
The Hope of Perfection

The subject of perfection is as central to the bible as is the gospel of Jesus Christ itself. The crowning revelation of the scriptures is that anyone who believes and receives Christ may be born anew by a seed of divine life. Those who are born of God may then grow up in Christ to full maturity, or perfection. Birth, growth and maturity are all equally part of the gospel message.

The title of this volume is taken from the scripture verse: *‘Therefore leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection’*. (Heb 6:1). This verse speaks of four things:– beginning (the first principles), leaving, going on, and perfection. The Christian life involves a beginning and an end. The Christian life is a race to be run, a fight to be fought. There is a goal to be reached and a prize to be won.

The apostle Paul, the central figure of the New Testament epistles, obviously set the hope of perfection as the target toward which he laboured: *‘Not that I have already attained or am already made perfect, but I press on to lay hold of that for which Jesus Christ has laid hold of me I press toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.’* (Phil 3:12–14). He had not yet attained or been made perfect, but the highest goal of his life was to receive this prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Expressed another way, the apostle described his hope as to *‘lay hold of that for which Jesus Christ has laid hold of me.’* (verse 12). His elevated goal was not a self-made aspiration or a product of his own wishful thinking. He sought

only the fullness of God's will for his life. Whatever it was that God had in mind, that is what he sought, nothing more and nothing less. '*And this **one thing I do***', he said, '*forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the prize*'.

THE GOSPEL

From the beginning, before mankind was created and before Christ came, it was the will of God that we should be His children and thus share the divine nature. Man was to be made in His '*image and likeness*'. (Gen 1:26). We know from the Genesis record that mankind, tempted by the serpent, fell into sin, requiring that Christ redeem the human race back to the original purpose of the Father. We also understand that God foreknew and made a total provision for every eventuality, for we are told that '*the lamb ... was foreordained from before the foundation of the world*'. (I Peter 1:19–20). God had an appointed and unchangeable schedule for the progressive unfolding of His purpose, culminating in the coming of the incarnate Son.

In the compelling gospel records we are told that the heavenly Father '*so loved the world that He gave His Son.*' (John 3:16). Those who would believe and receive Christ would have '*power to become **children of God***'. (John 1:12)

They could be '*born again ... of incorruptible seed, through the word of God.*' (I Peter 1:23). This offer of a new and divine birth was the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Father loved the world from the beginning and it was always His intention to give His Son, for this was crucial to our inclusion as His sons and daughters. As the only begotten Son was an incarnation of God, so also the seed of the Father's life when planted in the human heart, would accomplish an incarnation of the divine nature. (Cross Reference: On the use and meaning of the term 'incarnation', see **Creation and incarnation** page 3).

The gospel and the cross

The cross of Christ first of all dealt with the awful fact of our transgression into sin. More than this, it restored us to God's eternal design, that we be His children, the inheritors of the divine nature. It is this offer of divine birth, inherent in the eternal purpose of God, that convinces us of His **provision** for our perfection. Furthermore, His cross has made available a **process** for the complete cleansing and removal of sin. The cross of Christ has provided more than salvation from hell, and more than redemption from sin. We may be **born of His life** and grow to the **maturity** of Christ. We may be **cleansed by His blood** to the degree of His **perfection** in love and righteousness. This is the reason '*for which we were laid upon*' by Christ. (Phil 3:12).

The gospel and the Father

The transgression of mankind in the beginning was associated with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. From knowing the Father alone, mankind turned to a knowledge that was other than of the Father. This knowledge was to develop into a lifelong preoccupation with weighing good against evil in a mistaken endeavour to be like God. Thus man became blind to the will of the heavenly Father for His children.

Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, came to lead us back to **know** the Father, to be **born** of the Father, and to **grow up** to the full maturity or perfection that the Father desired when He said 'let us make man in Our image and likeness'. Jesus declared with the utmost simplicity: '*You must be born again, from above*' (John 3:3)¹ and thus offered us a new birth – to be '*new creatures*', born of the Father, born from above. (II Cor 5:17).

The gospel and perfection

The impact of the gospel then, brings us back to the Father and to His original purpose for our maturity in His image and after His likeness. The message of the gospel is of being born again and of growing up into His likeness. Clearly the hope of perfection is an essential part of the gospel itself. When we are born from above '*by the incorruptible seed of the word of God*', we receive the seed of the heavenly Father's life into our hearts. (I Peter 1:23). This seed will bring forth fruit unto perfection provided that, as the parable of the '*sower*' teaches, our lives are '*good ground*' for the Word. (Luke 8:8,15). The heavenly Father desires this fruit of full maturity, or perfection, to be brought forth in every one who is born from above.

The gospel preached by the apostles of the New Testament turned men to the fatherhood of God, to be born of God, and to receive His life and the power to fulfil His will. Accordingly, the apostles were as '*fathers*' toward all their '*children*' in Christ. (I Cor 4:14–15). They were burdened with the desire:

- that each one receive Christ and **be born** from above,
- that Christ be **formed** in each one, and
- that each one would grow up to **maturity**.

The gospel that the apostles preached involved **formation** into the image of Christ – more than a **position** of rightness with God and of eternal security. Thus, their call to each individual was to:

- '*go on unto perfection ...*' (Heb 6:1)
- '*grow up into Christ ...*' (Eph 4:15)
- '*be children no longer ...*' (I Cor 14:20)
- '*press on to the goal ...*' (Phil 3:12–14)
- '*draw near ...*' (Heb 10:22)
- '*be filled with all His fullness ...*' (Eph 3:19)

1 The Greek word translated 'again' in most versions, literally means 'from above'.

Unto Perfection

- *'be presented perfect ...'* (Col 1:28)

So also for us, our response to the gospel involves us all in the process of **formation**. In the natural sphere, the family provides the context for the growth and formation of the one born into it. In the spiritual sphere, the body of Christ is the relational context into which we are born, where we commit ourselves to one another, and where the fatherhood of God toward us is revealed. This is the context in which *'Christ may be formed in you'* and in which we may go on unto perfection. (Gal 4:19). It is therefore essential that His church, the body of Christ, move from its divided condition back into unity of relationship in divine order, so that there will be a true context for the process of going on to perfection.²

The call to go on

The call of the gospel to go on and grow up is vital today, if we are to receive the hope that Christ has provided for us. Solomon said that *'without a vision the people perish.'* (Prov 29:18). But what vision are we to have? Simply this:

*'... to take hold of **that, for which** I was taken hold; not that I have already obtained this or am already **made perfect ... but this one thing I do ... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature, be **thus minded.*****' (Phil 3:12–15).

Far from being a presumption on our part, perfection is the hope **for which** we were laid hold upon – the *'so great salvation'* that He died to make available to us. (Heb 2:3).

The New Testament scriptures repeatedly echo the apostles' call to go on unto perfection:

*'... that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to apprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you may be **filled with all the fullness of God.***' (Eph 3:17–19).

*'... for the perfecting of the saints ... until we all come to the unity ... to a **perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.***' (Eph 4:12–13).

*'Not that I have already attained or am already perfect, but I **press on** to lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of ...'* (Phil 3:12).

*'... He has now reconciled you in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and **blameless** and irreproachable before Him, provided that you **do not shift from the hope of the gospel** which you have heard ...'* (Col 1:21–23).

*'... the riches of the mystery, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory.** Him we proclaim, warning every man, and teaching every man ... that we may present every man perfect in Christ.'* (Col 1:27–28).

*'... may He **perfect you** in every good thing to do His will ...'* (Heb 13:21).

*'... God abides in us and His love is **perfected** in us.'* (I John 4:12).

2 See 9 The Body of Christ.

The message of the gospel is of being born and growing up. *'The hope of the gospel'* (Col 1:23) is the hope of perfection.

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

This glorious hope of the gospel is the central theme of the whole of the scriptures. We may call this theme *'the mystery of Christ'* (Eph 3:4,9), because God's mystery purpose in history is to reveal His untold riches through Christ.³

Paul prayed that we would take hold of this inheritance *'with all saints'*, meaning, in the body of Christ,⁴ and that we would *'be filled with all the fullness of God.'* (Eph 3:17–19).

The symbolic language of the scriptures

The mystery of Christ is revealed throughout the scriptures in many themes and symbols which convey spiritual truths. If we are to study the riches of our inheritance in Christ, it is necessary to understand this spiritual language of symbols, types and shadows that the Bible uses to convey spiritual truths. (I Cor 10:11; Heb 8:5). Created things, animals, materials, colours, and numbers are incorporated in this spiritual language. The mystery is imparted to us in these spiritual terms which are not taught by human wisdom. Those who have the Holy Spirit can interpret the secrets of the mystery by comparing these spiritual terms. (I Cor 2:6,7,10–13). For example:

- The tree of life in the garden of Eden was a **symbol** of the life of God. (Gen 2:9).
- The lamb sacrificed in the Old Testament was a **type** of the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God. (Gen 22:7–8, John 1:29).
- The tabernacle built by Moses was a **shadow** of the true temple which the Lord built and in which He dwells with His people to work out His purpose. (Ex 25:8–9; Heb 8:2–5). The language of the tabernacle structure and practice features extensively in the New Testament.
- In the book of Revelation, candlesticks, altars, priests, trumpets and in fact all the **symbols** of scripture are collected, and are a key to the interpretation of this final book.

3 I Cor 4:1; Eph 3:1–11. This inheritance that God has planned for His people is summed up in the words *'Christ in you, the hope of glory.'* (Col 1:27). That Christ may be *'in us'*, and we *'in Him'* is truly a great mystery. (II Thess 1:12).

4 The *'body of Christ'* is the expression used to describe our relationship to Christ as the head and to all the many members of His body which is likened to the relationship of the parts of the human body. Rom 12:3–5; I Cor 12:12–17.

The riches of our inheritance

Many symbolic themes unfold throughout the Bible, revealing the mystery of Christ in different aspects. The hope of perfection is contained and developed in these themes.⁵

- The **everlasting covenant** is the eternal purpose of God for an everlasting marriage of Himself with man in the flesh of Christ. (Heb 13:20; Ezek 37:26; Eph 1:10). Aspects of this one supreme covenant are reflected in all God's dealings with man – with Adam in Eden, with Abraham, with Moses and the law covenant, then with David until the whole revelation of the covenant is summed up in Christ, the true seed or heir of the covenant.⁶
- The ordination of marriage in creation introduces the symbolic theme of the **bride of Christ**, with Eve being the bride of the '*first Adam*'. (I Cor 15:45). The climax of this theme and of history, is the perfection of the church as a bride for Christ, the '*second Adam*'.⁷ The fruit of this marriage constitutes the conclusion of the whole mystery of God.⁸
- The truth of **sonship** is conveyed by the theme of the firstborn who, in the Old Testament type, received the '*double portion*' as his inheritance. (Deut 21:17; II Kings 2:9). This theme of sonship is summed up in Christ, who is God's firstborn, the true heir. Those who are born as sons of God become heirs with Him, as they grow into mature sons, into His fullness. (Col 1:15–18; Eph 4:15; John 1:12,16).
- The **Melchizedek order** is a vital theme in relation to our call and inheritance, as this is the priesthood order of which Christ is the high priest and in which we as believers are called to function. (Heb 5:10; 7:1–28). The name of the order as 'Melchizedek' both describes the order and also denotes what this priesthood order is ministering: viz God's **kingship** and **priesthood**, a dualism which portrays God's own order of life. Across the history of God's purpose man been called into this very order of divine life and function.⁹ (Ex 19:4–6; Psalm 110; I Peter 2:9; Rev 1:6; 5:10). This call was demonstrated when Israel was '*brought on eagles' wings unto Himself*' to be a '*kingdom of priests*.' (Ex 19:4–6). Later, Christ was declared to be the high priest of this order of Melchizedek. (Heb 5:10; Psalm 110). Now the church is called into the order of Melchizedek; the order by which the life and perfection of God is ministered to man.

5 Note that these themes are major studies in themselves. We refer to them briefly here, to introduce the terms, and also to establish that the hope of perfection is a central theme in the scriptures.

6 Gal 3.

7 Christ is called the 'last Adam' and the 'second man'. I Cor 15:45–49.

8 Eph 5:25–32; II Cor 11:2; Rev 10:7; 12:1–5.

9 "The History of the Melchizedek Order" by VJ Hall & DJ Watt, unpublished study notes, available from Brisbane Christian Fellowship.

- The **true temple** or tabernacle '*which God pitched*' (Heb 8:2) is His own dwelling place – the heavens and the earth, which He created in the beginning. In His temple, His priesthood (after the order of Melchizedek) functions to mediate His covenant.¹⁰ Throughout history, the true temple has been operative, whether in symbol, or in the shadow (Moses' tabernacle¹¹), or as the incarnate¹² temple – Christ Himself. Now the body of Christ is this temple of '*living stones*', where His purpose to dwell in flesh, to '*tabernacle with men*', is being culminated. (I Peter 2:5; Rev 21:3).
- The **body of Christ** is the truth which expresses our relationship and function with Christ as head, in the same terms as the miracle unity of the human body. (Rom 12:3–5; I Cor 12:12–17). This unique symbol is another powerful pointer to the goal of perfection, both in regard to the vision of corporate unity, as well as the individual maturity of each member. (Eph 4:4–16).

Enriched with these manifold symbolic themes, the singular theme of the whole Bible is the mystery of Christ, of '*Christ in us*' (Col 1:27) – the mystery of the divine nature manifested in flesh. Indeed our hope is perfection.

THE OLD AND THE NEW

Although the Bible is divided into two distinct sections, the Old Testament (or covenant) and the New Testament, both reflect the one and only 'everlasting covenant' which is the theme of the Bible and of history from God's perspective. The first section records the old covenant which God made with His people before Christ came. The New Testament speaks of His everlasting covenant confirmed through Christ. The old was a **shadow** of the new, in which God's people participated by faith, as they looked forward to Christ who would **fulfil** the shadow.

The primary lesson of the old is the inability of man to fulfil the will of God. (Rom 8:3). The old covenant arrangement was therefore deemed inadequate. However, through the blood of Christ, and the gift of His Spirit, the new is a '*better*' and '*more perfect*' covenant. (Heb 8:6; 9:11). Concerning our subject of perfection, we need to compare the old and new, as is done extensively in the book of Hebrews.

10 The function of priesthood is to mediate a covenant in a temple.

11 "The Tabernacle" by WW Patterson

12 'Incarnate' means 'in flesh', and in our usage means 'God in the flesh'.

The book of Hebrews

The Hebrews were a people that descended from Abraham, a nation brought out of slavery, and dealt with by God as an **example**. (I Cor 10:11). So the Hebrew Christians to whom the book was written were thoroughly steeped in an understanding of:

- the old **covenant**,
- the old covenant **tabernacle**, (where the covenant was mediated), and
- the old covenant **priesthood**, (called the Aaronic or Levitical Priesthood).

To these Hebrews, the apostle¹³ wrote about the new order that Christ had brought in:

- the **new** covenant
- the **true** temple (tabernacle) and
- the **Melchizedek** priesthood (Christ's priesthood).

The apostle draws our attention to the differences between the old and the new, and we become impressed, as he was, at the wonder of '*so great a salvation.*' (Heb 2:3). Clearly the new is '*so much better*' than the old. The blood of Christ is '*much more*' effective to cleanse us, so that we may now '*go on unto perfection.*' (Heb 1:4; 7:22; 9:14; 6:1).

A comparison of the old and new

In the book of Hebrews, the apostle argues that perfection was not possible under the old covenant, because its priesthood could not effect a real and full cleansing of the heart. (Heb 7:11,19; 9:9; 10:1). However, Christ's Melchizedek priesthood has now established a '*new and living way*' in which His blood grants us access to Himself, and also effects a perfecting process as we '*draw near.*' (Heb 10:19-23).

The old covenant situation produced only shame for the adherents because it highlighted the **inability** of man to keep the law. Thus the law acted like a stumbling stone, for as man tried to keep it, he stumbled and was directed to faith as the only means of fulfilling the law and inheriting righteousness. (Rom 9:32).

Paul said he was '*not ashamed of the gospel ... for it is the power of God.*' (Rom 1:16). The '*power*' of God as it is mentioned here describes the **ability** to do the will of God. (John 1:12; Acts 1:8). The new covenant makes provision for a new heart and a '*new Spirit*' whereby we are able to fulfil the will of God. (Heb 8:10; Ezek 36:26).

It is essential that we fully lay hold of the new covenant and go on unto perfection, or we will revert to the old covenant basis. (Gal 5:18). We will

13 The writers of this study support Paul's authorship of the book of Hebrews, but acknowledge this as an uncertainty of scholarship. Hereafter we refer to 'the apostle'.

slip back under law, back to the inability of the flesh to do the will of God, which was the dilemma of the old covenant situation.

The book of Romans teaches that we are **dead** to the old, to the law, if we are **married** to the body of Christ in the ongoing purpose of God. (Rom 7:24; 8:14; Gal 2:18,19; 5:4). The endless sacrifice involved in the old covenant, was a '*dead work*' (Heb 9:14), that could not deal with sin. The whole of that inadequate practice, which only highlighted the inability of the flesh, has now been replaced by the body of Christ, in which the '*will of God*' is performed through the power of the Spirit. (Heb 10:1–10).

Now Christ's perpetual priesthood is able to '*completely save*' those who will '*show eagerness in realizing the **full** substance of the **hope***.' (Heb 6:11; 7:24,25). Because He came to '*put away sin*', those who continue to '*draw near*' and '*hold fast*', in applying the work of the **blood** and **water**, will thus allow the **Spirit**¹⁴ to write and fulfil the perfect law in their hearts. (Heb 9:26; 10:15–16,22,23).

THE HEART OF MAN

The old covenant has served to teach us the weakness of the flesh (Rom 8:3), and has thus pointed us to the life of Christ in flesh, to incarnation as the only way the law can be fulfilled. We are to receive **His** life, **His** Spirit, and be filled with **His** fullness, so that **His** law can be perfectly fulfilled in us. There is no suggestion whatever that we are to apply ourselves to ascetic reform and personal perfectionism to attain God's likeness. (Cross Reference: On the use and meaning of the term 'incarnation' see **Creation and incarnation** page 3).

It is not just our outward appearance that needs changing, but the heart where sin has its root, must be cleansed. In the new covenant, God promises us a '*new heart*' and a '*new spirit*.' (Ezek 36:26). The blood of Christ has opened a '*new and living way*' whereby the **heart** can be '*cleansed*', and a perfecting process can operate. (Heb 10:20; I John 1:9). Since the heart can be changed, we can indeed hold to the hope of perfection.

Sin comes from the heart

The word 'heart' describes the centre of our being, the meeting point of soul and spirit, the deepest source of our motivations. The word 'sin' describes **our whole condition of self-centredness**, and doesn't just refer to individual transgressions of the law. Whereas love is **self-giving**, sin sums up everything that is self-centred **and not of love**. All sin is against relationship, in either attitude, word, or deed.

14 The application of blood, water and Spirit in the cleansing process is the subject of **3 The Blood of the Everlasting Covenant**.

Sin proceeds from the heart within, and it is a fallacy to think that outside influences cause an individual to sin, or that sin resides just in the physical body and its emotions. *'Whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him ... but what comes out of a man defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder ...'* (Mark 7:18–23).

We know that *'man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.'* (1 Sam 16:7). The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day outwardly kept the law. However, Jesus demanded a righteousness which was from the heart, which exceeded *'that of the scribes and Pharisees.'* (Matt 5:20).

'You have heard it said ... thou shalt not kill, and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment. You have heard it said ... thou shalt not commit adultery ...' Then Jesus responded: *'But I say unto you, whoever is angry (i.e. in his heart) shall be liable to hellfire ... But I say unto you, whoever looks lustfully upon a woman has already committed adultery in his heart.'* (Matt 5:17–28). He was looking beyond the outward appearance of keeping the law, and was *'discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart.'* (Heb 4:12). This could seem like a much harder law. However, Jesus was exposing *'the heart'* which *'is deceitful ... and desperately wicked'* (Jer 17:9), so that He could offer a newborn heart *'and a new spirit'* whereby the law could be perfectly fulfilled in us. (Ezek 36:26).

The law

As we ponder the matter of our present and eternal relationship with God, we realise that in the end, God's law will **fill all** things. Everything will need to fall beneath His kingdom rule and *'fulfil His law'*. Consequently, the scriptures give a lot of attention to the issue of the **fulfilling** of the law, not because a harsh deity demands it, but because a loving God desires full and unimpaired relationship with His creation, and has made full provision for us to be able to fulfil the law of His righteousness.

The law of God, the *'law of His righteousness'* (Rom 9:30–31) must **be kept**. The important question is – how? God intended that His perfect righteousness should be fulfilled through a faith relationship in which He cleanses our hearts and dwells within us – **by coming in our flesh (incarnation), not by law.**¹⁵

However, it has been the way of fallen mankind in all ages to endeavour to keep the law outwardly and in his own strength. This fact was evident when the law of God (the ten commandments, plus all the ordinances) was revealed to Moses, who brought it to the people of Israel. Their response was to say, *'all that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient ...'* (Ex 24:3,7). Although at first this sounds like a right and proper response, it was based in **their will** and in the ability of their flesh to keep the standard. It was a

15 The meaning of this expression 'by law' will be clarified in the following sections. Regarding distinctions in the use of the term 'law', see **appendix 1 The Meaning of Law**.

predictable response because it was **typical of mankind in all ages trying to live by law**. God then allowed them to try in their own strength, and thus caused them to *'fall upon the stone'*, **for only by faith** can man be righteous and inherit God's promises. (*Matt 21:44; Rom 9:32; Gal 3:26*).

Hence the law covenant was doomed to fail, as it was based in the strength of the flesh. This is why the old covenant was called *'weak'*, and why it could not achieve perfection. (*Rom 8:3*). The man who tries to live by law finds himself in a wretched condition:¹⁶

- with the mind he aspires to the law of God, but
- his flesh is captive to the law of sin. (*Rom 7:18–25*).

He wills to keep the law, but sin is operative within his spirit, beneath the faculties of the soul. There is no power or ability within the heart to do the will of God. Hence, the man who lives by law can never relate to the subject of perfection. He cannot conceive of such a thing, because even his best efforts fail. Indeed, he must repent of all his own efforts to be righteous through the good works of the law. Only then can he receive a newborn heart, and know the power of God that enables change and growth unto perfection.

The power of the gospel

In recognition of God's glorious provision, over against the background of impotent endeavour to keep the law, Paul exclaimed: *'For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the **power** of God **unto salvation** for everyone who believes ...'* (*Rom 1:16*). Man's weakness and inability to keep the law, would have made the apostle Paul ashamed of his former Jewish religion. Once converted he was able to say, 'I am not ashamed – the gospel is the power of God'.

Now that the gospel has offered this new dynamic to us all, we may no longer present a *'form of godliness'* and *'deny the **power** of God'* that has been provided for our perfection. (*II Tim 3:5*). Christ's coming *'in the flesh'* has made possible, what the law could not do. (*Rom 8:3*). How did He make it possible? Christ perfectly fulfilled the law of God, through the power of the Spirit. (*Matt 5:17; Rom 8:2–4*). Now by the same incarnation **of God's life**,¹⁷ the Holy Spirit can dwell in our hearts, and *'shed the love of God abroad.'* (*Rom 5:5*). Thus, His righteousness can be fulfilled from the heart.

16 Note this is the condition of the man living under law, and is not the norm of the Christian life.

17 Christ's incarnation was from the seed in the womb of Mary; ours is by the seed of the Word placed in the heart by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless it is the same seed of the Father.

The law of the Spirit of life

The good news is that *'the just requirement of the law' can now be 'fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.'* An entirely new and living way of life, referred to as *'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus'*, replaces and sets us free from *'the law of sin and death.'* (Rom 8:1–10).

This life begins when we are:

- born from above,
- baptised into the Lord Jesus Christ, and
- baptised in the Holy Spirit of Christ. (Cross Reference: This threefold foundation is discussed on page 211 ff).

We become dead to sin (Rom 6:2), obedient from the heart (Rom 6:17), and are able to put to death our sinful deeds. (Rom 8:13). As we yield our members to God, we obtain access to His grace, His justification and His righteousness. (Rom 6:18,19).

The meaning of **grace**, is His ability in us and through us to live His righteousness; not a legal position that ensures forgiveness of sin.

The meaning of **justification**, is that His life, which alone is justified, can be received and lived, and we are truly *'saved by His life.'* (Rom 5:10,18).

The meaning of imputed **righteousness**, is that His righteous life has been offered as a *'free gift'* which we may live out by faith (Rom 5:15,16); it is not a legal position we can claim, where sin is covered but never dealt with.

Reigning in life

The good news of the gospel is that the heart can be changed:

- The **blood** cleanses the heart. (I John 1:7).
- The **Word**, if understood and received into the heart, becomes an incarnate word which can *'save the soul'* by changing our lives. (James 1:21).
- The **Spirit** *'sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts.'* (Rom 5:5). Since love *'fulfils the law'*, we too are now able to love and fulfil the law. (Rom 13:10).

Now in all aspects we can *'reign in life'*, over all temptation and sin. (Rom 5:17).

Because the heart can be changed, we are able to lay hold upon the hope of perfection!

LAW VERSUS INCARNATION

We have seen that the law covenant could not produce perfection. However the incarnation of God's life in the flesh can accomplish what the law and the flesh of man could not do. For the man who is born of God, his hope of

perfection is based on the fact that God has provided for an incarnation of His life in us. The man under law tries to be like God by the works of the law. Thus, he rejects God's provision for a cleansed heart, and substitutes a cloak of self-righteousness.

In relation to perfection, law and incarnation are two approaches which are in complete opposition. From the beginning, mankind chose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, rather than the tree of life. (Gen 2–3). Tempted by Satan, he chose law as his way to be *'like God.'* (Gen 3:5). The law covenant era from Moses to Christ, taught mankind his inability to keep the law, and showed him his need of faith, of Christ, and of Christ to *'dwell in his heart by faith.'* (Eph 3:17). The scribes and Pharisees¹⁸ emerge from that era as models of religious mankind, i.e. of all men who try to keep the law and who clothe themselves with robes of self-righteousness based on legal and religious observances, who thereby reject the gift of God's righteousness in the heart.

The Pharisees rejected and opposed God's gift, the incarnation – Christ, to the point of killing him. Likewise, we must all beware lest the same mechanisms of religiosity and law work within us, causing us to resist Christ's coming in our flesh.

Above or beneath

'You (Pharisees) are from beneath, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.' (John 8:23). The Pharisees living by law were said to be *'from beneath'*. Jesus, living in the Spirit by love, said He was *'from above'*. What does it mean that they were from beneath, and of this world? It means they were fallen, as was the whole human race since the beginning.

In the Garden of Eden at the beginning, mankind lived in God.¹⁹ He **knew** God and knew all things in God. But then he partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and death came into the human race as a result. Now he **knew** good and evil.

Whatever else this may mean, it is clear that knowing good and evil was the **opposite** of knowing God. It brought death. Now man would spend his life comparing good and evil, trying to be good and not evil, and yet, whether good or evil, he would still die.

18 The Pharisee party, the scribes, the Saducees, the lawyers, the Elders of the Sannhedrin, and the Jews, are all mentioned in the gospels in relation to the conflict with Christ. Although these all differed greatly one from another, they all similarly held law as the authority of the divine will. Because of their interpretation of the law, they were in conflict with Christ and frustrated the divine-human encounter.

19 It is clear that mankind lived in the presence of God (Gen 3:8), but more than this, he lived, as he was made, *'in the image of God.'* (Gen 1:26–27). *'In the image'* expresses that he lived in God as his location. This also is the place of relationship and fellowship with God to which we are restored in Christ.

This event has been called the ‘fall of man’, because mankind fell from the place of fellowship with God as his centre. He fell to another position, a self-centred position. Now he was **fallen**, he was ‘*from beneath*’.

As a result of the fall, it is said of Adam and Eve, that ‘*their eyes were opened*’; i.e. they could discover their own potential to be ‘*like God knowing good and evil.*’ (*Gen 3:5*). Man would now be his own father. He would foster and realise his own potential, and be the master of his own destiny; and he would do it by good and evil, or ‘by law’.²⁰ It is not suggested that to know the law is to know evil. Rather the premature acquisition of this knowledge resulted in alienation from God.

He could now define ‘good’ as he saw it from his own position. He would be the origin of good, the judge of evil, and be the one to decide the difference between them.

This knowledge of good and evil, in the absolute sense, was equivalent to the **law** of God.²¹ As we know, the law can only be kept if we continue in God and allow His Spirit to write it, and fulfil it in us. If the law is taken on its own, without the **Spirit** of the law, which is **love**, it will kill; and this is what happened. When man ate of the tree, he took hold of the law and died.

When we take the law into our own hands as Adam literally did, we become a ‘*law unto ourselves.*’ (*Rom 2:14–15*). Then we become the judges of both ourselves and others. Of course, one will always try to excuse himself – ‘*a man’s ways are always right in his own eyes*’ (*Prov 21:2*) – and condemn others.

Mankind took, or rather stole the law and fell. He possessed the stolen law in a fallen position. When we look at the world, one thing is clear – it now works by law. Millions of laws have been written, with their origin in God’s law. The stolen law has been interpreted and is being mediated from man’s fallen position. Every man finds the law is now ‘*written in his heart*’, while ‘*his conscience bears witness*’; i.e. makes a governing assessment and motivates the self-centred action. (*Rom 2:15*). Self is now the judge, mediating the law from a self-centred basis.

This understanding of man’s fall and possession of the ‘stolen’ law²² is a vital foundational understanding. The knowledge of good and evil is the

20 The possession of this knowledge in his heart actually constituted a consciousness of the same righteousness that God later revealed as the ‘law’ to Moses; i.e. the ten commandments; hence the connection made between the knowledge of good and evil and ‘law’. Paul argues in Romans 2:14–15 that the Gentiles who did receive the revelation of the law had nevertheless acquired a witness of it, making them liable to judgment.

21 See previous footnote.

22 See previous footnote

symptom of man's fall, not a feature of his original creation.²³ Indeed, there was a reality of life for mankind in the image of God, **before** 'law', before the knowledge of good and evil. Now through Christ, we are redeemed from 'under law' (Gal 4:4), back to our predestination. In Christ we are able to rightly fulfil the law by the power of the Spirit, and go on unto the perfection of God Himself.²⁴

The scribes and Pharisees

The religious leaders²⁵ of Jesus' day were dramatic examples of law-keepers who outwardly appeared righteous. Jesus called them 'whitewashed tombs' (Matt 23:27) because their appearance was good, but in their hearts they were dead and were as wicked as Satan himself. (Matt 3:7; John 8:44).

"You are from beneath, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world." ... Jesus said to the Jews that had believed in Him, "If you continue in My word, then are you My disciples indeed, and you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free."

"They answered Him, "We are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to anyone."

"Jesus answered them, ... "I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word finds no place in you. ..."

"They answered, "Abraham is our father". Jesus said, " ... You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning ... the reason you do not hear My words is that you are not of God ... Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; he saw it and was glad. Truly, truly before Abraham was, I am." So they took up stones to stone Him.'" (John 8:23-59).

An incredible situation is portrayed in this encounter. The seed of the covenant had become the seed of the serpent! For Jesus stated clearly, 'You are of your father, the devil'. (John 8:44). The Pharisee provides us with a potent example of the 'fallen' man. He was religious; he was law abiding; he was

23 Because man in the garden was free and responsible to choose, he has sometimes been called a 'moral agent'. Since he was 'in the image of God' it has been erroneously concluded that God also is a 'moral agent', thus placing God 'under law' so to speak. Note then that after the eating of the tree the weighing of good and evil, from a fallen and self-centred position, became a major feature in the disposition of fallen mankind. If this activity is then also described as his 'moral agency', a major confusion arises. The impact of the fall upon the heart and conscience of man must not be negated, as though his functioning by law is the mark of his godliness.

24 The purpose of God is not 'back to Eden' but redemption back into the 'image' of God, and then on into His purpose for perfection through incarnation – (the 'likeness').

25 The conflict in John 8 appears to have involved scribes, Pharisees, and 'Jews'. Hereafter, we will use the 'Pharisee' as the representative of the conflict between 'law' and Christ.

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good; he may have even regarded himself as blameless. (Phil 3:6). He sought perfection, but his base was wrong – not only wrong but Satanic, for he was declared to be of Satan’s fatherhood. How had this come about?

The Pharisee claimed to have a **position** in relation to God because of the covenant, but he **did not continue** in the truth. He presumed a position, (what we could term a ‘legal position’) but did not continue; he did not ‘go on’.

So too today, wherever there is a ‘legal position’ claimed with no ‘going on’, there stands the same tragedy of operation by law, opposing the principle of incarnation and the truth of perfection.

‘Position-ism’

The ‘Jews’ claimed a **position** as Abraham’s children, belonging to the covenant of faith through circumcision. Yet there was **no reality** to this, either in their hearts or their works because they did not continue in the truth. (John 8:31–59).

The basis of all deception is exactly this:

- the presuming of a position, by law (a legal position),
- without continuing in the truth or reality of it.

‘Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof ...’ (II Tim 3:5).

This same ‘positionism’ is seen in Christianity today. For example:

- a position of being ‘saved’, of being a Christian, is often claimed on the basis of some minimum experience, e.g. infant baptism, confirmation, a crusade decision, etc.
- yet there is often no *‘continuing in the truth’* (John 8:31), no reality of Christ’s life in flesh, no going on unto perfection. Many things are believed, or given assent to, but there is no faith to enter in to the process. For example, some claim to have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit ‘by faith’, but have not actually experienced the reality.

Legalism

The Pharisees *‘took up stones to stone Him’* and ultimately it was they who conspired with the political powers to put Him to death. (John 19:7). In doing this, they used the law as their basis of condemning and killing Him. The *‘law kills’* (II Cor 3:6) for the law without love produces legalism. Their keeping of the law in a legalistic manner was now directly opposed to the revelation of God in the flesh, the incarnation, the coming of Christ in the flesh.

‘It is not for a good work that we stone you, but for blasphemy; because you being a man, make yourself equal with God.’ (John 5:18; 10:33).

The principle of antichrist

In their attitude and actions, the Pharisees manifested the ‘spirit of antichrist’ in not confessing Christ’s coming in the flesh.²⁶ They misused the law to serve their envious ends. They misappropriated the power of the law and by their self-centred interpretations of the law, opposed ‘the Incarnation’ of the life of God.

Today, this spirit and attitude shows itself in the same way. Christ is coming in the flesh of His people, by the Holy Spirit, to perfect the body of Christ as the expression of His life. Not only is there an indifference to this faith and vision, but there is rejection, even violent opposition to it on the very same basis of law. This is evident in the opposition to the truth of the Holy Spirit, to the truth of the word becoming flesh in the body of Christ, and to the truth and process of perfection. Once again, *‘the Word of God is being made of no effect because of traditions.’* (Mark 7:13).

The conflict

The religious Pharisee was the epitome of the ‘fallen’ man – obsessed with good and evil, functioning by law.

- He was ‘fallen’, ‘under law’.
- He was ‘of this world’, which is all ‘under law’.
- His ideas of good and evil were all ‘from beneath’.
- His evil was against God, and his good was against God.
- He was ‘from beneath’.

By their self-centred interpretation of the law, the Pharisees called good evil, and evil good. Accordingly they felt compelled to fight and kill the ‘evil’, to establish what they believed to be the ‘good’.²⁷ On this law base, they came directly into conflict with Christ, who did not function on this base, nor would He subject Himself to it.

The clash between them was a conflict of the realms from which they drew their origins – He was ‘from above’, they were ‘from beneath’. It was a clash of fatherhoods – His was the heavenly Father, whose works He did; they were *‘of their father the devil, whose works they did.’* (John 8:44). It was a clash of bases – His base was love; theirs was the knowledge of good and evil, the law, for they were *‘without the love of God in them.’* (John 5:42). Again, the law without love is legalism. It was a clash of kingdoms – His was of God; theirs was of Satan, sin, and darkness.

There were many examples of this conflict, e.g.

26 See I John 2:18–19; 4:3 and II John 7, where the ‘spirit of antichrist’ is defined not as the blatant hatred of Christ, but as that deception that leads individuals out from among us into the world, having denied that there is a revelation of Christ in the flesh.

27 Saul (later the apostle Paul) persecuted the church in this same way; all the religious wars and persecutions of history have been on this same base.

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- Jesus healed and brought life on the sabbath. They opposed Him on the basis of their legalistic interpretation of the sabbath. (John 5:10,16).
- He freed an adulterous woman, whom they condemned by law to be worthy of stoning.

This same conflict continued in the history of the early New Testament Church. Stephen was martyred for speaking against the law. He declared that the coming of Christ meant a '*change of law*' (Acts 6:14; Heb 7:12), and that their fathers' tradition meant they were '*always resisting the Holy Spirit.*' (Acts 7:51 – 8:1).

Who is the Pharisee?

The 'Pharisee' was not just a religious phenomena of that day. He was not just a product of the law covenant era that preceded Christ, but he represents an ageless form of humanity.

- He is the man of all ages living by the knowledge of good and evil, the 'stolen law'. He weighs everything in the balance of good and evil.
- He is the religious man, the good man, even the obedient man, who is self-justified by his '*own righteousness.*' (Phil 3:9; Rom 10:3).
- He is the man who is therefore opposed to the coming of Christ in the flesh (the principle of incarnation), because this brings a cross to all his merit, and makes '*his righteousness as filthy rags.*' (Isa 64:6).
- He is the man who 'says' but doesn't 'do', a hearer of the word but not a doer. He is self-deceived. (Matt 23:3; James 1:22).
- He is the man who is a judge, like God, except that every judgment falls upon himself.
- He is the man who is self-justified, whether by the 'golden rule' or a creed from the scriptures.
- He is the man who interprets his Christianity as a legal position without the reality of Christ's life.
- He is the man who stands still and doesn't 'go on' in the truth who hears the word of 'going on to perfection' and rejects the process in his life.
- He is the man whose own 'good' is against God. He is right by his own interpretation of law. He drinks the cup of iniquity – he is the law, he is lawless, he is anti (against) Christ.

Under law?

This description of the Pharisee confronts all of us with the law, the 'stolen law' that is within us – the 'tree ...' of which we have all partaken. As the Pharisee was, we find that we too are opposed to Christ's coming in our flesh. His problem was not just the old law covenant. His problem was as ours is: our roots in the 'tree of ... good and evil', the family tree of fallen man.

Indeed Christ ended the law covenant, and took the law '*out of the way!*' (Col 2:14). *How is it then, that this law of 'good and evil' is still working in*

us?²⁸ It is not from ‘the image of God’, but from ‘the fall’! We still find that we are torn between living ‘*in the flesh*’ under law, and living ‘*in the Spirit*.’ (Gal 5:17–18).

Now the real issue can be dealt with. The problem is not with the law.²⁹ The problem is with the sin that still takes the law in the same way as in the beginning, and uses law to bring death. Sin deceives us by the law, just as the Pharisee was deceived. Sin deceives me into doing **good** as a way of **life**. Then sin deceives me into believing that I am truly living by doing good. Such was the sin and deception into which mankind was tempted by Satan in the beginning.

‘*Sin finds opportunity by the law.*’ (Rom 7:11). The more the law is seized, the more sin results. The Pharisee illustrates to us that the grossest sin is not that of blatant immorality, but the blatant pride of religious lawfulness. So too for us; much self-justification is procured on the strength of self-righteous comparisons, made in the same spirit as the Pharisee who compared himself with the tax collector. (Luke 18:10–14).

To understand how sin works, and how it can be dealt with, we must first accept that it works by the ‘stolen law’. **Unforgiveness**, for example, is based on one’s use of the law to judge and condemn another, then to alienate and thus sentence the other. **Adultery**, is likewise based on one’s self-centred use of the law to judge a spouse unworthy of love, to then reject, sentence and replace him or her. **Suicide**, is the ultimate use of law to either vindicate oneself, or to execute judgment upon oneself as unworthy.

The heart, where sin is rooted, has to be exposed. Its potential for wickedness and self-deception can then be dealt with by the cross. Our heart can be cleansed and we can be perfected.

Going back under law

Why is it that there is such a strong tendency, both as individuals and as the church, to go back under law? It is because that’s where our roots are – in the family tree of ‘good and evil’. The biggest problem in the New Testament church was this going back under law. Large sections of the epistles, such as the letter to the Galatians, are devoted to this subject.

‘*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you ... having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect in the flesh.*’ (Gal 3:1).

The law covenant had been abolished, 1500 years of living in dead works were now over, Christ had now come. (Gal 3:23–29; Col 2:13–14). But that

28 The issue here is the self-centred use of the law of good and evil as a power base by the conscience, to support the self-centred motives of the spirit. The conscience, that faculty of the spirit that gives approval or reproach to one’s actions, is to ‘*bear witness in the Holy Spirit*’ (Rom 9:1), i.e. to the will of God, and not to function by law. See “The Nature of Man” by VJ Hall, Vision One.

29 ‘*The law is spiritual, holy, just and good; but I am carnal, sold under sin. It was sin that brought death. Sin used the law to deceive me and kill me.*’ (Rom 7:10–14).

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didn't stop the church which had gloriously '*begun in the Spirit*' from trying now '*to be made perfect in the flesh.*' (Gal 3:1-5). How quickly they reverted back under law, rebuilding the '*things that had been destroyed*' (Gal 2:18) – the traditions, the works of the flesh, the outward show. (Gal 4:10; 3:2; 6:12). They continued as if '*the cross was emptied of its effect.*' (I Cor 1:17). It was not just their roots in Judaism that were the problem, but their roots in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the family tree of man under law, man in sin.

The problem of reverting to law is our greatest problem today – even though the law covenant has been abolished. We must also ask the question – are we 'from above' or 'from beneath'? Supposedly we are 'born from above' and are '*seeking the things that are above.*' (Col 3:1). But there is so much law in our theology and in our practice which is opposed to the purpose of God, opposed to the incarnation of His life in us, and therefore incapable of responding to the call 'unto perfection'.

- Wherever there are 'the traditions of our fathers' which resist the present moving of the Holy Spirit, there is **law**. (I Peter 1:18; Acts 7:51).
- Wherever there are constituted church structures that are not of the New Testament pattern of divine order, there is **law**.
- There is much reversion to religious, ritualistic, even Judaistic practices which can only be described as legalistic, under **law**, and even more, they are akin to '*witchcraft.*' (Gal 3:1).
- The 'situation ethics' of good and evil practiced religiously in the political, moral, and social context, are based in **law**.
- Self-motivated 'positive thinking' doctrines feed self-centred identity. Then self-centred motivation and action is mistakenly thought to be the true identity of the new creature in Christ.
- The basic shame of the 'fallen' nature, produces the insecurity and inferiority which motivate many to strive by **law** and to compete for positions of service and ministry. Self-determined identity is believed to be the true newborn identity.³⁰
- So many structures, intended to be biblical and spiritual, are pyramidal power structures in disguise, still functioning by **law** and not 'by the Spirit'.
- The integrity of Christian relationships is so often destroyed by self-centred reactions and divisions, which do not spring from the love that should '*believe all ... and hope all.*' (I Cor 13:7). True love does not react. Such reactions, based on 'right and wrong', on 'good and evil', on **law**, then lead to independence, whether individual, corporate, or even structured independence.

30 See 'Born Again – The New Identity of Faith' by VJ Hall, published in "Sound Doctrine (Vol 1)", Vision One.

There is so much today that is scripturally correct, doctrinally sound, and outwardly tidy that is nevertheless based in law. Upon it all, the same indictment as was upon the Pharisees is appropriate: *'You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; ... they bear witness of Me, yet you will not come to Me that you may have life.'* (John 5:39–40).³¹

The science of interpretation, together with the presuming of 'legal positions', have substituted for the receiving of Christ in our flesh that we may have life. Truth must not be perceived as an objective law.³² As God Himself is a relationship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so too truth is **relational not objective**. To come to the truth, is to come into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and with His many-membered body.

THE CROSS

The apostle Paul was a Pharisee. So great was his zeal for the tradition of his fathers, that he violently persecuted and attempted to destroy the church of God. He was present at Stephen's martyrdom, consenting to it by the law that was now against Christ. What a devastation, what a conversion, and what a revolution was to come to him! Only after a startling revelation from the Lord Himself, and the loss of all that he had attained, did Paul come to terms with the truth of 'Christ in us', which replaces the law. (Gal 1:10–24; Col 1:27).

What an impact the cross of Christ had upon Paul's life! What an impact Paul and 'his gospel'³³ were to have upon the world, *'turning it upside down'* in one generation. (Acts 17:6). What an impact it will have today if the same gospel of 'Christ in us' can break through into a world under law. But the preaching of the cross will bring the same devastation to us, as it brought to Paul.

31 Note that the RSV translation, *'You search ...'*, and not the AV *'Search the scriptures ...'* is the correct rendering, and conveys the indictment that Jesus intended.

32 While there is absolute truth in God, from our perspective there can be no such thing as an 'objective' law by which good and evil may be judged. The law, now in the possession of the fallen man, is always in the hand of the user to be 'interpreted'; it is therefore 'subjective'. For this reason, the one who *'judges'* is said to *'judge the law'* (James 4:11), for the one who judges must first pass judgment on how the law is to be interpreted. We note by way of illustration, that the major activity of legal systems is the interpretation of the law itself.

33 Paul referred to the mystery of Christ as *'my gospel'* to distinguish the true revelation of God from the many other *'gospels'*. (Rom 16:25; Gal 1:11).

The offence of the cross

What does the 'cross' mean to a Christian? It speaks of Christ's death for us, but it also declares our death with Him, to the flesh, to law, to the world and to the way of religious mankind. *'One has died for all; therefore all have died. And He died for all that those who live might no more live for themselves.'* (II Cor 5:14,15).

Because we have died with Christ, the cross means

- the end of our flesh (Gal 2:20),
- the end of our glory (I Peter 1:24),
- the end of our works (Gal 2:16) and
- the end of our pride in keeping the law. (Rom 3:27).

The cross is an offence to the flesh because it cancels **our** merit, **our** identity, **our** confidence, and **our** ability. To *'take up the cross'* (Matt 16:24) is to constantly experience His death within us, so that His life may be perfected in us.

- The offence of the cross to the disciples was that Christ had come to suffer and not to establish the earthly kingdom they hoped for.
- The offence of the cross to the Jew was that Jesus who was of the tribe of Judah, was **the** seed who inherited all the covenant promises. Now all nations, whether Jew or Gentile could come into Christ on the same basis, by the cross, to become joint heirs with Christ. (Eph 2:13–19; Gal 3:16; Rom 8:17; Phil 3:3).
- The offence of the cross to the Gentile was its apparent foolishness when compared with all his human wisdom, his political ideology and his existential philosophy.³⁴

The foremost impact of Paul's apostolic word³⁵ was that it brought the *'offence of the cross'* to bear upon all **flesh**, all functioning by **law**, and for this he was persecuted. (Gal 5:11; 6:12). The cross that he preached would not allow any merit of the flesh, or activity of the 'old', to pass through into the 'new'. The 'flesh' could not be mixed with the 'Spirit'.

The critical issue for us today, as it was for the New Testament church, is to discern between the flesh and the Spirit, the old and the new; between what is of law and what is of Christ's life in flesh; between what is 'from beneath', and what is 'from above'. The good news of the gospel, is that through Christ we can be born from above,³⁶ and be raised and seated with Him, seeking only the things which come 'from above'. (John 3:3; Col 3:1–3).

34 Existentialism can be broadly seen to be the philosophy of 'fallen' man in that he makes himself the measure and centre of all things, and says 'I am'!

35 Today there is a great lack of, and a great need for this true apostolic word, *'the word of the cross'*. (I Cor 1:18). This Word will then establish true foundations in the cross and a true vision of the perfection of God for which His cross provides.

36 'From above' is the literal meaning of the Greek word 'anothen'. (John 3:3).

Discerning good and evil

The Christian who is born from above and going on unto perfection, is told to have his *'senses exercised to discern both good and evil'* if he desires to grow beyond being a 'babe' in Christ. (*Heb 5:14*). Clearly there is a time in God's purpose for a legitimate possession of the knowledge of good and evil. Mankind, in the beginning, was not yet mature or ready to function in the mature capacities of the Melchizedek order. Of course, this 'discerning good and evil' does not mean living by law according to the knowledge of good and evil, for this is the way of the fallen man, and of the religious man who may be 'fallen' and in need of repentance.³⁷

What then does it mean to discern good and evil? This question is vital to our growing up and going on, since the one who cannot discern is said to be still a babe. The 'babe' in the New Testament, is the individual who is still functioning by law, in the flesh, and who cannot yet discern between good and evil.³⁸

Discerning between good and evil means discerning

- between 'above' and 'beneath',
- between these two bases of life and motivation, and
- between living by the Spirit, and living by law.

The **true good** is that which is **from above**, or from love, from the Spirit.

The **true evil** is that which is **from beneath** which functions by the knowledge of good and evil.

This matter needs careful understanding. To be dividing good and evil from the basis of 'self' and not by the Holy Spirit, is all from beneath. To truly discern good and evil in a new covenant sense, means that we must discern all that springs from the realm of 'good and evil'. Within our own hearts we must discern between the bases – from above and from beneath.

If we are still living by 'good and evil' and functioning by law, we are essentially 'fallen' and are functioning from beneath, even though we may claim to have a position as a Christian. In this condition, we will never truly conceive of perfection. We will only ever oppose it as being incredible and impossible.

An understanding of the difference between law (from beneath) and incarnation (from above), brings a complete revolution to our lives, as when Christ 'broke in' to a world functioning from beneath with a revelation from above; as when Paul turned the religious and Gentile world of his day upside down. (*Acts 17:6*). The law base 'from beneath', is directly opposed to the incarnate base 'from above'. Only the cross as a reality in our lives, can deliver us from the one, and move us into the other.

37 The Lord's word to the Christians of the Ephesian church, was that they were 'fallen' from heavenly places in regard to their love, and hence their place in the candlestick, i.e. the church, was in jeopardy. *Rev 2:1-7*.

38 On the 'babe' see *I Cor 3:1-4*; *I Cor 13:11*; *Gal 4:1-3*.

How then do we ‘take up the cross’ and apply its ‘offence’, and put an end to law? The answer follows in Hebrews 6:1–2, just after the statement about the babe, and about the need to discern good and evil.

The apostle lists the ‘*first principles*’ which are the foundation upon which we may ‘*go on unto perfection*’ (Heb 6:1–2): repentance from dead works, faith towards God, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection, and eternal judgment.³⁹

- These six first principles of the doctrine of Christ are the basis for ending law, and enabling us to ‘go on unto perfection’.
- From being a babe (under law, not discerning), we are to live and proceed according to these six principles toward the hope of perfection.
- As we live by these, they replace law, (as the basis of our motivation and identity), with the Spirit as our motivation and as our newborn identity.
- The first of these principles is ‘repentance from dead works’ and this is the primary activity by which we begin to apply the cross to our hearts and lives.

Repentance from dead works

Repentance is best understood as a ‘change of mind’, a complete ‘about turn’ to face a new direction.⁴⁰ It is important however to see that we are to repent **of**, and turn **from**, the entire **person that we are** without Christ, not just of isolated evils.

Repentance from dead works, is to be a living foundation in our lives, not a ‘once only’ or ‘now and then’ activity. We are to continually examine ourselves by the Spirit, and turn from all activity that springs from self-centredness (sin), from the flesh or from law. The result is that we are left with nothing to ‘do’ except believe, or exercise ‘faith towards God’, which is the second principle. (Heb 6:1). ‘*This is the work of God, that you believe.*’ (John 6:29).

*‘Thus says the Lord, “Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool ... but to **this man will I look**, he that is **humble** and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My word.”’* (Isa 66:1–2).

To come to the cross is the first step in going on to perfection. If in repentance we can face its pain and devastation, then we will glory in the provision that has been made through the cross and the blood of Christ.

‘Looking to Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, not counting its shame.’ (Heb 12:2).

39 On the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, see 8 **The First Principles**.

40 A ‘change of mind’ is an appropriate rendering of the Greek word ‘metanoia’, which is translated ‘repentance’. The association between the word ‘repent’ and the military ‘about turn’ provides a useful comparison.