

Gospel and Identity in Christ — Sonship

Outline

1. Our Identity in Christ is sonship — born of God
2. Understanding our Adoption into God's Family
3. Living with our new identity requires Renewing our Minds
4. Five primary ways God sees us in Christ

1. Our identity in Christ is sonship — born of God

*Eph 1:3-8 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be **holy and blameless** in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us for **adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ**, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,*

The gospel—the good news. Father God wanted a family of holy and blameless children like His Son Jesus. But we are born sinners and live sinful life. To fulfil God's plan, Jesus lived a sinless life that we should have lived but didn't. Then out of love, He died, paying the punishment for sins that we should have paid so that we shouldn't. Jesus' sinless life is credited to our account as if we had lived that life. When God looks at us as believers, He does not see our sins but sees only the holy and blameless life of Jesus.

2 Cor 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus endured immense suffering because God loved us and wanted us in His family even before He created the world. When we believe the gospel (good news), we become part of God's family because He sees His Son's holy and blameless life in us.

John 1:12-13 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

John 1:12 repeats the same thing in two ways

- *Yet to all who received did him ...'.*
- *Those who believed in **his name**.*

To believe in His Name or receive Him applies only to those genuine believers. They trust Jesus and openly confess with gratitude that Jesus is their Lord and Saviour. To those who displayed such faith in Jesus, **He gave them the right to become children of God**. It means **He gave** them the privilege to become children of God. That privilege was not there before they became believers, but God **gave** them that privilege after they became believers. It's the privilege of being **adopted** as sons and daughters into God's family (Eph 1:5).

v13: In one sense, all humanity, believers and unbelievers, are God's offspring (Acts 17:29). But before people become believers in Jesus, they are born of **natural descent** (heritage, race, caste), **human decision** (sexual means) and **husband's will** (a man taking the lead in the sexual act). And all people were sinful

and in rebellion with God. But once they became believers in Jesus, they were given His righteousness and became children of God. It has nothing to do with how much or how little education they have, whether their parents were married or not, and what race and class of society they came from. But now, it is entirely due to an act of God. God gave believers in Jesus this privilege. We don't earn it, nor do we strive for it. We can only receive and believe it; we must rest in the truth that God adopted us into His family.

2. Understanding our Adoption into God's Family.

In the Bible, we read Jesus addressing His Father with great respect. Jesus calls

Him Heavenly Father (Matt 5:48), Holy Father (John 17:11) and Righteous Father (John 17:25). But only once in the Bible does Jesus call His Father by a very intimate name—"Abba". It was when He was in agony and sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Mark 14:36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup

from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Why did He choose to call the Father "Abba"? What does "Abba" mean? In Aramaic (language spoken by Jesus), Abba is the intimate name children would call their father from when they learned to talk. It shows a child's innocence and dependence on their father. It is a name that Jesus used to dig deep into His relationship with His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus will not leave us orphans or fatherless (John 14:18). He gives us His Spirit by whom we call the Father "Abba".

Gal 4:6 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." (also Rom 8:15) — that's why Jesus is not

ashamed to call us brothers and declares the Name of the Father to us (*Heb 2:11*). Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us that we should be called the sons of God (*1 John 3:1*).

Illustration: When a couple adopts a child from an orphanage, the child must make

a big adjustment, especially if the child is older than five years. The adjustment is even greater when the couple has children of their own. The adopted child realises they are not of the same "blood" as the natural children and feels the difference. But I have seen some cases where the adopted child has adjusted very well, blended into the family, and has natural children's privileges (rights). But I have also seen more cases when the adopted child has not adjusted well even though the parents were very loving. What went wrong? The issue is complex.

There are two main problems:

(i) Deep roots in the adopted child's heart come from the child's original parents

and need healing.

(ii) The child consciously or unconsciously always blames the original parents for abandoning them—resulting in an orphan spirit. That orphan spirit creates an extensive and deep hole in the adopted child's heart that cries for acceptance from others and can never be filled. It causes rejection and resentment in the adopted child.

But when God adopts us into His family, we have the same privileges as His Son, Jesus; we are joint heirs with Christ. Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brothers

and sisters (*Heb 2:11*). Our Abba Father God fills the big hole in our hearts with His lavish love. Of course, there is suffering to be called brother and sister of Jesus, our elder brother—because the world rejected Him, they will reject us too. But it's nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed in us. God has destined us for glory! (*Rom 8:18*)

1 John 3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Rom 8:16-18 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

¹⁸ *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

Heb 2:11 Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters

3. Living with our new identity requires **Renewing our Minds**

Our identity in Christ radically differs from how we saw our identity before we believed in Jesus as our Saviour and Lord. It is usual for believers to know their sins are forgiven and have the assurance of their salvation. Nevertheless, most believers live in their old identity — this is normal. And it takes time to renew our minds to grasp our new identity and live accordingly. **The renewal of our minds must be intentional and something we must believe because it is accurate and was bought with a great price — the blood of Jesus. The great war raged by the devil against believers is to prevent this truth of sonship from being established in our hearts.** It's like having our right arm dislocated at the shoulder when we do not grasp our identity in Christ. The arm is there, but it cannot function properly.

Understanding how God sees us is the real issue to help us grasp our new identity. When we **constantly adjust our thinking** to how God sees us, we will get hold of our new identity and make it our foundation to grow in maturity.

4. The five primary ways God sees us when we believe in Jesus:

(i) God chose you first to be His child, even before He created the world.

The foundation of your identity is that God chose you with love to adopt you into sonship before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4-5). He loved you before you were born, even before He made the world. Therefore, He completely accepts you as His child. We all have wounds of rejection in this broken world. And we all crave acceptance by parents, friends, and society. But let's build our foundation on Almighty God accepting us as His children. Then we can handle any insult and rejection. And even though it may cause temporary pain, we can overcome it.

(ii) God considers you extremely valuable and priceless. The price of any article can only be measured by what one is prepared to pay for it. And as believers, God redeemed us with the precious blood of His Son Jesus. It should give you self-esteem. *(1 Pet 1:18-19 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect).*

(iii) God completely forgives you. Even as a mature believer, you may have sinned yesterday. But if you renounce and repent of it, God declares you just as if you had never sinned (justified) — He declares you clean. All because of the righteousness of Jesus that God put into your account (2 Cor 5:21).

(iv) God loves you eternally. There are two characteristics of God's love for you:

- God's love for you is eternal (John 3:16, Jer 31:3)
- God's love for you is unconditional, not "if" you are good. God is not moody. His steadfast love endures forever (Lam 3:22-23, Ps 136).

(v) God has chosen you to be a capable royal priest. (*1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*). A priest is a person who represents God to man and man to God. God has made us capable of being His ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20) — to represent God to man. And He gave us the ministry of intercession to represent man to God (1 Tim 2:1-4). We are all broken people and lack the confidence to represent God. We think our prayers are weak and useless. But you must not listen to the world but to God, who says you can be a priest.

Conclusion: When you feel insecure, fearful, lacking confidence, or incapable, consider that you are listening to the devil and the world and not to God and resist those negative feelings. Instead, find your rest in the truth that you are a beloved child of God. It will take time, but by prayer, persistence and declaring that you are God's precious child, you will have victory.

Gospel and Identity in Christ — Bride of Christ

Outline

1. Our identity in the world
2. Our identity in Christ
3. Our identity as Bride of Christ
4. The battle between our identity in Christ and the world

1. Identity in the world: Identity is how we view ourselves deep in our hearts. In the world, we measure our identity by our function (what we do), our status (in terms of earnings and work responsibilities), our heritage (family name, caste), and our possessions. But also, we constantly measure our identity compared to other people around us. And then we are troubled by comparisons, fear, rejection and strife. Everyone faces the same problems concerning identity — even communities, nations, and races have identity problems. The result is human misery.

The problem began when our first parents, Adam and Eve, turned away from a loving God to live independently rather than trust God as their Maker. It happened because Satan, a rebellious angel, tempted our first parents, and they listened and became rebellious themselves. We inherited their rebellious spirit, and it deeply affected our hearts. We can't find our way back again. So, sin, death and human misery reign throughout this world. Satan seemed to have won.

But God sent His Son to rescue us. The Son of God became man—Jesus Christ. He lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died for our sins. Then on the third day, He rose again. He **transformed** all who repent and believe in Him by giving them a new heart and spirit (prophesied in Ezk 36:26). Believers in Jesus are a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come (2 Cor 5:17). This is the good news — **the gospel**.

2 Cor 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

2. Our Identity in Christ: As part of the new creation, God gave believers in Jesus two essential new spiritual identities or spiritual relationships — children of the Father (John 1:12-13) and Bride of Christ (Eph 5:25-32, Rev 19:7-8).

John 1:12-13 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Eph 5:31-32 "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the Church.

Rev 19:7-8 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."

But there is a difference between these two spiritual identities in Christ. When it comes to being children of the Father, we are individually a son or daughter of the Father. But when it comes to being the Bride of Christ, the church is **the Bride of Christ** (Eph 5:32 above).

3. Our Identity as the Bride of Christ: Though it is a collective identity, each believer is individually responsible for their actions within the church.

Our responsibility is to honour the Bride of Christ. When we do that, we honour Christ (Psalm 16:2-3). We know our sins are forgiven and have the assurance of salvation. Yet, most believers continue to live in their old worldly identity—causing comparisons, strife and divisions in the church. Then we dishonour the Bride of Christ and we dishonour Christ Himself. **The Church is His bride** that He bought with a great price — by His blood. We must see ourselves the way Jesus sees us—His bride. This is recognising or discerning the body of Christ when we have holy communion. (*1 Cor 11:28-30 Everyone ought to examine themselves before eating the bread and drinking from the cup. 29 For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. 30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and many of you have fallen asleep*). To discern means to know what is happening within a local church, especially the relationships with one another. Poor relationships will make the church weak, and bad relationships will hinder healing.

To understand our new identity, we must renew our minds. It means to see Jesus on the cross and seek God by reading His word, praying for revelation of who He is and His ways. On the cross, I see the Almighty Son of God become a man who is holy and humble. He lived that I should have lived but couldn't and then died for my sins instead of me because He loved me. And continuously seeing Jesus on the cross does four vital things to my heart:

(i) It makes me **secure in His love** because Jesus went to the cross because he loves me and tells me to remain in His love. (John 15:9, "*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love*"). The Father loves Jesus

infinitely. And Jesus loves us the same—infinately. On a day when you do good deeds, Jesus doesn't love you more. And on a day when you do evil deeds, Jesus does not love you less. You can be secure in His love.

(ii) It makes me **humble** because I know I am the worst of sinners. Yet, Jesus died for me (*1 Tim 1:15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst*).

(iii) It makes me **rejoice, even in trials**, because I am reconciled with God eternally (Rom 5:11). Nothing and nobody can separate me from His love (Rom 8:31-39).

(iv) It makes me **want to know Jesus more** and identify myself with His death and resurrection (*Phil 3:10-11 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead*)

4. The battle between our identity in Christ and our identity in the world

The devil rules the world system. Jesus called him the prince of this world (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).

The devil wants to make the church (Bride of Christ) weak and ineffective. He makes us measure our identity by what we do with our hands (function) rather than what we do with our hearts (love for our Bridegroom—Jesus). And it appears the devil is succeeding because the church is full of strife and division.

Illustration from an earthly marriage. Generally, in a marriage, the husband works hard as a provider for the family, and the wife works hard as a homemaker. In modern marriages, both husband and wife work as providers, and both share in homemaking. But in all cases, what will make the marriage successful and joyful is love between the husband and wife. In fact, without love, marriage becomes dull and mechanical. So, in principle, the primary focus is what we do with our hearts towards each other, and the secondary focus is what we do with our hands that make the marriage successful.

Similarly, in our bridal relationship with Jesus, our primary focus must be our intimacy with Him (what we do with our hearts). Notice in John 15:9 that Jesus loves us the way the Father loves Him—which is enormous. And He calls us to love Him with our whole hearts, soul, mind and strength. Our secondary focus should be our ministry to the world, which is also important but secondary. Then, when you face trials, criticism, rejection etc. — it will not shake you.

Paul was careful to insist that our primary focus must be our intimacy with Jesus
2 Cor 11:2-3 I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. 3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

What was the joy set before Jesus that He endured the shame of the cross?

Heb 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Rev 19:7-8 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people).

The joy couldn't be to sit at the Father's right hand because He was there

before

the foundation of the world. But the joy Jesus sought when He went to the cross and endured its shame was to win a holy bride for Himself.

But why is Jesus called the Lamb on His wedding day? Because the Bride will see Him face to face and know the price He paid for her. She will look deep into His heart to find the cost of ultimate love. And she will love Him also.

Conclusion: My dear friends, our primary identity should be that we are children of God and, collectively, the bride of Christ. In both cases, our primary focus should be what we do with our hearts (love Jesus) rather than what we do with our hands (work for Him). When we get our primary focus right, the secondary focus will be an outcome of our love for Him. Only when we are precise on our primary focus will we recognise the beauty of the church (His bride) and discern the Body of Christ in an honourable manner.

*Psalm 16:2-3 I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; apart from you, I have no good thing." 3 I say of the **holy people** who are in the land, "They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight."*

The holy people in Psalm 16 refer to God's covenant people. In the New

Testament,

they are the Church, His Bride; We delight in her by encouraging, respecting, loving, and meeting the needs of every local church member. Jesus said, "By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." (John 13:35)

Gospel and Grasping Our New Identity in Christ

Outline

1. The Kingdom of God advances by Revelation
2. Two Aspects of Revelation
3. The Power of the Second Aspect

1. The Kingdom of God advances by Revelation

Matt 16:15-18 [Jesus asks His disciples] 15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." 17 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. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

v16: Simon Peter declares Jesus is the **Messiah**, the **Son of God**. What does it mean?

- **Messiah**, a Hebrew term, means the "Anointed One" whom God sent and empowered to deliver His people and establish His kingdom. The equivalent word is "Christos" in Greek or Christ in English. Jesus is the true Messiah, anointed by God to deliver people from Satan, sin and death and establish the Kingdom of God. But the Jews hoped the Messiah would be a king who would save the Jews from Roman oppression. Though Jesus privately accepted the title and function of the Messiah, as in Peter's declaration in Matt 16:16-17, He told Peter not to tell anyone (Mark 8:29-30). This is known as Jesus' "messianic secret." He was the Messiah but did not want the public to know it too early in His ministry. This is because Jesus' kingdom was not political but spiritual (John 18:36). If Jesus had publicly used the title "Messiah," people would have thought He was a political king. His ministry would end before the appointed time.

- **Son of God:** When the New Testament presents Jesus as the Son of God, it emphasises two aspects of His person — His eternal relation to God as His Father (John 1:18) and His perfect revelation of the Father to the human race (John 14:9, Heb 1:3).

Simon's declaration was a unique and mighty declaration of faith in Jesus— declaring Jesus to be Messiah (Saviour) and Son of God (Lord). And though Jesus was not yet crucified for our sins, died, buried and resurrected at that time —

Simon accepted Jesus' true identity and mission. Simon is now a Christian, born of God and entered God's Kingdom. Jesus says this revelation comes not from *flesh and blood but from "My Father in heaven"*. Jesus makes it clear to us that the entry to the Kingdom of God is only by the revelation that Jesus is Saviour and Lord.

Jesus addresses Simon by his earthly birth name *Simon son of Jonah*, and tells him that Simon will be called Peter from now on. It is as though Simon, son of Jonah, is now born again, but this time not as a son of Jonah but as a child of God (*John 1:12-13*), a new creation (*2 Cor 5:17*) with a **new identity — Peter**.

Then Jesus says that He will build His Church on this "rock"— on this new identity that came by revelation from Father God.

The Church will overcome the gates of Hades. (The proper translation is Hades and not Hell. Hell is the place of eternal punishment). Hades, here, refers to the place of darkness ruled by evil powers—the kingdom of darkness. "Gates" refer to evil principalities and powers that rule Hades. The Church born from above by revelation will smash through the forces of darkness on earth and set the captives free—spreading the kingdom of God on earth as it is heaven.

The good news (gospel) is that the eternal Son of God became a man named Jesus, **the Messiah** (Christ) sent by God to deliver the human race from Satan, sin and death. But not only that but also to make them children of God — children not born of human descent (caste, gender or race), not of human decision (whether born of parents who are married or not) but born of God (*John 1:12-13*). Furthermore, God will partner with these children of God to overthrow the kingdom of darkness and bring about the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

The importance of good behaviour and good works: There are many good things about good behaviour & good works, e.g,

- It glorifies the Father (*Matt 5:16*) — *they will see your good deeds and praise the Father*
- It makes the believer more credible in their witness (*2 Cor 6:3*) — *we put no stumbling block in anyone's path so that our ministry is not discredited*
- It disarms an unbeliever's objections and defences (*Rom 12:19-20* *Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this,*

you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.)

But the severe limitation of good behaviour and good works is that they cannot smash through the powers of darkness. Only revelation knowledge can do that.

For example, you can show great love and compassion to a person bound by evil spirits, but that will not drive away the evil spirit. You can only drive out the evil spirit in Jesus' Name, provided **you grasp the revelation** of your identity in Christ. So, the Kingdom of God advances only by revelation from God.

2. Two Aspects of Revelation

(i) **The Essential Aspect:** In Matt 16:16, Simon Peter declares, "***You are the Messiah, Son of the living God***" — by this revelation from Father God, Simon, son of Jonah, **enters the Kingdom of God**. This is the first aspect of the revelation. It is the **essential** aspect

(ii) **The Effective Aspect:** In Matt 16:18, Jesus said, "***I tell you that you are Peter*** and upon this rock, I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it". This revelation from Jesus gives Simon a new identity that will smash through the kingdom of darkness. The second aspect of revelation enables Peter (the believer) to **bring the Kingdom of God to earth**. This is the **effective** aspect — you are Peter.

If Simon doesn't grasp this **effective** aspect of the revelation, he will declare — I can't do this, and I can't do that. He will not be able to move ahead because of fear. Even though he is born again, he will be stuck in his old identity as Simon, son of Jonah. He cannot do anything except good works (which cannot advance the Kingdom of God on earth). Most people who get stuck in unbelief start blaming others, especially their parents/spouses/children. But remember, **blaming others has an expiry date**. However, people who grasp their new identity don't want to waste time. Despite opposition, they are eager to spread the message of the Kingdom of God. It is the grasping of the second aspect of revelation that empowers Peter. Jesus says that the Church consists of Peters, who grasp the revelation that they are children of the Most-High God and who can smash through the gates of Hades. Of course, the Holy Spirit empowers them to accomplish the mission of Jesus.

But there will be excuses. There will be domestic responsibilities, uncooperative spouses, young children, lack of time, lack of finance etc. In Matt 8:21-22, in response to a disciple who wanted to first bury his father before

following Him, Jesus replied, "Let the dead bury the dead, but you come and follow Me". The Lord of heaven will not show disrespect to parents—but what He means is don't make excuses nor fall into traps. There is urgency and priority for the Kingdom of God to expand. Don't allow stubborn parents or spouses to stop you from answering the call to further the Kingdom of God. Most of us have domestic responsibilities—but we must **set our hearts** on advancing the Kingdom of God despite it. And when and where there is a will, there will always be a way.

So many in our churches are genuinely born again, having grasped the first aspect of the revelation. They love the Lord and live godly lives but do not grasp the second aspect of the revelation. They will certainly go to heaven, but on earth, all their good works will not be able to break through the gates of Hades.

One can also look at these two revelations as:

- (a) **Who do you say Jesus is?** — Simon told Jesus, "*You are the Messiah, Son of the living God.* When you grasp this, **God does work in you** (The Essential Aspect).
- (b) **Who Jesus you are as a believer?** — Jesus says, "*You are Peter, and I will build My church upon this rock. And the gates of Hades will not overcome it.* God works through you (The Effective Aspect) when you grasp this.

3. The Power of the Second Aspect (the Effective Aspect)

Matt 16:18-19 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

In John 15:5, Jesus says, "*Apart from me, you can do nothing*". We need Jesus to overcome the kingdom of darkness. God is self-sufficient. He doesn't need us. But since He has given the earth for man to rule, He chooses not to do anything without partnering with man.

So now, God and believers have become partners to bring the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. In **v19**, Jesus tells us, "*As your partner, I will give you the keys of the kingdom to bind and to loose, and all heaven is behind you*".

But it would be best if you took the initiative (the keys are in your hands), and I will back you with the power of the Holy Spirit. The only condition is that you must know my character, my will and my mission so that I can be your partner (Don't expect Me to partner with you to rob a bank)

- When Moses faced the evil magicians of Pharaoh, he used the staff (symbolic of keys), and God's power was with him to defeat them.
- When David faced Goliath, he was confident of God's will and used his sling (symbolic of keys) to knock Goliath down.
- When Abraham interceded for Sodom, he was confident of God's mercy and used intercession as a key to saving his nephew, Lot.

Conclusion: 2 Kings 6:13-18 tells a fantastic story of how a strong army with chariots of the King of Aram surrounded Elisha and his servant to capture him. *The servant cried, "What shall we do". Elisha replied, "Don't be afraid. There are more with us than those with them. And Elisha prayed that God would open the servant's eyes so that he may see it. God listened, and the servant saw the hills were full of horses and chariots, representing heaven's armies. Then Elisha prayed that God would strike the armies of Aram with blindness. The enemy forces became blind and were captured, etc.*

Paul prays the same prayer as Elisha prayed for his servant—to open our eyes. Paul prays for the two aspects of revelation: (a) **v17** & (b) **vv 18-21**. Paul prayed, *"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know the hope he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."* (Eph 1:17-22).

I want to pray for you a shorter version of Paul's prayer. I pray for you that:

- You will grasp the first and second aspects of revelation (Essential and Effective Aspects of Revelation)
- Your eyes will be open to know that the armies of heaven are with you as you use the keys of the kingdom in Jesus' Name to smash through the gates of Hades and bring in the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Remember, the armies of heaven are with you as you take the next step in faith. The next step could be small, but the armies of heaven are with you and will multiply your offering. Imagine every believer in the church taking the next step forward—WOW.

Gospel and Fear in Times of Trouble

Outline (Psalm 11)

1. The Language of Fear (Ps 11: 1-3)

2. The Language of Faith (Ps 11: 4-7)

(i) The LORD is on His heavenly throne (11:4b) — He is in control

(ii) The LORD is in His holy Temple (11:4a) — He is available

(iii) The LORD observes everyone (11:4c) — He examines our hearts

1. The Language of Fear (Ps 11:1-3): *In the LORD, I take refuge. How then can you say to me: "Flee like a bird to your mountain. 2 For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. 3 When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"*

11:1-2: This psalm of David was probably written when he was king. But we need to find out what dangers David was facing. Like all rulers, he certainly faced the constant threat of assassination. In India, we saw the assassination of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. In the USA, they saw the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln and John Kennedy. Undoubtedly, David faced constant threats from unknown wicked people (11:2).

11:3: But David faced a more challenging threat — the foundations of society were being destroyed (11:3). There is no justice and no law and order in the land. Violence and corruption increased; people did not keep promises, and good behaviour was rarely seen. Such a situation greatly discourages the righteous (**what can the righteous do?**). It tempts them to withdraw, not open their mouth, not make a stand etc. It is the prevailing condition in most countries worldwide, and India.

In 2020, the problem worldwide was more dangerous because of the Covid pandemic. The covid germs are invisible. They strike without warning. They kill people by the thousands. Thousands more lost their jobs. Schools and colleges had to shut down. Youths were getting desperate; families were locked in their homes, resulting in fights, depression, and fear of the future.

In David's situation, his advisors told him to flee like a bird to the mountains — go, run away (11:1). That's **the language of fear**.

Note: Sometimes, God tells us to temporarily withdraw from a dangerous situation. The angel told Joseph to escape to Egypt with Mary and the baby Jesus

because King Herod wanted to kill the baby Jesus. (If Herod killed Jesus as a child, it would have destroyed God's plan of salvation). However, they returned when Herod died. That's **the language of wise caution** and not fear. In this covid pandemic, we must wear a mask, keep social distance, wash hands and get vaccinated. Caution does not give up your calling, but fear does. In David's case, his advisors told him to flee and run away; what could he do? — that's fear!

David spoke **the language of faith**. He asked his advisors why he should flee. Fleeing from his responsibilities as king would undoubtedly add to the problems and confusion in Israel. In difficult situations, the right thing to do is to seek refuge in the LORD (11:1). Such a response would glorify the LORD and demonstrate love for His people. David shows us what it means to take refuge in the LORD by speaking the language of faith to his mind and heart in 11:4. Notice the enormous difference between the language of fear in 11:3, expressed by David's advisors and the language of faith in 11:4, spoken by David.

2. The Language of Faith (Ps 11:4-7): ORD *The L is in his holy temple and on his heavenly throne. He observes everyone on earth; his eyes examine them.*

⁵*The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion. 6 On the wicked, he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot. 7 For the LORD is righteous; he loves justice; the upright will see his face.*

David shows us what it means to take refuge in the LORD by speaking the language of faith to his mind and heart in 11:4. There are three things David says:

(i) The LORD is on His heavenly throne (Ps 11:4b). He is in control: God is always ruling the world from His heavenly throne, and He always has a plan for His glory and the good of those He chose to be His people.

Isa 14:24, 26-27 The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will happen. ...26 This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. 27 For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?"

Isa 46:10 I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'

Rom 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

The problem is that we human beings think we are in control of the world. And when we can't control the situation, we feel the world is out of control. And we worry, get depressed, and become fearful of the future. Then **we must speak the language of faith to our minds** — that God is on His heavenly throne and has everything under His control. We must quieten our minds and start trusting that God will turn out everything for His glory and our good. However, **the language of faith requires humility** to say we are not in charge, but God is. It is especially true for strong leaders like Pharaoh. He couldn't humble himself, which led to a disaster for the Egyptians.

Consider the story of Joseph in Gen 37-50. Joseph had one problem after another in his life. But he summed up his troubles by saying to his brothers in Gen

50:20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, saving many lives.

Consider the story of Jesus & His apostles in the four gospels. His apostles had such high hopes that Jesus was the Messiah, mighty in word and deed and would redeem Israel (Luke 24:19-20). But when they saw Him crucified on the cross, their hopes were dashed, and their world fell apart (They did not expect Him to rise from the dead at the time of His death and burial). Yet God was in charge all along. Through Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, God did the most extraordinary deed in all history. God defeated the three enemies of God and man — sin, Satan and death and redeemed humanity. The apostles eventually grasped it. They said:

Acts 4:27-28 Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

(ii) The LORD is in His holy temple (Ps 11:4a) — He is available. The throne of God is infinitely high above and remote. But the temple was here on earth in Israel, where the Israelites could have fellowship with God and be comforted in their hearts. Though David could not understand the reason for all his troubles, he could say to his heart, "*Cast your cares on the LORD, and He will sustain you*". (Ps 55:22).

Notice, throughout Ps 11, David calls God by the name Yahweh (translated in English as "LORD") —the God who made a covenant with the people of Israel.

Even

though the Israelites were God's people with the covenant, they could not get

close to God and see His glory, or they would die. Not even Moses could (Exodus 33:18-20). In the temple, God's presence dwelt behind the veil in the Holy of Holies (or the Most Holy Place). The veil was 4 inches thick, according to the Jewish historian Josephus. It represented a barrier between the Holy God and sinful people. Only the High Priest could enter that space behind the veil with the blood of a sacrificial lamb, only once a year on the Day of Atonement. The LORD was available to His people in the temple through a complex system of cleansing laws, animal sacrifice, and a designated priesthood. He answered their prayers and comforted them so they could cast their cares on Him (Ps 55:22).

Then Jesus comes in John 2:12-22 and clears the temple of buying and selling. The Jewish leaders ask Him for a sign to prove His authority to do this. Jesus answered, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days," but the temple He had spoken of was His body (John 2:19, 21).

When Jesus died on the cross, the thick veil in the temple was torn apart from top to bottom. The way for fellowship with God was open to human beings irrespective of gender and race. **This is the gospel—the good news.** Jesus lived a sinless life that we should have lived but didn't. Then out of love, He died, paying

the punishment for sins that we should have paid so that we shouldn't. Jesus' sinless life is credited to our account as if we had lived that life. When God looks

at the record of our life, He does not see our sins but sees only the sinless life of Jesus, so God rewards us accordingly.

2 Cor 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus meant in John 2:19, 21: I am the temple of God. I am the High Priest who brings My blood of sacrifice for your sins. So that the barrier (veil) between God

and man is torn apart, you can go right into the Most Holy Place to have deep intimacy with Me, your LORD and God. You can seek My face. It is the New Covenant in My blood.

Now you have peace and comfort in your mind (11:4b — the LORD is on His heavenly throne) and confidence in your heart that you can seek the presence of God (11:4a — the LORD is in His holy temple). With this, you can face your fears with faith that the Almighty God is with you and always willing and able to help you.

Heb 4:16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

(iii) He observes everyone on earth (Ps 11:4-7) — He examines our hearts.

Whether we face international disasters (like the covid pandemic), national disasters (like earthquakes, floods and famine) or personal disasters of various types, the general principle to bear is to ask what God is saying to us. And the general answer is that there will be a day when God will judge the world. That day will surely come when He will seriously punish the wicked and abundantly bless the righteous (11:5-7). But God does not want anyone to perish but to repent and believe in the gospel. And for this purpose, God calls us to pray for everyone.

2 Pet 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance.

1 Tim 2:1-5 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,

But even when God does something internationally, He also does something personally in us. God does some things in our hearts during trouble that can:

- **Make us better:** When we face trouble, we can become better or bitter. God, of course, wants His children to become better.

- **Enlarge our hearts;** we become less judgmental of other people's shortcomings. We become more understanding and comforting when others go through a hard time.

- **Wake us up** to get our lives in order and our priorities pleasing God.

- **Remove some strong ungodly views in our life.** The prophet Jonah had racial prejudice against the Ninevites and refused to preach to them. He landed in the whale's belly. Then he repented and went to Nineveh.

- **Discipline us.** *Heb 12:7-11 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? 8 If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! 10 They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best, but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the*

time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

But God's ultimate desire in all our troubles is to help us find our meaning in life, our joy in life, our security in life — in Him alone. So don't fear. Instead, speak the language of faith to your mind and heart like David, and fear will flee.

Gospel and Spirit of Fear

Outline

1. Fear and the Spirit of Fear
2. Spirit of Fear and the Presence of God
3. Overcoming the Spirit of Fear with the Gospel
4. Satan fears those who overcome fear

1. Fear and the Spirit of Fear: The greatest commandment is to love your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. It occurs about 16 times in the Bible. But the commandment that occurs most frequently in the Bible is "Do not fear" or "Do not be afraid"— 87 times. God gives us this command not to shame or expose us but to tell us that He is near. And with Him comes the grace to be victorious over fear. God gives us this command to partner with Him against the devil. With God as our partner, we can do what we previously couldn't do ourselves. God's grace enables us and empowers us not to fear.

Acts 2:25 David said about him: " 'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken (Ps 16:8).

I remember my youngest daughter when she first went to school at the age of 4 years. In her first few days, she would cry and be fearful. My older son, in the same school, would spend all his break time trying to comfort her. Then one day, she remembered the song from Ps 56:3-4 that we taught her — "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You, I will trust in you, I will trust in you etc.". She sang it softly; faith came into her heart. She stopped crying and wasn't frightened anymore.

I used to preach the gospel regularly on the streets of Mumbai for many years. Once, as I was preaching on the road, a notorious local gangster decided to stop me and push me around. He then stopped a taxi and pushed me inside, sat with me and began to threaten me. He told the taxi driver to drive at full speed. The driver recognised the gangster, obeyed, and was very afraid. The gangster tried to intimidate me. He would control and stop me from preaching in his area if I showed fear. Of course, I could preach in another place, but fear would follow me, sooner or later, everywhere. Someone said, "Courage is fear that has said its prayers." As a habit, I pray every morning and also before I preach. But sitting with this gangster, I wasn't praying. Instead, I was respectfully smiling at him. I refused to be frightened. *God has not given us the spirit of timidity but a spirit*

of power, love, and self-discipline (2 Tim 1:7). After about 20 minutes of threatening me, the gangster gave up and released me. I returned to my preaching point and preached there regularly for several weeks without any problem. Then later, I moved on to another street.

The emotion of fear is natural and spontaneous—it is not a sin. But surrendering to fear as though it is in charge, allowing fear to dominate your thoughts and actions, is unbelief and sinful. It opens you to an evil spirit, which we call "the spirit of fear". It can paralyse you. It is like a dog paralysed with terror when a panther comes to attack and eat it. But with his master by his side, the dog will not fear, especially if the master has a gun. **Fear does not exist when your Master (Jesus) is beside you.**

2. Spirit of Fear and the Presence of God: *Isa 51:12-16* "I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mere mortals, human beings who are but grass, 13 that you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretches out the heavens

and who lays the foundations of the earth, that **you live in constant terror every**

day because of the wrath of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction? For where

is the wrath of the oppressor? 14 The cowering prisoners will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread. Who stirs up the sea

so

that its waves roar — the LORD Almighty is his name.16 I have put my words in

your mouth and covered you with the shadow of my hand— I who set the heavens in place, who laid the foundations of the earth, and who say to Zion, 'You are my people.'"

God tells Israel that they are His covenant people (51:16). God is the Maker of heaven and earth—so don't forget His presence by your side against oppressors who are mere mortal human beings (51:12). Don't open yourself to fear because then you will live in **constant terror every day** (51:13) — which is the spirit of fear. **Fear cannot exist when there is trust and rest in God.**

The Apostle Paul preached the gospel wherever he went. And everywhere he went,

people wanted to beat, kill, and jail him. And yet, through it all, he taught his disciples to rejoice. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Phil 4:4). In fact, he wrote this to his Philippian disciples whilst he was in prison. What

was Paul's secret of rejoicing even in difficult times and places? He yielded his thoughts and emotions to God's presence, and this relationship with God brought

3. Overcoming the Spirit of Fear with the Gospel

Rev 12:10-12 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God, day and night, has been hurled down. 11 They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. 12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury because he knows his time is short."

"Overcoming" occurs 17 times in the Book of Revelations. And the primary way to overcome (triumph over) the evil one is by the gospel. Many Bible scholars say the martyrs sang Rev 12:11 in heaven. Let's examine it and apply their principles to overcome fear:

- **By the blood of the Lamb** refers to the **gospel** (good news). Jesus fulfilled God's justice by living the life we should have lived but didn't and paid the punishment for our sins that we should have paid. He did all this for us because He loves us. Here we see the gospel of victory because Christ is the triumphant Lamb on the cross. He won the cosmic battle over the devil (*Col 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross*).

- **Our testimony:** What we believe and confess about who Jesus is, what He did on the cross, and who we are in Him.

- **Did not love our life as to shrink from death:** The fear of death is Satan's most significant weapon over human beings. But the resurrection of Jesus defeated death. And believers know that God will resurrect us from the dead. So, the fear of death is gone. The Romans fed the early church Christians to the lions. But the Christians faced death, knowing God would resurrect them when they died. If we believe in the resurrection, we can meet any persecution thrown at us by people. We examine their threats and say calmly, "**So what?**" So, what can they do to me? They can kill me at the maximum, and I am ready to die for Jesus. **So what?**

Another way we can overcome fear is through perfecting love by seeing that Jesus loved us so much that He gave His life for us while we were still sinners — **the gospel**. What a remarkable thing that we can rely on the love of God. Our love for God is not perfect or complete, but His love is perfect and complete. As we remain trusting in His love, our love will grow towards perfection. We know God

loves us more than we can imagine in all our trials. This love rescued us from darkness and brought us into his marvellous light. This love covers all of our sins. His love is so powerful that we can live victoriously and fearlessly because we grow in His love. And "perfect love expels all fear." (1 John 4:18). We know that after death, there is the judgment where eternal life or eternal punishment awaits all humanity. But His love will equip us to stand before the Lord on the day of judgment with confidence, not fear. Remember, just before the Jews stoned Stephen in Acts 7:54-56, he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and Stephen's face shone as he died. He had no fear.

Heb 9:27-28 Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love

4. Satan fears those who overcome fear: *Phil 1:27-28 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you*

stand

firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is

a

sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.

When we grasp what the martyrs teach in Rev 12:10-12, we will conduct ourselves

worthy of the gospel of Christ. We will overcome fear, especially the fear of death, Satan's ultimate weapon. Then Satan and his demons become fearful because they are reminded of their coming doom in hell and that their time is short (Rev 12:12, Phil 1:28).