

THE WAY TO HUMAN FREEDOM
Study 7
THE HOLY SPIRIT &
THE GREAT HUMAN CRISIS

In our first four studies we have seen the nature and perfections of God, the nature and calling of humanity, its tragic fall into sin and rebellion and the endless, restless struggle this has produced.

Then in Studies 5 and 6 we have seen how those ‘doctrinal dynamics’ of the first four studies are expressed within the amazing Story of Redemption: that grand Narrative of God’s unfailing covenant love and faithfulness, from the Fall of humankind to the Day of Jesus’ Appearing at the close of history.¹

Now here we have another doctrinal study that will further describe and explain what has been happening in the Story of Redemption. We have seen how in spite of the tragic nature of the Fall, and the deadly and damning power of idolatry, members of our fallen race have been wonderfully redeemed: liberated into life-giving worship and authentic human living within the kingdom of God.

In this study we will be exposed to the awesome action of God by which He, Himself, brings a person *into* the redemption He has accomplished in His Son.

Every time a fallen human being comes to enjoy an authentic relationship with the ‘God Who Is’, something truly incredible takes place—something that requires nothing less than a mighty, sovereign operation of the Holy Spirit!

The title of this study is ‘The Holy Spirit and the Great Human Crisis’. The two parts of the title declare what is central to the salvation of any fallen human creature: the Holy Spirit mightily *acts*; while the one being saved is brought to a point of *great personal crisis before God*.

Experience of crises is not unusual in our fallen world. Times of uncertainty, difficulty or pain—that bring us to a point of decision—are a part of life. Study 4 showed that this can be especially so when living against the way of our Maker. Attempting to godlessly cope with failed idolatry, we tend to lurch from one personal crisis to another.

But the crisis we are speaking of in this study is unique. It is completely different to any other and happens just once in a lifetime. It is a *holy* crisis—one that God initiates as He brings a person from darkness into light and from death into life! Apart from this no one can be saved from the condemnation they deserve, or enjoy the human freedom and fullness for which they were created.

Before we look at the nature of this crisis, we must firstly understand the nature of the One who *facilitates* it: the Holy Spirit. Already in Study 6 we have seen something of His place within the Triune-Community, but now this will be filled out a little more.

¹ The term ‘doctrinal dynamics’ in this paragraph is significant. A dynamic may be described as ‘a powerful force that stimulates progress’. The doctrines of Studies 1–4 can be called ‘dynamics’ because they have, indeed, been powerfully central to the unfolding progress of the Story that has been told in Studies 5 & 6. All that these doctrines have declared regarding the nature of God, humanity and the creation have, clearly, shaped the nature and forward movement of the Grand Narrative of Redemption. And, of course, it will be seen that they will—in the same way throughout the rest of the Series—continue to be a significant part of what is revealed of our Redeemer’s unfolding provision and purpose for His beloved humanity.

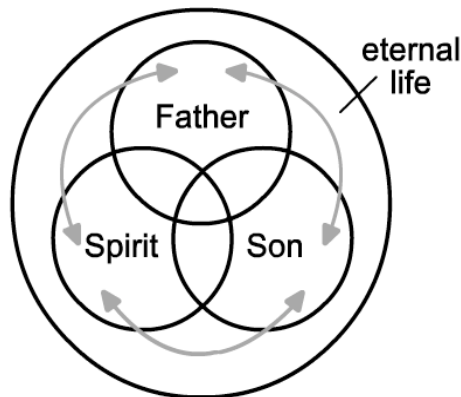
His nature:

(as 3rd Divine Person of the Blesséd Triune-Community-of-Love)

- **Spirit** [of the Initiator-Father & Mediator-Son]

We have seen that within the Triune-God there are *three distinct vocational functions*: In all things the Father is the *Initiator*, the Son the *Mediator* and the Spirit the *Facilitator*. All is *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Spirit. Everything is accomplished according to the *will* of the Father, the *word* of the Son and the *work* of the Spirit.

In the intimacy of Their eternal covenant-union-of-love and Their engagement together in divine vocational action, the Three Persons know unbounded joy and delight in one another and perfect rest and peace. This is the eternal life of God.



And in this the Spirit *delights* to respond to the Father's will and the Son's word. If He were asked, "Who are You?" He would immediately cry, "I am the Spirit of the Father and the Son!"

John 14:26

[Jesus said,] "The Holy Spirit, [is the One] whom the Father will send in My name."

The Spirit comes to God's people *from* the Father *on behalf of* the Son.

1 Corinthians 2:10

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

There is no deep place within the heart and mind of the Father and the Son where the Spirit doesn't always intimately dwell—searching out every glorious personal and vocational detail, so that He may wholly respond to it! And the Father and Son delight to 'give place' to the Spirit!

- **Creator** [as Facilitator of the creation]

At the beginning of the Creation it was the Spirit who was *alive* with the Father's purpose—joyously awaiting every command of the Son so that He could *act mightily* according to it.

Genesis 1:2–3

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving [as a mighty wind across] the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Psalms 104:30

[LORD], when You send Your Spirit, they are created, and You renew the face of the earth.

Every new creature comes into being as a result of the Spirit's glad creative work. The Spirit of the Father and the Son has always been, is today and always will be the Facilitator of the creation!

- Servant [as Spirit] & King [as Facilitator of the kingdom]

Vocationally both the Son and the Spirit are 'the Happy-Divine-Servants of the Father'; and no wonder—for He, the Joyous Initiator-Father, ever pours Himself out in love for them!

In the New Testament we see that the En-fleshed Son and the Spirit have been *sent* by the Father: together freely doing all under His authority.

But—as we've also seen—the Spirit responds vocationally to *both* the Father and the Son.

The Father sends the Spirit, and so does the Son.

John 15:26

[Jesus said], "I will send [the Holy Spirit] to you from the Father."

The Spirit, then, is the *Servant* of both the Father and the Son.

But He is also *King* and *Lord* as 'the Facilitator of the kingdom'—the Royal, Ruling Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18

[Transformation] comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

In this Scripture the Spirit is identified as 'the Lord'. As the Spirit, He is declared to be totally one with the Lord Jesus in His sovereign, transforming work.

Revelation 5:6

Then I saw a Lamb ... standing in the centre of the throne ... He had ... seven eyes, which are the [sevenfold Spirit of God] sent out into all the earth.

In the Hebrew imagery of the Book of Revelation we see that the Spirit, being intimately one with the Son, *participates totally* in His kingly reign. As the Son-Lamb-King looks out over all the earth, He *sends out* the Spirit to *facilitate* every action of His kingship!

HIS WORK OF REGENERATION

Regeneration means 'to begin again'. It describes a situation that was once *dynamic* but no longer is. All life and vitality is gone. Then, suddenly, that which was no more, surges back into operation!

Jesus spoke of the 'regeneration of all things' at the end of this present age—when the whole of creation will be dissolved and then completely renewed (Matthew 19:28)!

The regeneration we are speaking of in this study is the mighty, renewing work of the Holy Spirit when He first comes to indwell a person (Titus 3:5–6). It is THE POWERFUL OPERATION OF THE SPIRIT IN BRINGING SOMEONE FROM DEATH INTO LIFE—AT LAST, MAKING THEM TO BE *ALIVE TO GOD!!!*

Jesus called this experience 'new birth'.

John 3:3, 6

[He] declared, "Very truly I tell you, no-one can see the kingdom of God without being born again ... Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

Physical birth is one thing, but spiritual birth is quite another.

Again, Jesus said:

John 3:8

“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

This work of the Spirit is a grand, sovereign action of God. He blows wherever He pleases, according to the will of the Father. We can experience the Spirit at a particular moment; but we can never know all that He has been doing up till then, or what He will do next. He certainly can't be managed!

The Holy Spirit is God 'on the loose' in His world—doing what He wills, where He wills, in whomever He wills!

Colossians 2:13

When you were dead in your sins ... God made you alive with Christ.

We've seen already that every person was born into this world dead to God, alive only to them-selves.

When someone is dead, and *has been* that way for a long time, there is *nothing* anyone can do about it—least of all the dead person. Anyone who is dead will stay that way—*unless* there is some mighty external action bringing them to life again!

We will see in our next study that new birth is a person's participation, by the Spirit, in the Resurrection of Jesus Himself!

**** the supremely, awesome action of God's mercy***

When it comes to this matter of regeneration and new birth, the Scriptures make it very clear that it is brought about entirely by the *mercy* of God.

God's mercy in regeneration is His action on behalf of those who are in *misery* and unable to do anything to help themselves. Not only are they unable to bring about what they desperately need, they actually deserve the exact opposite!

And more than that, they also have no *desire* for what is really needed and make no *effort* to gain it. The kind of mercy they require does not interest them. They may very well *earnestly* desire a 'divine solution' to their dilemma, but not one that makes them *truly alive to God to do His will!*

Job 35:9–10

People cry out ... But no one says, "Where is God my Maker?"

It's one thing to cry out to other people, or even to 'God'. But it is quite another to call upon the One who is our *Maker*—who is worthy of full-hearted worship and absolute allegiance. As we've seen, fallen people have no inclination, of themselves, to *truly seek* the Holy One who has always given them 'life and breath and everything else'.

Colossians. 1:21

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.

Romans 8:7

The sinful mind is hostile to God.

Psalms 53:2–3

God looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. Everyone has turned away.

And so, the Father's mercy in regeneration involves *sovereign action* towards hard-hearted, rebellious human creatures—a *mighty working* which awakens within them the desire for true salvation and for *Himself!*

Romans 10:20

I was found by those who did not seek Me; I revealed Myself to those who did not ask for Me.

When tragically fallen human beings *find* the 'God Who Is', it is *never* a result of their own initiative. No one truly seeks after the 'Living and True God' who has not been awakened to do so by an act of divine mercy.

Ephesians 2:3–5

All of us ... were by nature [under] wrath. But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

Made alive with Christ by His mercy!

Now when Jesus was raised from the dead it was not an act of mercy but of *justice*. He was the Righteous One. But when a fallen child of Adam is made alive *with* Him, this is always sheer mercy!

1 Peter 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Born again to a living hope by His mercy!

Titus 3:5

He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of [regeneration] and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Regenerate and saved by His mercy!

Romans 9:15–16

He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion'. It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

Mercy comes to a sinner *entirely* at the initiative of God. It comes to one, but not another—regardless of either one's desire or effort.

In Study 6 we saw the amazing conversion of the apostle Paul (then called Saul) while he was 'breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples'. He said of this:

1 Timothy 1:13

"Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy."

That proud, self-righteous Pharisee—miserable in the fierce rage of his ignorance and unbelief—was a fine candidate for the mercy of God!

Romans 15:8–9

Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.

Paul knew not only what had come to him as a hard-hearted Jew. He rejoiced also in what the Father had purposed for so many among the *nations* who would, through

the Messiah, receive the *blessing* of Abraham—and in experiencing the mercy of their Maker praise and glorify Him!

Regenerated by God's mercy, on the basis of:

- the grace of 'election'

(the Father's sovereign choice from before the Creation)

When it comes to understanding the nature of divine mercy in regeneration, the matter of *election* is of great significance.

a 'God-sized' doctrine

The doctrine of election is a most wonderful revelation to God's children, speaking of the staggering nature of His grace towards them. It truly is a 'God-sized' doctrine, coming from far beyond the boundaries of fallen-human wisdom.

Like the 'Trinity' and the 'Two Natures of Christ' (divine and human), election is a great *wonder* that we are unable to fully understand with our minds. After all, we are dealing with the unsearchably great heart, mind and will of the Holy One!

As with all the grand doctrines of the faith, the matter of election is not an idea merely to contemplate, but rather a glorious reality to be lived in. It is not a mental puzzle to be solved but a magnificent fact to be received by faith and enjoyed every day!

chosen, fore-ordained, foreknown

The doctrine of election declares to us that the Father chose His family from before the Creation.

Ephesians 1:4 (NRSV)

He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

He chose His family *in Christ*. Not only were each of the family members chosen, but the One in whom they would be embraced was appointed for His task before all things came to be.

1 Peter 1:20

[Christ] was [foreknown as the Lamb of God] before the creation of the world.

For God to 'foreknow' His Son as the En-fleshed Son-Lamb-King, was to *choose* or *appoint* Him beforehand. For Him to 'foreknow', 'fore-ordain' and 'choose' are terms that have the same meaning in the Scriptures.

Jesus was, indeed, the Lamb of God *slain* in the Father's purpose before the world was made. This, of course, was not 'in case something went wrong'. It was part of His perfect plan.

Before the Creation, the Father chose to send His Treasured One as the Lamb-King, in order to fulfill His great, eternal purpose of love. In Studies 5 and 6 we've seen what that purpose always was. [It may be summarized like this: His purpose was that through giving up angels and human beings to a perverse operation of their will, He would—through His En-fleshed Eternal Son—accomplish by His grace a *great salvation* for humankind. So that His chosen and redeemed—'grace-delighted'—family may share in the glorified humanity of the Son, in a renewed creation, forever!]

As with His purpose for His Son, the Father's choice of His family was also according to His fore-knowledge.

1 Peter 1:2

[You] have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

For Him to foreknow was to ‘fore-ordain’ or to ‘relate-to-beforehand’ in His purpose.

Amos 3:2

[The LORD said to Israel], “You only have I [known] of all the families of the earth.”

For God to ‘know’ Israel obviously didn’t just mean that He knew *about* it. He knew about *all* the nations. His knowledge of Israel involved a particular *relationship* He had purposed to have with them, rather than other national groups. The Father’s foreknowledge of His family is to be seen in this same way.

Some believe that God’s foreknowledge of His elect is merely a divine *foresight*: that He was able to see before the creation of the world who would respond to His call and who would not. And then He chose those who would respond as His own. But His *foreknowledge* is clearly much more than mere *foresight*.

In the Scriptures, God’s foreknowledge is never to do with Him *learning* something about the future. It always has to do with a foreordained *relationship* that He has purposed. Just as Jesus was foreknown as—that is, ordained beforehand to be—the Lamb of God (1 Peter 1:20), so also the elect were foreknown as—ordained to be—the family of God (1 Peter 1:2). The same Greek word for ‘foreknow’ is used in each case. So both the Eternal Son, as the Lamb of God, and the elect, as the children of God, were foreordained rather than foreseen.

As was said in Study 1, the Creator is not to be thought of as a kind of ‘celestial fortuneteller’! Neither is He a ‘slave of history’, who allows His purpose to be shaped by what He foresees will happen.

Jacob and Esau

When Israel’s ‘father’ Jacob was born, God chose between him and his brother Esau, simply on the basis of His purpose. The apostle Paul spelt this out to the believers in Rome:

Romans 9:11–12

Before the twins [Jacob and Esau] were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who calls—[Rebekah] was told, “The older will serve the younger.”

The LORD intended Jacob, not Esau, to be ‘Israel’—the father of His covenant people. He is God! He chooses according to His own purpose.

Paul then further defines the nature of this choice:

Romans 9:13

Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

The phrase ‘Jacob I loved’ speaks of Jacob being chosen ‘electively’: chosen to be a receiver of God’s grace. Correspondingly, ‘Esau I hated’ simply states that Esau was not chosen for grace. ‘Hate’ in the Scriptures means ‘to choose against’. All are loved—within the creation covenant—but not all are chosen according to God’s purpose in election.

At this point you may be feeling that this is not really fair. Paul anticipates such a reaction:

Romans 9:14–16

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.

It was seen in Study 5 that neither Esau nor Jacob had any desire for God. They were both out to fulfill their own passions. Apart from divine intervention Jacob would have had no more love for the LORD than his brother did. With his self-regarding attitude and deceitful behaviour it took powerful moments of revelation to turn His heart towards the LORD.

great mercy—always according to
His sovereign, purposeful choice

The apostle immediately goes on to illustrate God's sovereign action in this way:

Romans 9:17–18

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display My power in you and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens those whom He wants to harden.

God decided to harden Pharaoh's heart so that His own name might be 'proclaimed in all the earth'. He wanted the nations to know that He is God! He has mercy on some, or gives others over to hardness of heart—all according to His great redemptive plan.

In the light of this, Paul continues to anticipate any protest:

Romans 9:19–21

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist His will?" But who are you, a mere human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for disposal of refuse?

In every moment of history the Holy One acts towards sinners with absolute integrity. He alone knows how things must be worked out according to the perfections of His nature as Father, Creator and King.

How awful that the human heart should rise up in self-righteous protest against God, accusing Him of injustice! And to do this as if we, ourselves, had some kind of moral platform from which to judge Him!

The fact is that the Potter is not working with good clay and bad clay. He is working from the 'same lump'—all bad. And that includes us all!

God doesn't look down 'the corridors of time' and see good clay and bad clay, and then say, "I'll choose that one because they have a heart that will respond to me." No! There has never been a fallen-human heart in all of history that would ever *want* Him! They may want a god—but not HIM!

IF HE CHOSE NOT TO HAVE MERCY ON *ALL* FALLEN HUMAN CREATURES THEN HE WOULD BE TOTALLY JUST. AND YET HE *HAS* CHOSEN TO HAVE MERCY ON AN UNCOUNTABLE NUMBER FROM AMONG ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH!!!

Paul then tells us clearly what our God-centred perspective should be on this whole matter:

Romans 9:22–23

What if God, although choosing to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience the [vessels] of His wrath—[given over to themselves and made fit] for destruction? What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the [vessels] of His mercy, whom He prepared in

advance for glory—even us, whom He also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

Only grace-liberated worshippers of God can receive the doctrine of election—for they make no claim to self-righteousness. Their cry is: “HE HAS HAD MERCY ON ME!!!”

Paul’s love for His brothers and sisters in Christ was based squarely upon his joy in their election from eternity by the grace of God. He marvelled in the fact that in being made alive in Christ, both he and they had received great mercy as the beloved objects of His grace.

2 Thessalonians 2:13a

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because [from the beginning God chose you] to be saved.²

In receiving the doctrine of election it is essential to understand that God is not under obligation to save anyone at all. In fact, when the angels fell into sin (2 Peter 2:4) He had mercy on none of them! Considering the high calling we have received and the horrible nature of our depravity, it is the sheer wonder of His grace that He purposed to save ‘a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and tongue’ (Revelation 7:9).

those who are not among the elect

The question is often asked, “What about those who have not been chosen? Doesn’t God have compassion for them?” The answer is that He certainly does have compassion *for* all people—and expresses it in endless ways. *He is love*—showing kindness to all His creatures (Acts 14:17). But although He has compassion *for* all as *Creator*—and shows great mercy towards them—He doesn’t have compassion *on* all as *Redeemer*.

What must be understood is that the Father’s redemptive mercy and compassion is determined by one thing: His *divine wisdom*. It is according to His unsearchably great and wise purpose as the *Holy One*, that He chooses to mercifully regenerate *any* of His rebellious and hostile-spirited human creatures. More than this we cannot say. Nor do we need to; nor should we.

We are told God desires that “all people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4) and that “none should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). This is why He gave His Son “for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). There can be no doubt that He *desires* all to be saved. But He has also made it very clear that His *wise purpose of love in redemption* is to show the riches of His grace by having saving mercy only on those He has chosen.

As was declared in Study 6 there will never be one person who calls upon the Lord for salvation who will not be saved. All who are not among the elect are so because they have had no desire to know God’s grace. Although they may have sought an imagined grace of their own devising, they have had no yearning for the ‘holy grace’ of a fiery divine love: a grace that liberates by the Beloved Son being given up to the terrible judgment that our sins deserve. They have wanted nothing more than a freedom to pursue their own will and maintain their own boast—and He has given

² 2 Thessalonians 2:13 can also be translated, ‘... because God chose you as first-fruits to be saved ...’ That is, they were chosen to be the first-fruits of the gospel’s spread into Europe. It is still speaking of election, but the focus is upon the significance of the particular, historical context in which God’s choice of them was made known.

them up to their demand. They rightly, then, live their days under the wrath of the One who loves them—with no will to ‘obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory’ (2 Timothy 2:10).

What is true of those who are *not* among the elect was also equally the case of those who *are*, before their regeneration. The only difference being that the latter were chosen by grace and made alive to their Maker by His mercy—according to His divine wisdom.

The apostle Paul’s final word on this matter, then, must also be ours:

Romans 11:33–36

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever! Amen.”³

Regenerated by God’s mercy, with a view to:

- a predestined goal

(perfect conformity to the likeness of the Son)

Having chosen His family by His grace, the Father has *pre-destined* them—that is, marked them out beforehand for a glorious purpose.

Ephesians 1:5-6

He predestined us to be adopted as His children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will—to the praise of [the glory of His] grace, which He has freely given us in the One he loves.

In our next study we will speak in detail about the grace of God that has been lavished upon all who are in Christ—including this extraordinary matter of adoption as His children.

Romans 8:29

Those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

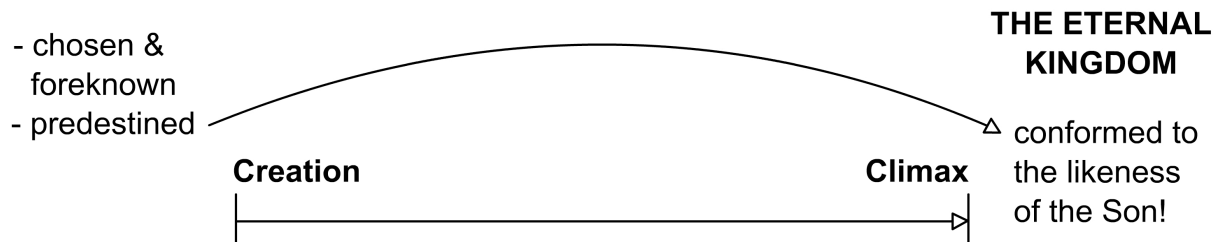
The glorious purpose for which the elect have been predestined is that they be perfectly conformed to the image and likeness of the Son! This purpose will be fulfilled totally in the End, but is also to increasingly be experienced even now.

The fulfillment of that purpose is, in fact, what all of life in Christ is about. Nothing else! This is so because personal conformity to Him fulfills every element of true human vocation.

³ The doctrine of election is one that is often debated, with two opposing sides, unfortunately, being at times strongly against each other. Those who hold to election as stated in this study are said to be from ‘the Reformed’ position, and those who cannot accept it are said to be from the ‘Arminian’ position (Arminius being a theologian in the 16th Century who opposed the understanding of Election taught by other Reformers, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin). A strong conviction behind the writing of this study is that God’s sovereign election of His Family is a reality to be joyously exalted in and wondered at, rather than, a doctrine to be harshly asserted in the face of those who struggle to embrace it. To delight in the wonder of election ought to produce a spirit of humility rather than harsh assertion.

The rest of the series will declare the outworking of this grand calling the elect have received by God's grace. It is in this that the human freedom and fullness we long for is known and enjoyed, and the glory of the Redeeming Father truly seen!

The diagram below illustrates the Father's predestined purpose for His elect family.



Regenerated by God's mercy, through:

- an 'effectual call'

(the irresistible & enlivening summons of God)

No one can be born again apart from the all powerful and life-giving call of God. This is what has been referred to as the 'effectual call': a call that is totally *effective*, accomplishing what it commands in the one who hears it.

Romans 8:30

Those He predestined, He also called.

In Study 6 we were told of how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. This was a sign of the fact that in the End—in the eternal kingdom—there will be no more death. But it was also a sign of the mighty action of *new birth*: a dominant theme in John's Gospel and His teaching in 1 John.

The resurrection of Lazarus is a graphic illustration of what must happen to every person who is *dead to God 'in transgressions and sins'*.

We saw that Jesus actually delayed coming to His sick friend Lazarus until he had died, and had great pleasure in anticipating the revelation He was about to bring! He said:

John 11:14–15

"Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I [rejoice] that I was not there, so that you may believe."

John 11:43–44

[Standing at the opened tomb] Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

In this extraordinary event we see Lazarus responding obediently to the word of the Son of God—but only after he had been *made alive* through that word by the power of the Spirit!

Correspondingly, so *willfully dead* to God is every fallen person that nothing less than a *mighty spiritual resurrection* is required if they are to be made alive to Him.

When Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!", this was indeed an 'effectual call'. Lazarus could do nothing else—he came out!

He obediently activated his will and emerged from the tomb. But the exercise of his will was a result of an *irresistible, enlivening call!*

The apostle Paul knew that his own regeneration was a sovereign act of the Spirit of God and wanted all to have the same assurance. He said:

Ephesians 1:18–20

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the ... [unsearchable greatness of His power towards us who believe—we who believe, as a result of that same] mighty strength He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms.”

The same power that raised Christ from the dead is required to regenerate every elect child of God!

John 5:25

[Jesus said], “I tell you the truth, a time is coming and now has come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.”

This is the great miracle that is happening today among the nations wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the power of the Spirit!

In Study 6 we heard how Paul went to Philippi in Macedonia and began preaching the gospel there. Luke—the writer of Acts—was delighted to record this instance of the Spirit’s regenerating work:

Acts 16:14

One of those listening was a woman named Lydia ... The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.

Through Paul’s proclamation Lydia heard the effectual call—and her heart was opened!

John 6:44, 65

[Jesus said], “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day ... No one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled them.”

Jesus knew—without a doubt—that all who came to Him had been *given* to Him by His Father. They were drawn and enabled by the Father to come. He expressed this assurance as He prayed during the occasion of the Last Supper:

John 17:6

“[Father], they were Yours; You gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your word.”

As it was during the time of the Son’s Ministry among us, so it still is today as the gospel goes out into the whole world. Vast numbers of people hear the word that proclaims the glory of the Father’s grace; but it is His elect who come.

Matthew 22:14

[Jesus said], “Many are invited [and given a chance], but few are chosen.”

Every time the gospel is proclaimed the ‘general call’ goes out to all who are listening. But only those who are chosen will then, or eventually, be enabled to respond to—what is for them—the ‘effectual call’ of their Redeemer-Father. All who are not of the elect will steadfastly *choose against* their Maker, ‘The God Who Is’—to the end of their days *refusing* to seek authentically Him, receive His grace and come to Him, desiring His will.

the wonder of divine election and calling, producing joyous humility and purity of worship

Those who are chosen and called are not ‘the choice ones’, who now have something to boast about. It is, said Paul, the very opposite.

1 Corinthians 1:26–30

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him. It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus.

Paul knew that neither he nor anyone else could boast of their response to God. He, himself, certainly didn’t have any notion of having made a *‘free-will choice for Christ’* that he could be proud of. For he knew it was a choice that came to him *against* his own will—in the very act of seeking to blot out the name of Jesus and destroy His people!

He rejoiced in the Father’s grace that his will had now been *freed* to do what it could never do before: choose the truth and seek the glory and honour of God. Before then he—like us all—was free to choose only within the circle of his own self-righteous and self-satisfying desires, regardless of how extremely religious and sacrificially expressed they were. His will had been *bound* until Christ had *set it free!*⁴

To be one of ‘the called of God’ is simply to be an object of His mercy and grace—what the elect may delight in every day with glad humility before the Father!

1 Peter 2:10

Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

As we’ve been saying, the reason why God calls each of His elect children is hidden in the depths of His own divine counsel. It certainly has nothing to do with anyone’s personal virtue. We know that in the end, all whom He has chosen will be totally “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Ephesians 1:4–6).

And it is this that will be the blessed spring of their unbounded joy and absolute purity of worship on the Final Day. Within the entire being of each one there will not be even the slightest trace of self-boasting!

The Lord will never have to say to anyone, “Thank you for responding to the salvation I provided. Unlike so many others who hardened their hearts, your happiness today is in part the result of your righteous choice to believe. Congratulations!” No, on that Day, there will not be the intrusion of any kind of self-satisfaction into the hearts of the elect.

The fact is that if there were one tiny speck of self-boasting in regard to anyone’s salvation, to that degree their worship would be tainted with impurity, and so, greatly diminished. The blessedness of unbounded joy and delight in the Age to come will be primarily known in *absolute purity* of worship; and this, in the sheer wonder of divine

⁴ Opposition to the Father’s sovereign choice of His Family in election is often made on the basis of a philosophy that is brought to the text of the Scriptures: that each person has a ‘free will’. The conviction held in this study (from a Reformed position) is, as stated above, that our *will* needs to be *freed* by an action of God’s great mercy before it can authentically embrace the gospel.

mercy and grace! And, of course, the same principle applies to purity of worship here and now. That's why this reality we're speaking of is at the heart of so many outbursts of worship and adoration by writers of the New Testament.⁵

election and the joy of proclamation

Truly enjoyed, this sweet doctrine of God's election and calling of His people is one of the great *stimulants* to sharing the gospel with others. It produces proclamation that is God-centred, joyous, humble, free-spirited, sane-minded, bold, sacrificial and earnest!

Paul, having received the call of Christ on the road to Damascus and having had his sins washed away, relentlessly proclaimed the grace that had come to him, for the rest of his days! He said:

2 Timothy 2:10

"I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory."

He knew that as he proclaimed the gospel the Spirit would be at work, calling the elect into the salvation that he himself had freely received. And he was glad to endure any kind of suffering this involved in order to enjoy the privilege of being engaged in such a glorious work.

The Father loves to include His whole family in the outgoing of His redeeming goodness, mercy and grace. His desire is to bring His children into the deep yearnings of His own heart. This happens as, by the Spirit, they share in the *intercessory cry* and *proclamation* of the Enfleshed, Eternal Son—the One He has appointed as the great Priest-Prophet-King over the nations!

The Father has chosen His family—and day after day He calls His elect home, through the prayers, earnest communication and tender love of His already redeemed children!

Acts 2:47

The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Regenerated by God's mercy, as the Spirit sovereignly brings:

- enlightenment

(revelation of the truth: things as they really are in regard to God, humanity, the creation & the glorious gospel of grace)

We have seen that the 'great human crisis' is powerfully initiated by the effectual call of God. Now our focus will be upon the *effects* of that call within a person's heart, mind and will.

The first of these effects is produced by the Spirit's work of 'enlightenment', as He 'opens the eyes of the heart' to see and understand the truth: things as they really are.

Through the proclamation that He brings—in whatever ways He chooses to do this—the Spirit begins to reveal the essence of Studies 1–6 to a person: the way God is,

⁵ In a later study the utter necessity of having no personal boast will be dealt with in some detail. Here, it may well be relevant to say that we are not even to boast of our belief in divine sovereignty! Our ugly tendency to grasp hold of anything that will create a sense of superiority to others must always be strongly resisted.

what a human being is called to be, what we've become in our rebellion against God and the impact this has upon us personally and relationally; as well as an understanding of the redemption that has been accomplished in Christ and the glorious, eternal salvation that may be known by the lavishly given grace of God—rather than what is justly deserved: an awful, eternal exclusion.

With this enlightening work of the Spirit, the great miracle of new birth may already be taking place. Light is coming into the darkness of what has been, for too long, an unregenerate life!

Isaiah 9:2

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

Isaiah 29:18

Out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.

The 'dominion of darkness' is such a deceptive realm. Its inhabitants are easily deceived into thinking that the darkness in which they live is actually light. But now, sight is coming to blinded eyes!

Isaiah 17:7

People will look to their Maker and turn their eyes to the Holy One.

Now *there's* a miracle!

Isaiah 32:3–4

The eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen. The mind of the rash will know and understand.

Isaiah 42:18

Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see!

We saw in Study 6 how Peter suddenly received revelation as to the identity of Jesus:

Matthew 16:16–17

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven."

And when the disciples had returned from their preaching mission, rejoicing that demonic powers had submitted to them, we also saw that:

Luke 10:21

At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise You Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children, for this was Your good pleasure."

The Father is the One who hides and reveals! Here we see the Son and the Spirit joining with Him in the joy of His wise choosing. It is certainly true that the more we understand the sovereign purpose and action of God in *regeneration*, the greater is our capacity to rejoice with Him in the revelation of the glory of His mercy and grace!

It must be understood that apart from the *enlightening* work of the Holy Spirit—revealing 'the way things really are' with God, humanity and in redemption—no one can be born again into the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 2:14

[The things of God] are discerned only [by] the Spirit.

regenerated by God's mercy, as the Spirit sovereignly brings:

- conviction

(a mounting awareness of innate, personal unrighteousness,
& a deeply disturbing sense of total accountability to God)

With the Spirit's enlightening work He begins to bring to bear the alarming experience of *conviction* in a person's heart and mind. As such conviction starts to have its way, the mounting 'birth-pains' of regeneration may well be taking place.

Jesus was keen to foreshadow the nature of this absolutely vital work of the Spirit, declaring:

John 16:8

"When [the Holy Spirit] comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment."

He went on to spell out what the focus of the Spirit's conviction in these three areas would be. This may be expressed in the following ways:

- **sin:** the *sinfulness* of refusing to believe that Jesus is the Messiah—the Saviour we so desperately need (John 16:9).
- **righteousness:** the *righteousness* we have utterly failed to express, which is fulfilled only in Jesus, who is now reigning over all things with the Father, and is, Himself, the only hope of righteousness that anyone can ever have (John 16:10).
- **judgment:** the *judgment* that is upon all who persist in going the way of 'the world', because 'the prince of this world', Satan—and the system he presides over—already stands condemned (John 16:11).

Such action of conviction is a most wonderful thing, even though it is deeply disturbing and traumatic. Without it all would remain willfully dead in their sins. It is (as Study 4 showed from Isaiah 28:21) part of His 'strange work', His 'alien task' of judgment—which is, in fact, the operation of His mercy, in order to promote the honour of His name and a life-giving experience of His grace.

Someone once said that the gospel is good news for bad people and bad news for good people. That is, those who are convinced that they are basically—of themselves—good, find no joy in the grace of God. They are, actually, hostile to it. Whereas those who have received revelation that they are—of themselves—basically *corrupt* embrace the gospel with great joy! It is, indeed, the *mercy of God* to bring anyone to a place of personal disturbance and despair before Him—no longer confident in their own righteousness and rightly alarmed regarding their eternal future.

It may be truly said that conviction of sin is the beginning of 'the fear of the LORD'—which is the beginning of wisdom, and all else!

the convicting law of God

We have spoken much of the law as God's gift to His people to bring them into the way of His kingdom—into the blessedness of being with Him, as His image, in His great purpose of love for His world. This is a magnificent and enriching function of 'the perfect law that gives freedom' (James 2:25). Rightly presented and received, the law is an indispensable source of great blessing for any human being.

However, apart from keeping a person in the blessedness of the way of God, the law also has another equally important—though less personally enjoyable—function. The

law of God reveals both His glorious character and His righteous demands, and in that, decisively defines and exposes sin. This, then, becomes the means by which He condemns every godless desire, thought, word and deed in the lives of all who resist the truth of His way.

confronting the lawless

The apostle Paul spoke of this function to those who needed to deal with ‘law people’ in the church at Ephesus. Some were seeking to exalt themselves as ‘law teachers’ without understanding the abundance of the grace of God. So Paul wrote:

1 Timothy 1:8–9

“We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is not made for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers. And it is for whatever is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God.”

The law exposes and condemns whatever is against the revelation of God’s glory and the holy calling He has given to His image.

silencing the proud rebel

Paul also spoke of the convicting work of the law to believers in Rome. To the Jews among them, who may have been tempted to see their possession of the law as something that made them righteous before God, he declared:

Romans 3:19–20

“Whatever the law says it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin.”

Before the law of God can do anything enriching or liberating for *anyone*—Jew or non-Jew—it must first silence any proud and self-righteousness claim to personal goodness, and expose the dark depravity of the sinful, human heart.

a personal, apostolic testimony

Later in his letter to the Romans, Paul gave his own testimony to the convicting, inflaming and deadly power of the law as it operates upon the conscience of every rebellious human being. For him, personally, this—in the end—proved to be utterly devastating. He said:

Romans 7:7–13

“I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin spring to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then the law is holy and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.”

“Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.”⁶

When the conscience is confronted with the obligating presence of law, the rebellious, fallen-human heart finds itself suddenly inflamed with all kinds of sinful passions! Where law is not present sin has, in one sense, limited animating power. But the moment law makes its insistent entrance into the mind, sin is immediately charged with a quickening force that brings it to life! Ungodly passion then rises up, and will not relent until it finds expression in thought, word or deed.

For Paul—a former proud and zealous, religious law-keeper—this rising up of passion took place most powerfully when he was confronted with that penetrating command to inner integrity, “You shall not covet.” To his utter dismay, his heart was then, day after day, filled with ‘every kind’ of greedy, covetous desire. With the command emblazoned upon his mind and agitating within his conscience, sinful desire was incited whenever he saw or heard of what others around him were enjoying—whether it was the stimulation of sensory experience, the possession of magnificent things or the elevation of personal status. These immediately became for him consuming passions that demanded expression one way or another! He was then totally deceived into thinking that if he gained such things he would have the life that his whole being hungered for—and was powerless to overcome his obsession with them.

Before this crisis took place, Paul—originally known as Saul of Tarsus—was *alive* with a sense of his own personal capacity for true human righteousness. He knew what a person should or shouldn’t do and celebrated his ability to operate accordingly—in his view, unlike so many others around him. But when ‘the law of life’ that could have kept him safely in the way of God, instead, inflamed his whole being with every kind of greedy desire, he was *crushed* with a humiliating and damning sense of his own moral impotence. This self-proclaimed vibrant and dynamic ‘man above all others’ was plunged into dark depths of personal despair. The *life* he imagined himself to have *had* was now *death*. And, as the book of Acts has shown, he was then pressed on—in self-righteous rage—to somehow re-establish himself as a mighty, moral achiever. Any abiding sense of life, however, had now left him. The law had done its lethal work. Indwelling sin was shown to be the utterly damnable thing it is. The proud rebel was a dead man with no hope of life—apart from the mercy and grace of God.

the law as the Spirit’s servant in the proclamation of the gospel

In all that Saul experienced under the operation of the law, the Holy Spirit was preparing him for a glorious revelation of the grace of the gospel. He was being sovereignly brought to that point where he would have eyes to see the glory of His Redeemer: the One who had descended into the place of accursedness on his behalf. And in this, the Spirit would create within him an urgent desire to be numbered with those who—united with the Saviour in His death—have at last died to the law’s condemning power. Our next study will proclaim the amazing reality of this!

⁶ This testimony shows the enormous part that a person’s conscience plays in the incitement of unrighteousness—an insight that will be of great value later, when a future study addresses the problem of habitual patterns of unrighteous behaviour.

As was seen in Study 3, every person—Jew or non-Jew—has the law of God written on their heart as at creation, and expressed in various ways through their particular culture. This, together with a powerful revelation of God's specially revealed, holy law—as the gospel is proclaimed—is used by the Spirit to bring a person into that indispensable experience we've been speaking of: deep, personal disturbance and alarm at their utter moral inability to live a true and full relational life in the presence of the Holy One—before whom they will one day stand.

In the light of his own experience, we may assume that Paul was careful to make sure that his proclamation of the gospel did, in fact, include revelation of the righteousness that our Maker requires of His image. When speaking to Governor Felix, we are told that he did just that.

Acts 24:25

As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient I will send for you."

Under the revelation of his human obligation to live according to the way of God and to exercise self-control with a view to the coming Day of Judgment, Felix found himself unsettled and exposed before His Maker—and a terrible sense of foreboding began to overtake him. The law was doing its work.

the Judgment to come

In Studies 4 and 6 we have already needed to speak of the great crisis of judgment that will take place at the end of history. But to briefly do so again now is necessary as we seek to understand the nature of the Spirit's work of conviction. In the Scriptures this awesome theme is a vitally important part of the gospel's proclamation.

The Last Judgment is one of the great facts of life. Moral creatures—created with such a regal and noble purpose—cannot operate in their Maker's world without ultimately coming face to face with this reality. Their high human calling brings with it great responsibility—and a total, final accountability.

Hebrews 9:27

People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.

Hebrews 4:13

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

The searching presence of the One to whom we all belong is inescapable, every moment of our lives.

Psalms 33:14–15

He watches all who live on earth—He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.

Psalms 90:8

You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence.

Not one corrupt desire, thought, word or deed will escape the judgment to come. All will be exposed and fall under the Holy One's just verdict.

Isaiah 30:30

The LORD will cause people to hear His majestic voice.

Romans 2:5

Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the Day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed.

The prophet Joel emphasized the need for all people to exercise their will in the light of what awaits the wicked, declaring:

Joel 3:14

"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the Day of the LORD is near."

the conviction that comes

The convicting work of the Holy Spirit is really an intensification of the normal work of the conscience—now more fully informed and sensitized by the Spirit's illumination through the word of God.

The experience of such conviction is, in fact, a foretaste of the Final Judgment. It is a merciful foreshadowing of it, *warning* the disturbed one to *flee* from what is ahead *into* the glorious salvation that has been accomplished in Christ!

In His mercy, God comes to His elect and demolishes their devices of self-righteous self-deception. He reveals the true nature of their human fallen-ness. They are given eyes to see the foul outworking of their inner corruption. Even their proudest moral achievements, done in self-conscious disregard for God, are seen as polluted.

Isaiah 64:6

All our [self-obsessed] righteous acts are like filthy rags.

The awful reality of ultimate divine judgment upon human unrighteousness becomes a terrifying thing. Those now seized by their sense of personal failure understand that they live before the One who is 'a consuming fire' (Deuteronomy 4:24).

Isaiah 33:14

Sinners ... are terrified; trembling grips the godless: "Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with the everlasting burning?"

When the word of God comes, all false moral confidence falls away.

1 Corinthians 14:24–25

They are convicted of sin and brought under judgment ... as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare.

Acts 2:37

When the people heard [Peter's words on the Day of Pentecost] they were cut to the heart and said, ... "What shall we do?"

This conviction that the Holy Spirit brings truly does create deep disturbance within the human spirit!

It must be said, though, that there is a form of conviction that is not of the Spirit. This may take the shape of intense anxiety over an acute sense of personal failure, yet is not a true conviction of sin brought about by the Spirit's illumination. It has to do with a proud spirit of *personal humiliation* rather than a humble acknowledgment of *moral culpability before God*. Such deficient inner-motivation and behavior is seen merely in terms of it minimizing one's capacity for 'the good life' (possibly from the Creator): a life to be godlessly pursued on one's own terms.

In another study it will be seen that false conviction may also be experienced when the conscience has been wrongly informed by cultural or personal law rather than the word of God—what Study 3 referred to as a 'corrupted conscience' (Titus 1:15) and a

‘darkened understanding’ (Ephesians 4:18). Satan, of course, delights to stir up such false agitation, in order to distract a person from the possible, liberating outcome of true conviction.

However, even though someone does come under genuine conviction of sin—even to the point of being greatly alarmed by it before God—this is no guarantee that the experience will result in new birth. The convicted one has simply received frightening insight into what rightly awaits them if they persist in rebellion. It is by no means certain that they will seek salvation: coming to desire God and His way.

The Spirit may bring conviction to a person who is never going to receive salvation purely as a declaration of the Father’s righteousness—as He did with Pharaoh whose heart was again hardened. The purpose of the Spirit’s work of conviction is, primarily, to reveal the rightness of divine law and the justice of divine judgment.

Human depravity is such that the rebel who comes under conviction will, by nature, *flee back* into the ‘safety’ of self-deception, *away* from the terrifying confrontation of God’s word—having no desire for ‘the riches of His grace’, His ‘glorious salvation’ and the ‘righteousness’ into which it calls them.

Those who have ‘seen and heard’ certain things and come under conviction in the light of them, yet have then *turned away* from such light, are in a most perilous, spiritual state. They have *hardened their heart* to the word of God! On the Day of Judgment such people will wish they had never seen or heard a thing. So much more devastating will be their condemnation and more horrible their self-reproaching misery! Any who know the blessedness of the grace of God would, naturally, want to implore such a one to return to that place of *moral and spiritual reality* from which they have fled (Acts 2:40).

But where there has been an authentic troubling work of the Spirit in those whom the Father has chosen by His grace, these will desperately flee *from* Satan’s dark, deceptive and deadly domain *into* their Maker’s life-giving realm of truth and light! By God’s great mercy they will—often after a long, drawn out battle, even of many years—fully embrace His just verdict against them, and seeing the blessedness of His kingdom press ‘forcefully’ into it: *seizing* the grace that has been set before them. As Jesus said:

Matthew 11:12 [ESV]

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.”

Ever since the time when John the Baptist announced that the kingdom was at hand, there have been powerful extremes of either reaction or response. Some—stirred up and incited by dark powers—have violently resisted the kingdom’s coming. Others—as objects of mercy and driven by the Holy Spirit—have ‘violently’ pressed into it. Nothing could now stop them from taking hold of the King’s salvation. So wonderful is the vision of it they’ve received!

It must be said, though, that not all who are regenerate by God’s mercy do *immediately* come into a dramatic, personally devastating experience of conviction. Sadly, there can be a kind of ‘dribbling into the kingdom’ (often through a more human-need-centred proclamation—or reception—of the gospel) that leaves a person with a deficient depth of conviction. But if they are to truly *enjoy* the abundant riches of God’s grace in Christ as His regenerate children, strong, penetrating conviction is something that will need to eventually take place—one way or another.

It's time now to describe the shape this intensity takes, as a person is brought into new birth.

regenerated by God's mercy, as the Spirit sovereignly brings:

- repentance

(a grace-inspired change of mind towards the Father)

The crisis of enlightenment and conviction having done its work, two gifts are then simultaneously given to bring a person into the *salvation* that is in Christ and into the *life* of the kingdom of God. The first of these is the gift of *repentance*.

the great life-giving mind change

Repentance is a grace-inspired, radical *change of mind* towards the Father. It involves—as indicated above—a self-surrendered agreement with Him as to His just verdict in regard to sin, but then also with that a resolute purpose to live according to His will and way.

It is a decisive *rejection* of the devil's lie and an equally decisive *acknowledgement* of the Father's truth. The cry of the heart towards Him is this: "ALL MY LIFE I HAVE LIVED AGAINST YOU; BUT NOW I WANT TO LIVE *FOR YOU!!!*"

The repentant person agrees wholeheartedly with the apostle Paul's declaration:

Ephesians 2:2–3

"You followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, [who rules over the abiding attitude and disposition of those who are by nature disobedient—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh and following] it's desires and thoughts; [and like everyone else] we were by nature [those who lived under and were destined for God's wrath]."

Repentance involves, then, acknowledgment of a life shockingly and perilously lived against our Maker: a life lived according to the way of the evil one. And with this recognition, an earnest *resolve* to seek the way of the Father.

When anyone comes to repentance, the deepest revolution the human spirit can ever know takes place. In Study 10 it will be shown that repentance is the *first flush*, the *initial surge* of a whole, new mind!

The mental shift that takes place in repentance, rightly, includes an acknowledgment that the *entire life* of a human being is the gift of God and belongs to Him. In it there is an affirmation that as the Divine Creator He has *total ownership* of every human creature made in His image. Their body, heart, mind, will, time, energies, abilities and material resources—all that they are and have—are His. This is one of the most fundamental, human realities that can be known.⁷

At least a *basic* acknowledgment of such divine ownership will, ideally, be part of any authentic response to the gospel, and will be increasingly recognized and expressed as the powerful thrust of repentance progressively works itself out in a person's life. And this, as they are progressively exposed to the truths of God's word.

Such a radical change of mind towards our Father-Creator-King is the desperate need of every person. Where it is refused there can be no experience of true human freedom and fullness in this life. But also, without it there will be no escape from the

⁷ Study 2 showed that being a servant/steward of God is essential to our created nature and calling.

wrath of God on the Day of Judgment—no eternal salvation. Repentance is the urgent obligation that all must fulfill!

Acts 17:30-31

He commands all people everywhere to repent. For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead.

Acts 2:38-39

Peter replied [to those who were cut to the heart], “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

repentance—a merciful gift of God

It is, indeed, absolutely essential for a person to repent if they are to be saved from their sins and enjoy—now and eternally—the life for which they were created. But we must understand that this great dynamic of repentance is not only *commanded* by God, it is also *given* by Him—otherwise it will never take place.

The deep depravity of the sinful human heart and its hostile resistance to its Maker is such that repentance is seen as an intolerable option. This is the case whether an unregenerate person is experiencing the goodness and kindness of God in blessing or His severity in judgment.

Our Faithful Creator continues to pour out His blessings upon those who don’t love Him (Acts 14:17; Matthew 5:45). Through such abundant expressions of kindness, all should have an inclination to seek Him and to change their mind regarding His worthiness of their affections and allegiance. But in the hardness of their heart, all doggedly resist such a prospect.

For people privileged to have experienced much of the enduring goodness of God, the question is rightly asked:

Romans 2:4

“Do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, forbearance and [longsuffering], not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”

Contempt for His kindness! And when, on the other hand, He brings His just judgments upon despisers of His way, there is also nothing within their hearts that will incline them towards a repentant response.

Revelation 16:9

They cursed the name of God who had control over these [judgments], but they refused to repent and glorify Him.

Left to them-selves rebellious human creatures won’t be savingly impacted by either the goodness or the severity of God. They will not be merely *wooed* into a radical mind-change towards Him through His tender expressions of loving-kindness. Nor will they be merely traumatized into it, by either tasting the painful present consequences of their rebellion or by the threat of eternal terrors that await the finally unrepentant.

The dark and desperate state of the sinful human heart is, clearly such, that our Creator’s great *regenerating power* is required to effect the response He commands! And this is precisely what He exerts as He brings His elect to Himself: enlightening, convicting, and forming within them the gift of repentance.

Yes, it is wonderfully true that REPENTANCE, THE BEAUTIFUL AND LIBERATING *MIND CHANGE*, IS A MERCIFUL AND SOVEREIGNLY IMPARTED GIFT OF GOD!!!

Acts 11:18

They ... praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

2 Timothy 2:25

[Those who oppose] must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.

Jeremiah 24:7

I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD. They will be My people, and I will be their God.

Repentance is a thing of great joy, leading a person into all the blessing of the Holy One. But as it is preceded by a disturbing experience of *conviction*, it may well be expressed with a trembling spirit.

Hosea 3:5

They will come trembling to the LORD and to His blessings.

that shabby counterfeit of repentance—remorse

Remorse is that 'fleshly', fallen-human reaction to personal failure that can sometimes be mistaken for repentance, for it may be expressed with a deep and intense sorrow.

But as Study 4 showed, although remorse does involve an experience of sorrow, it is not directed towards God—at least not in an authentic way (2 Corinthians 7:10). We have seen that remorse is just a self-absorbed regret for the way things have turned out. It has to do with a dark spirit of humiliation in the face of failed, proud agendas. The lament is, "I've made a mess of everything!" It may even be: "And now I will end up forever damned!" But none of these cries of the heart are necessarily indications of true repentance—just bitter fruits of a rebellious, God-refusing human existence. Such will, in fact, forever be the remorse-driven torments of the eternally lost. But these will have nothing of repentance about them.

In contrast to remorse, repentance is a dynamic, God-given, life-restoring experience. It includes deep sorrow before God that brings a complete *change of mind* towards Him, faith in the grace He has revealed (as we are about to see), a sweet humility before Him and others and a desire to be restored to His will and way.

As we proceed through our series, it will be seen how this liberating gift of repentance does, indeed, persistently work itself out in a redeemed person's life—in all kinds of personally and vocationally enriching ways!

regenerated by God's mercy, as the Spirit sovereignly brings:

- faith

(a simple, joyous & decisive act of trust in the Son's fully accomplished work—a *taking hold* of the grace of God)

As repentance is simultaneously joined by *faith*, the process of regeneration is complete! The enlightened and convicted person sees the glorious, saving grace of God in Christ (which will be fully proclaimed in our next study), repents in the light of it and *takes hold* of it in a decisive and joyous act of simple trust: "YES, I BELIEVE THIS IS WHAT YOU'VE DONE FOR ME. IT IS WONDERFUL!!!"

Acts 20:21

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must [have repentance toward God] and have faith [toward] our Lord Jesus.

Although there is an earnest resolve to now live according to the way of God, there is nothing that needs to be *done* in order to receive the grace of God, except believe. Indeed, there is nothing else that *can* be done!

John 6:28–29

They asked [Jesus], “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent.”

All kinds of actions will follow, but only *faith in God’s grace* will bring the eternal salvation that is in Christ.

1 John 3:23

This is His command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ.

To believe in the name of Jesus is to acknowledge who He is, what He has done, is doing and has promised to do—and, in obedience to His command, gladly embrace it all!

Acts 4:12

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.

Only one—the Lord Jesus Christ—has triumphed over sin and Satan on our behalf, and so, has the ability to save us from the rightful terrors of God’s wrath on the Day of Judgment. And all are commanded to look to Him alone.

Tragically, there are those who hear the message of His salvation, but whose trust remains in them-selves or elsewhere.

Hebrews 4:2

The message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith.

What Jesus has accomplished through His Death, Resurrection, Ascension and Outpouring of the Spirit is so incredibly wonderful and urgently needed. For this alone can bring the total forgiveness of our sins, acceptance as the children of God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, eternal hope—and, so, the fullness of life for which we were created! Simple, joyous faith is the most *obvious* and the only *wise* response to make.

Romans 10:9

If you [openly] confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

John 3:16

God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Acts 16:31

Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.

THE FATHER DESIRES WHOLE FAMILIES TO COME INTO HIS GREAT SALVATION!!!

faith—the Father’s merciful gift to those who are His

Although simple, joyous faith is, surely, the most obvious and the only wise response to make to the gospel, the unregenerate, sinful human heart will never come to it—

such is its self-righteous, grace-rejecting pride, hostile resistance to the way of God, and wild passion to pursue its own way.

Yes, when it comes to this matter of *saving faith* there is one absolute fact that must be understood: unregenerate sinners *cannot* exercise it. That is, they *will* not! They have the obligation to do so and will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment for refusing to, but the evil of the fallen-human heart is such that they *never will*!

Locked into a guilt-charged spirit of proud and hostile rebellion towards God, *the will* of every unregenerate person is held in inescapable bondage to powerful, self-obsessed passions (for sensory experience, magnificent things and personal status) and stubborn self-belief—making it *impossible* for them to truly repent and believe the gospel. Although under complete obligation to exercise saving faith, there is, in reality, a *total moral inability* to do so.

Without the regenerating power of the Spirit enlightening and convicting, awakening and enlivening a person's whole being towards their Maker, and WITHOUT HIS OVERRULING OF THE WILL, LIBERATING IT FROM BONDAGE TO GOD-REFUSING PASSION AND SELF-BELIEF, *NO ONE WILL EVER CHOOSE TO EXERCISE TRUE FAITH!!!*

Apart from such *divine mercy*, the joyous, God-loving, grateful humility of *saving faith* will under no circumstance rise up in a rebellious, polluted and idolatrous, human heart.

As with repentance, SAVING FAITH MUST BE SOVEREIGNLY IMPARTED AS A *GIFT FROM THE REDEEMING FATHER!!!* Yes, we must declare that whenever this faith is formed within a fallen human being, it is always a glorious and miraculous fruit of divine mercy and grace!

Then, what held no, or little, real interest becomes totally arresting. AS THE GIFT OF FAITH IS RECEIVED, SUDDENLY, FOR THE ELECT, THE GOSPEL OF GRACE IS THE BEST NEWS THEY HAVE EVER HEARD!!!

Acts 13:48

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

The gospel is to be proclaimed to all. But only those appointed to eternal life will receive the gift of faith. Every glad-hearted believer who honours the word that proclaims the glory of God is one upon whom the grace of God has come!

Acts 18:27

[Apollos was sent to encourage] those who by grace had believed.

Yes, a fallen human being believes the gospel of grace only through the merciful operation of divine grace towards and within them.

Paul was keen to give new believers in Thessalonica assurance of the Holy Spirit's facilitating work on their behalf, bringing them to faith. He declared:

2 Thessalonians 2:13b

"God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth."

The elect are objects of the Spirit's *sanctifying* action—as He *sets them apart* and *consecrates* them to become receivers of eternal salvation through faith!

the verdict upon unbelief in the face of open revelation of Christ

Once when speaking with people who were demanding proof that He was the Messiah, Jesus responded with these words:

John 10:26

“You do not believe because you are not My sheep.”

Notice He didn’t say, “You are not My sheep because you do not believe.” It was the other way round: They did not believe because they were not His sheep.

On another occasion to those who had at first believed but then became offended by His word, He said,

John 8:47

“Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

Throughout His ministry, Jesus was always revealing the glory of His eternal Sonship and the Spirit was witnessing to that reality within those the Father had chosen—and they were being drawn to Him. But by their hard-hearted unbelief others were clearly showing themselves to not be among the elect—who belonged to the Father and whom He was giving to the Son as His flock.

‘belief’ that is not saving faith

Under the enlightening influence of the Spirit, a person may well come to *believe* certain things about God, humanity and the creation, and even salvation—and possibly, for various reasons, may eagerly respond to these truths. But this doesn’t guarantee that saving faith has come to such a person. As Study 6 showed, Jesus had little confidence in much of the eager ‘believing’ He saw during the time of His earthly Ministry.

John 2:23–24

Many people saw the signs He was performing and believed in His name. But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all people. He did not need human testimony about them, for He knew what was in them.

The Scriptures tell us that even *demons* believe in the one true God (James 2:19). In this they are by no means ‘warm-hearted’ towards Him, and their understanding is no doubt distorted by hatred. But, nevertheless, they believe in the unsearchable greatness of the ‘God Who Is’—and tremble at the eternal terrors they are to face at His hand (Matthew 8:29). There is, of course, nothing ‘saving’ about that belief.

When it comes to unregenerate *human* believing, the outcome is no better. The most passionate ‘faith’ of unrepentant sinners can never have more than a merely human-centred agenda for gaining certain benefits or avoiding certain abhorrent outcomes—in time or eternity. Behind it is always a range of self-justifying, self-validating, self-securing, self-enlivening and self-calming pursuits.

Eager mental acceptance and appreciation of orthodox biblical doctrines, together with enthusiasm for ‘Christian’ values and activities, are, indeed, no proof of themselves that the gifts of repentance and saving faith have been received. Our next major section will, in fact, speak of three ‘immediate fruits’ of the Spirit’s work of regeneration.

the distinctive nature of saving faith

When the Father’s elect receive the gift of faith, there truly is a distinctive work of the Holy Spirit that takes place. In this, He operates not only *upon* the *mind* but also *within* the *heart*.

The apostle Paul expressed it in this way to the believers in the church at Corinth:

2 Corinthians 4:6

For God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Just as at the beginning light shone out of darkness at the Creator’s command, so also at new birth light is shone into the heart of sinners. In the face of the Redeeming Son—that is, in all that is revealed of His character and Being in what He has said and done—there is revelation of the glory of the Father’s grace. Entranced by the sheer loveliness and excellency of Christ, the elect are irresistibly drawn to Him. Arrested by His love for them in bearing their sins—and in the absolute pardon He holds out to them—all their resistance is overcome. They, at last, run to Him for His salvation, and find themselves to be, at once, by faith, *alive* with Him in the presence of His Father!

Such is the light that is shone into the heart at regeneration. And for the rest of their days, the more the elect know of it—and the glorious pleasure it brings—the more they want of it!

In Psalm 19 the things that God reveals to His people are described as being to them ‘perfect, refreshing to the soul’ (v.7); ‘right, giving joy to the heart’; ‘radiant, giving light to the eyes’ (v.8); and ‘sweeter than honey’ (v.10). The regenerate person senses and savours the great beauty of what is revealed to them. In this their heart goes on being drawn to their Maker, and their desire to live wholly for Him is joyously affirmed. This is the abiding nature of saving faith within the regenerate soul.

Paul again said to the new believers in Thessalonica:

1 Thessalonians 2:13

“We also thank God continually because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work [and energizing] in you who believe.”

The word they had received by revelation was not, to them, merely a set of religious ideas and propositions to be acknowledged as true. It was the very word of God Himself, which after its reception continued to be wonderfully at work within their hearts and lives!

We will see later that although saving faith remains within the regenerate, there is, nevertheless, a relentless, spiritual battle that rages on. The ongoing *expression* of faith in a believer is contested at every point by the world, the flesh and the devil—with the dreadful, ever-present possibility of idolatrous passion being inflamed in the heart, and darkened, faithless thinking *filling* the mind. Such an intrusion may be only momentary, or it may, tragically, endure for longer periods. It will be shown as the series continues, that great *diligence* is required to avoid falling into such states. The shape this effort must take will also be seen.

* * * * *

And so, we have the twin dynamics of repentance and faith. Both of which are truly merciful, Spirit-wrought gifts of God sovereignly imparted to each one whom He effectually calls.

In it all, the elect are like Lazarus. Quickened by the Spirit, their will is *freed* to respond to the word that has come to them—and they emerge from the tomb of an unregenerate life!⁸

God's mercy in regeneration producing the immediate fruit of:

- reconciliation

(a full restoration to friendship with the Father)

The moment a person is born again—through repentance and faith—they have a whole new attitude towards God the Father. No longer is there a guilty, hostile or dull-minded and indifferent spirit. They now know that the Father has reconciled them to Himself—that through faith in the En-fleshed, Son-Lamb-King they are His friends instead of His enemies. They know that they have been delivered from 'the coming wrath', and that here and now and forever He is *for* them rather than *against* them. He is truly loved, cherished and adored as the One who has, at last, mercifully brought His elect child into *peace* with Himself. His just condemnation being forever gone, A NEW, ETERNAL RELATIONSHIP OF GLORIOUS, INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP HAS BEGUN!!!

Colossians 1:21–22

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now He has reconciled you.

What a sweet fruit of repentance and faith we have here: NO LONGER ENEMIES IN OUR MIND TOWARDS OUR MAKER!!!

2 Corinthians 5:18

[God] reconciled us to Himself through Christ.

Romans 5:10–11

When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son. ... [We] rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

In our next study we will be exposed to the *gifts of salvation in Christ*. There it will be seen how we may have a *growing assurance* of the Father's enormous grace towards us in His Son. And how that makes *enjoyment* of this NEW FRIENDSHIP with Him to grow more and more as the years go by.

God's mercy in regeneration producing the immediate fruit of:

- conversion

(a 180° turn—from the way of Satan, to God & His way)

Conversion is a greatly significant, immediate fruit of new birth.

⁸ At this point, one last clarification may be helpful regarding those who don't receive the saving gifts we've been speaking of. It must be said that if a person will not obey the command to repent and believe the gospel, it is entirely because of their rebellious, hostile or stubbornly indifferent choice. But it is also because God, in His divine wisdom, has not chosen to have mercy on them, and has withheld the gifts of repentance and faith. In this—as spoken of above in the section on election—the fact always remains that rebel, human creatures are *culpable*: without excuse and totally blameworthy in their choice; and the Wise-Creator is *just*—absolutely right and fair—in His. Again, more than this we cannot say. Nor do we need to—nor should we.

When the mind is radically changed to seek the truth, together with a thrilling assurance of God's great grace in salvation, there is a decisive change in *direction*. The word 'conversion' means to make a complete 'about face'. To be going one way, and then, to turn and go the opposite way!

It has been said that before their conversion every person hated God and loved sin; but after it they love God and hate sin! That is, before, they chose *against* God and *for* sin; but now, choose *for* God and *against* sin.

As mentioned above, we will see in our next study that a regenerate person is still *fallen* and has to battle every day with 'the flesh': the old sinful drive that rises up within them. But a revolution in their heart and mind has taken place, so that remaining out of fellowship with God and continuing in the old way of Satan is no longer an option.

To go back to the old ways would make a regenerate child of God completely miserable. There has been born within their heart a desire for God's way and His will—and they have no greater joy than to be given to it!

In the following Scriptures the word for conversion is put in italics.

Psalms 51:13

Sinners will *turn back* to You.

Matthew 18:2-3

[Jesus] called a little child whom He placed among them. And He said, "I tell you the truth, unless you *change* and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Acts 3:19

[Peter said:] "Repent then, and *turn to God*."

Isaiah 31:6

Return to Him you have so greatly revolted against.

Acts 26:20

I preached that they should repent and *turn to God* and prove their repentance by their deeds.

1 Thessalonians 1:9–10

They tell how you *turned* to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

1 Peter 2:25

You were like sheep going astray, but now you have *returned* to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

A regenerate person has been turned (converted) 'from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God' (Acts 26:20)!

It is a fact that because of the fiercely relentless—and very often subtle—nature of a believer's battle with the world, the flesh and the devil, conversion is something that needs to be constantly renewed in their experience. Again, future studies will speak of the way this renewal may take place.

God's mercy in regeneration producing the immediate fruit of:

- wonderment

(a joyous, creaturely humility in the face of such mercy)

What we have here is actually the restatement of a constant theme running throughout this study: the absolute *wonder* of that supremely awesome action of our Sovereign Creator's mercy towards His regenerate children!

We have spoken of the amazing doctrine of election, that is, the wonder of being a person who has been chosen by sheer grace from before time began, to be conformed forever to the likeness of the Son. And then—in the midst of God-refusing willfulness—our being enlivened into an *intimate communion with the Father* through the Spirit's merciful operations of enlightenment and conviction, followed by the gifts of repentance and faith. With all this being the essence of the Apostle Paul's joyously, wonderstruck declaration:

Ephesians 1:4-5a; 2:1-5

[The Father] chose us [in Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless [before Him in love] having [predestined us for adoption to sonship, in accordance with the pleasure of His will—to the praise of [the glory of His] grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves. ... As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air [who rules over the abiding attitude and disposition of those who are by nature disobedient; among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh,] following its desires and thoughts; [and like everyone else] we were by nature [those who lived under and were destined for wrath. BUT GOD, WHO IS RICH IN MERCY, BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT LOVE WITH WHICH HE LOVED US, EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN TRANSGRESSIONS, MADE US ALIVE WITH CHRIST]!!!

The regenerate children of God are rightly exhorted to remain gripped by the wonder of what has been sovereignly effected towards them. For in such assurance they are *liberated* from any spirit-deadening claim to self-righteousness or moral superiority. Rather—let it be said again—their joyously humble-hearted and awestruck cry is: "HE HAS HAD MERCY ON ME!!!"

And, of course, such childlike wonderment is multiplied as the reality of the grace that has been freely received is more and more enjoyed—as our next study will show.

CONCLUSION

From all that has been seen above, it must surely be said that the great crisis of regeneration truly is an incredible and glorious event.

In the redemptive rebirth of any child of Adam, there is the *coming of light* and *holy disturbance*, the *creation of a mind intently set on the truth*, the *opening of a heart to believe* in the liberating Son, the *dawning of peace* with the reconciling Father, an *entirely new direction in living* (happily alive to God and His will) and an ongoing, *gentle-spirited and awe-filled astonishment at His mercy*. And with all of this, then, leading to a growing experience of human freedom and fullness—to the glory and praise of their Redeemer!

Now at last we are ready for the long-awaited proclamation, so often spoken of, in previous studies: the amazing *grace of God* that is lavished upon all who are mercifully united with His Son.

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