1 Corinthians 2 goes on to say we have the "*Mind of Christ*". It is suggested that the 'mind of Christ' is one which **knows** what God has prepared and thinks accordingly, with faith and love according to that expectation.

If we go back to Romans chapter 8 in the passage following 'to be spiritually minded' we read these words

"But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

So if Christ be in us the body is dead, rendered powerless; Jesus has judged sin in the flesh and the effects that sin has on our bodies. Natural bodies, outside of regeneration, cannot bring forth fruit unto God; they are dead and will only produce dead works. So they are rendered powerless, but the **spirit** in us is **life** because of righteousness. So here is the life we need to bring fruit unto God, it is in our spirits, so we can produce spiritual fruit to a God who is spirit. Then, wonderfully, Paul continues, *"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also **quicken (or make alive)** your **mortal bodies** by His Spirit that dwells in you"*. So here is the life, that is in our spirit, brought to act in our mortal bodies. No longer is there death but life, and indeed resurrection life, from our Lord Jesus. It is exactly what we need, and that to which we were recreated, and is the outworking of **God's workmanship**. Life will bring forth life, and here it is practically working bring forth fruit unto God, as we walk in '**good works**'

The conclusion *"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live"*. So we do not owe anything to our flesh; there is no requirement to live according to the flesh at all. We are free, we are **made** free, we are justified, Jesus Christ has paid the price for us; no more debts to our flesh. Jesus has taken our old nature, the nature of sin and death, out of our hearts and changed us so wonderfully that we now have His life as our spiritual nature, and it goes as far as making not only our spirits but our bodies alive. Paul writes to the Galatians, *"I **live**, yet not I, I but Christ **lives** in me and the **life I now live** in the flesh I **live** by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me"*.

Paul continues; *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with*

Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together". Now are we sons of God, we are born of God; His progeny, **His workmanship**, His creation. The Spirit of God bears witness to the truth of it all in our hearts and we now cry 'Abba Father', calling on Almighty God as our Father. We have become heirs of God and 'joint heirs' with Jesus Christ. We were **made** for this. This is exactly what God has prepared for us, not only to walk in Him on the earth but also to possess Him through all eternity. This could only be the great work of Almighty God, in and through His Son, this is the work of redemption, the work of **salvation** and it is "Marvellous in our eyes". Hallelujah

What is marvellous in God's eyes, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, is found in Psalm 118, *"The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it"*. Jesus Christ has become the head of God's building and everything depends on Him. We have looked at how we are God's workmanship individually, and that is very wonderful, but the **workmanship**, or building of God, has another great aspect, the building of all individuals together as His church. Paul tells the Corinthians *"You are God's building"* and this building, as we have suggested, is His church, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have quoted before Psalm 51 with 'the work of God in His good pleasure to build the walls of Jerusalem'. We read *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: **build** thou the walls of Jerusalem,"* and mentioned Revelation chapter 21, *"And I John saw the holy city, **New Jerusalem**, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"*. We must see and understand that the purpose of God goes beyond each individual, and His will is to build by His own **workmanship** a building, a church, a chosen people separated unto God, in whom He can dwell and live for ever. Revelation 21 goes on to say *"Behold, the **tabernacle** of God is with men, and he will **dwell** with them, and they shall be **his people**, and **God himself** shall be with them, and be their **God"***. This is the ultimate finished work of God, when all is perfect and God dwells where He has always wished to, in His people for ever, in order that He might be their God. It is quite wonderful and was marvellous, as we have seen above, in the eyes of Father and Son. If we read the verse in Psalm 118 properly, it shows us the position in the Godhead before Jesus ever came to the earth, and the forward looking knowledge of what would be accomplished in the cross of our Lord Jesus. There is the knowledge of Jesus becoming the 'head of the corner' but only by laying down His life for our sins. Therefore we have the response from the Son, *"Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord. God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light: bind **the sacrifice** with cords, even unto the horns of the altar"* This expresses Jesus' willingness to come and die for us with the knowledge, as we have read, *"The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner"*. This is the basis for both the **salvation** of every Christian and the '**gathering together of all in one**,' all Christians to be His church. The vision of God 'in the beginning' which is revealed to us in the prophecy in Psalm 118 was very wonderful and shows us the

extent to which the love of God has moved in His eternal plan prepared for us. We are **His workmanship** in that plan.

In Psalm 22 we read, and again this is prophesied beforehand, of Jesus' victory on the cross and in that moment His joy and awareness in Himself, in the Spirit, of His whole church. *"I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee,"* and, *"For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation".* Jesus is thus aware of His brethren (brothers), you and me, *"He is the firstborn from the dead that he might be the firstborn among many brethren (brothers)".* *"Jesus brought many sons to glory and He is not ashamed to call them **brethren**".* We also read of the great congregation (or assembly) of the people of God, all brought together 'in one' with the Lord Jesus, giving praise to His Father in the middle of that gathering. Jesus is thrilled at the wonder and outworking of His Father's so wise plan of **salvation** through **His workmanship** in His Son. They had seen it all before the foundation of the world and it was marvellous in their eyes.

We now need to look at the book of Acts and chapter 15, and the understanding of the early apostles of this church of our Lord Jesus Christ. *"And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written. After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, says the Lord, who doeth all these things".* (Amos 9) These comments are made by James, the brother of our Lord Jesus, at the conclusion of the debate about the need, or not, for the Gentiles to be required to undergo physical circumcision. It is clear, by that stage, the disciples were aware that the gospel had reached to the Gentiles,(perhaps nations is a better word). Peter of course had been the first to see the non-Jews saved. Jesus had told Peter he had the 'keys of the kingdom,' and so that word and promise had begun to be fulfilled when the first Christians were saved and added to the church through Peter's preaching in Jerusalem. Peter then went into Samaria to pray for those who had responded to the preaching of Phillip, in order that they should receive the Holy Spirit (Acts, chapter 8). Then, in chronological order, Peter preached to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and saw the Holy Ghost fall on him and his household (Acts 10). It is the coming of the Holy Spirit into a life which makes that person a member of the church (read 1 Corinthians 12.13). Peter had been shown in a vision that **salvation** through the preaching of the gospel was for all the nations. *"Who was I that I could resist God"* was His response under critical examination in Jerusalem. James, as we have seen in Acts 15, makes that confirmation, quoting from the prophecy of Amos, chapter 9. The word from Amos shows that God would build again His tabernacle, His dwelling place and it would include 'all the gentiles/nations'. Why the apostles had not understood this truth a little sooner is a bit of a mystery when they would

and should have been aware of the many scriptures, for example, this one in Isaiah 42, *“Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the **Gentiles**”*, which make the inclusion of non-Jews in to Jesus’ church very clear. This situation perhaps demonstrates 2 things; firstly, only when God shows us something do we really understand it; secondly, how rigid religious upbringing can be and how it can blind us to the very obvious, and if we are not careful such blindness can cause us to work against the Lord and His will. Peter really had to be shown so clearly in the vision he received, we thank God for that, but all Christians need to beware they do not get taken up so much with their traditions that they prevent God doing something new in their lives and opening up new avenues of faith and experience.

So we are gathering evidence for this great church of Jesus Christ, God’s building, God’s workmanship, with the inclusion within its membership of the ‘called’ from all nations. Revelation chapter 5 helps us enormously with John’s vision of the ‘redeemed’, the church. *“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and hast **redeemed** us to God by thy blood **out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation**; ¹⁰ and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth”*. Here are God’s people; they are the redeemed out of every sub-group described by man in society. It has to be that way, for if our Lord Jesus is unable to bring in and keep in His church a member from each tribe, people, language and country, or whatever sub-group we like to use, then He is not Lord. It would mean He had not overcome every dominion and power, and somewhere and somehow an authority could resist His authority and not yield up those who are called into their salvation. But **Jesus is Lord**, so we find the word **every** in Revelation chapter 5 so that **none is left out**. Members of Jesus’ body, His church, come from **every** sub-group, as they believe on Him and receive the Holy Ghost. *“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be **saved**”*. As we have seen, it was the coming of the promised Holy Ghost in each of these areas, firstly Jerusalem (Acts 2), Judea, Samaria (Acts 8) and the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 10, Cornelius as the first), which brought salvation and entry into the kingdom of God, and it was through Peter’s preaching that this key to the kingdom of God was provided.

So **every** nation **has** to have members who are part of this great church of God, and, if we read Galatians chapter 3, we see that *“The gospel was preached to Abraham so that the Holy Ghost should fall on the **Gentiles**”*, and *“In thy seed shall all the **nations** of the earth be blessed”*. The evidence in our Bibles is overwhelming for the great church of Jesus Christ, the habitation of God, and confirms John 3.16; *“For God so loved the **world** that He gave His only Son that **whosoever** believes on Him should not perish but have eternal life”*.

So we have understood the membership of the church and the building of God. *“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular”*. We see the church is made up of many members. Each one is special, precious and important and has the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is necessary for the bride of Christ, the church, to reflect the glory of God. *“The*

woman is the **glory of the man**” So how are we to be in the image or likeness of Jesus Christ? We have looked at much of this already and seen how Christians are new creations individually, but the description of the construction of Solomon’s temple, and the production of the stones, helps us to understand the making of each member to be part of the whole body. Peter tells us we are ‘**living stones**’, we will come to that again later, but the church of God is built of ‘living stones’; the temple of Solomon was of **hewn** stones, prepared in a quarry but ready for use. We read in 1 Kings 6.7 “*And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone **made ready** before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building*”. So we see that there was workmanship in the making of the stones, the stone was **made ready**, and the word for ‘made ready’ comes from the Hebrew word ‘to make perfect’. Each stone therefore was made perfect in the quarry, nothing else needed to be done in Jerusalem to make it fit to be a part of the building. This teaches us that each Christian was made perfect through the work of our Lord Jesus, who suffered for us on the cross outside the city, or camp. This is **God’s workmanship**, and the work of Our Lord Jesus is enough to perfect us forever so that we are His and members of His body for ever.

We should now look at another description of building in the Old Testament, unusually found in the book of Proverbs and chapter 9. “*Wisdom hath **built** her house, she hath **hewn out** her seven pillars: she hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she cries upon the highest places of the city,⁴ Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that lacks understanding, she says to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding*”.

This passage describes the work of our Lord Jesus, the personification of wisdom, “*Christ, the wisdom of God*”. If you read in chapter 8 of Proverbs it becomes very clear that wisdom equals our Lord Jesus. So Jesus has built His house and he has **hewn out** 7 pillars. The word hewn is a bit of an old English word but used still in most of the translations, the NIV has ‘set up’ but with a footnote giving the proper meaning as ‘hewn out’. This takes us back to our quarry where the stones for the temple were produced, and the word ‘hewn’ implies hard work. This fits in with the words of Isaiah in chapter 53 “*He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied*”, indicating the real work of faith of our Lord Jesus on the cross which involved His whole being in **our salvation**. We also have the description of Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane; this account supports the physical, emotional and spiritual effort involved in building this house, Jesus’ house, Jesus’ church. There are 7 pillars and it has been suggested that these 7 pillars could be the 7 ‘ones’ in Ephesians chapter 4: “*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*”. Here are 7 essentials for all Christians. There is one body, of which all are members; there is one Spirit, whom all can and must receive; one hope of our calling which, again, is common to all Christians. Then we have one Lord, who is, of course, our Lord Jesus, but then

one faith. This really is Jesus' faith which we all receive by the word of God, which becomes our faith by which we can believe unto righteousness. We are told in the book of Jude there is a 'common faith'. This means it is the same faith which is common to all members. There may be different approaches to some doctrine, but for each Christian there must be the same fundamental faith by which we believe, so that we may be saved by grace and believe unto righteousness. There is one baptism, it is a spiritual one, not the water one, by which we are **all** baptised into the one body. Six of the seven are all set truths; the one baptism is the one experience that all Christians must have to enter in the body of Christ. It is the Baptism into the Holy Spirit which baptises into the death of our Lord Jesus, joining us with Him in His death, and hence to be joined with Him in His resurrection. All Christians because of this one baptism, which is common to all, will walk in the same newness of life, in fellowship with each other. Finally there is One God and Father, who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is above all, yes of course; through all, absolutely as He comes in all Jesus does; and in us all. God is our spiritual Father when we are born again of the Spirit of God, and the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are Sons of God, crying Abba, Father. Hallelujah. Each Christian life is built on these 7 pillars, and the whole church is built on them too as the same principles are in every member, in every living stone, who is built into the church of Jesus Christ.

We have read that Wisdom has killed her beasts and mingled the sacrifice. This of course relates to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus in His death. We read in the Book of Hebrews, "*He offered Himself,*" and this quotation from the book of Proverbs must refer to the Lord Jesus laying down His own life for us in the will of God. Hebrews tells us that, "*He offered Himself through the eternal spirit.*" As we read on through the passage in the Proverbs we find the invitation to "*Come and eat of the bread and drink of the wine and go in the way of understanding*". We read in Genesis, chapter 14, of Melchizedek, King of Righteousness, giving bread and wine to Abraham. So even then, in the early days of the Bible and the history of Israel, bread and wine is offered, speaking of the death of the Lord Jesus and relating this to the tokens which are used for 'breaking of bread' by the church of God. The church therefore when gathered together is to remember the Lord's death by breaking bread and drinking the cup together, and doing it often, the tokens, the bread and the wine, representing the body and blood of our Lord. We really are to eat spiritually of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus, offered through the eternal Spirit for us, and thus taste and see that the Lord is so very good in providing such a **salvation** for us through our Lord Jesus. It is this eating in faith, Jesus' body is indeed **spiritual** food and his blood indeed spiritual drink, which will give us a **spiritual** understanding of the work of our Lord Jesus, and enable us to go in the way of understanding how great this work of God is. As with Jonathan, when his eyes were enlightened by the eating of honey, so will the eyes of our understanding be enlightened. We will walk in the way of understanding the house God has built, the pillars Jesus has hewn, and the sacrifice He has made to provide an **eternal salvation** for all who will believe on Him and receive Him as Lord and **Saviour**. Jesus said "*Whoso eats my flesh,*

and drinks my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ *For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed*". The church, the Christians who meet in a locality, break bread together to encourage one another and build one another up in 'our most holy faith'.

The seven pillars interestingly contrast with the 2 pillars in the temple of Dagon built by the Philistines (1 Samuel chapter 5). Samson was able to push the two pillars down and so destroy the whole temple and all the leaders of the nation. (Interestingly, this is a very good illustration of our Lord Jesus openly destroying principalities and powers by His death on the cross when all the rulers of darkness were overcome). The 2 pillars, it has been suggested, are the 'Knowledge of good and evil', the basis of this world's system, and if they can be pushed over so easily it demonstrates how very unstable and insecure this world is. We need to be aware that most digital operations are based on the numbers 0 or 1. It is Yes and No, and could be considered the 2 pillars, especially as the whole world now is so dependent on computers which all operate digitally. In contrast 7 pillars, of course, provide huge stability. Seven is the number in the Bible for God, and also for perfection. So this work of our Lord Jesus hewing His seven pillars, **His workmanship**, through the **travail** of His soul, produces a house, a church, with a perfect structure, which will endure forever.

Just for clarity there are two pillars in Solomon's temple, but they are only pillars for the porch and not the whole building *"And he set up the pillars in the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin: and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz"*. However the names of these 2 pillars are helpful to us. 'Jachin' means 'He will establish' and 'Boaz' means 'In Him is strength'. So we are encouraged again with **God's workmanship**. "He will establish" the work and He has the strength to perform and finish His work and cause it to stand. The porch, of course, is the entrance and this is God's declaration at the entry to His temple 'I have established this building in my strength'.

We mentioned earlier that 'living stones' are the basic material of construction for the church. We read in 1 Peter chapter 2, *"To whom coming, as unto a **living stone**, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as **lively stones**, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up **spiritual sacrifices**, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the **stone** which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a **stone** of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy"*.

We are stones, living stones; we are stones not bricks. Stones are hewn from the quarry and come from that which God has created, whereas bricks are made by human beings. Bricks were used, of course, to build the pyramids for Pharaoh in Egypt. Egypt is a picture of the world and the system is all based on the works of mankind. God does not use that which is of the world, but that of His own creation and nature, when He builds. We are talking about God's workmanship, and the living stones which God uses are those created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Jesus as the 'Son of God' has God's nature and it is that nature which is used in our **salvation**, and is why when we are in Christ we are **a new creation, 'created in Christ Jesus'**, partakers of the divine nature.

So we are **living stones** coming to the **living stone**, Jesus Christ the chief or headstone. The word 'head' means the highest, *"Jesus is the **first** born from the dead that in all things He might have the pre-eminence"*. We are living stones because He is the living stone; Jesus said *"Because I live you shall live also"*.

We have seen the house is the church, *"In my Father's house there are many mansions"*, the word 'mansions' meaning 'little dwelling places'. Here is another illustration; we have had 'living stones', now 'little dwelling places', little houses in this church of God, the church of Jesus Christ. Each stone is a living stone, each stone itself is a dwelling place for God, a little temple, being wonderfully part of this whole wonderful building of God. **Glory be to His Name**. All this confirms the scripture in Ephesians, chapter 1, *"The fulness of Him fills all in all"*. Another way of expressing the same truth is Jesus words in John, chapter 15, *"I am the vine; you are the branches"*. Each Christian is part of the whole, we are all in Him and He is in all of us. Jesus said *"In that day you will know that I am in my Father, you in me and I in you"*. So now the teaching of Jesus to his disciples in John 14 becomes much clearer and we see the truth He was really wanting to impart to His disciples. We see the revelation Jesus had of all He was about to accomplish on the cross. Peter clearly had come to the same understanding and writes all this in His letter to encourage those Christians scattered abroad in those early days of the church. The same truth is just as relevant to Christians in these modern times, who are in need of the same encouragement to understand how much they are part of this wonderful eternal **work** of God.

So we are a spiritual house and therefore a **holy priesthood**. Priests are those who make offerings to God and priests are holy, separated to God; we have looked at that earlier. So what are we to offer? The answer is **spiritual sacrifices; living sacrifices**; it is *"the praises of Him who brought us out of darkness into His marvellous light"*. So much of the life of the church of Jesus Christ when gathered together should be taken up with real worship; not just singing. Individual Christians too as they live their lives should have and express constant worship in their hearts. We should see that so many ways are produced in church meetings these days to facilitate singing. It is called praise and worship, but is it worship, is it from our hearts/spirits inspired by the Holy Spirit and in truth? We should ask, does it satisfy Almighty God who has built us together, or does it more satisfy our flesh both in the pleasure we get

from the singing and the feeling of satisfaction that we have done something for God?

Spiritual sacrifice means the laying down of our lives, the presenting of our bodies, all of our beings, as living sacrifices to the Lord Jesus, with the purpose that He might reign in all our lives as we do His will. One would suggest that, unless such a sacrifice has been made, there is no basis in any Christian life for true worship. The Christian life is 'not I but Christ'. The royal priesthood is holy and this has to be outworked in our lives, and the 'holy' has to be practical, not continuing to sin, not lying, not compromising; it is the **only** way. Then we are God's peculiar/special people, not only in name but in spirit and truth. We are His royal (made up of kings) priesthood and His holy nation, the people of God, called out to be His people on the earth, to serve Him and to bring Him glory and honour. We had not obtained mercy but now we have!

So the work of the church is about sacrifice, about worship, and that is shown in the book of Revelation when all who see the 'Lamb of God' on the throne fall down in adoration. The book of Hebrews tells us, *"For we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour"*, so with that revelation of our glorified Saviour, the church, in its meetings and lives, must be a place of worship.

We read in 1 Corinthians 1, *"Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours"*. This shows that the church is universal, we have already looked at how it comes from every tribe and nation, and we see that where that church operates and worships, in every place, all the members call on the name of the Lord. The Church works on the basis of location, not denomination or ministry. How many ministries are there which are forms separate from the church, with a leader who receives an income and has many followers? How many denominations have come from splits in churches in locations? Of course there have been wonderful revivals and groups come out of that revival as they have no choice but to leave the established church which has lost its way. But so often these groups form into 'a name' and die spiritually just as did the church from which they came out. *"The Body is of Christ"*.

So in every little church, or big one for that matter, the name of the Lord Jesus is called on, His name is praised, He is loved by all the members and that love expresses itself in worship. We have seen in Peter's letter *"To you who believe He is precious"*, or of great value. So we have Christian worship. We are also to 'lay down our lives for the brethren,' our brothers and sisters. We are to love one another and that love must work out practically in the lives of those in each local church as part of the spiritual sacrifice they offer to the Lord. This is God's building, **His workmanship**, we are a holy nation and in this nation different principles operate. These are **faith** and **hope**, but above all **love**. Within this great house of God the life of our risen Lord Jesus should be laid down by each member, one for the other and to reach out to the lost. There is no place for selfishness, no bitterness, no anger, no uncleannesses, no envy, no spite, no covetousness; just 'love out of a pure heart fervently'.

In Ephesians 4 we read these words, *“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the **whole body** fitly joined together and compacted by that which **every joint** supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the **edifying of itself in love**”*

This scripture supports the necessity to love. In this chapter in Ephesians we are shown the great body of Christ which will grow into the stature of His fulness. Each member is to grow into that fulness, to be like Him, and there are works of the ministry within that body to help this work. This is not the excuse for all the ministries which people set up as their own organisation; they operate with each local church. Each ministry, each gift, is for edification, which means to ‘build up’. A big building can be called an edifice, that which has been built. So all these ministries, which are for edification, are to build up the body of Christ, both individual lives and the corporate life of the church. Usually it is local but in the early church, as now when it is much easier with all the wonderful methods of transport, apostles and prophets and teachers travelled around encouraging local churches. Pastors are based within their local church. We also read in Ephesians 4, *“that every joint supplies”*. That refers to every member, showing that every Christian in the church is vital in this work of building the church; building up one another, in love of course. This ‘upbuilding’ can come in many practical ways; it can involve practical works with homes and families; it can mean providing support, a listening ear to a brother or sister, praying for one another that each may be healed/made whole. It also involves praying for one another in our devotions to the Lord Jesus, as we are led by the Spirit of God to make intercession for the saints (separated ones) according to the will of God.

Also in the church meeting, where and when members gather together, the gifts and ministries and the graces of the Holy Spirit operate to build up ‘our most holy faith’, *“Until we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God unto the measure of the stature of Christ”*. When we gather together we are told *“You all have ...”*, so this involves every member, that which every joint supplies, working together, led by the Spirit of God, to build one another up in love, looking for the coming again of our Lord Jesus. **“We are workers together with God”**, God **“works in us** to will and to do of His good pleasure”. So having been **His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, we now become co-workers with Him in this great work of building His church ready for the final day. This is **God’s workmanship**; this is **our salvation**, and is the same for all our brothers and sisters out of every tribe and nation. God gave John a vision of the New Jerusalem, a bride adorned for her husband, the tabernacle of God; God’s total and completed work in which He will dwell

with His people in the New Heavens and New Earth for ever and ever. We are God's workmanship. Amen.