

A NEW COVENANT

Being a Christian is much more than being religious

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Introduction

The following eleven chapters has been written as part of my conversation via internet with thousands of South Africans across the world over a period of eleven weeks.

These series of conversations were introduced with the following statements:

“I would love to talk with you about your inheritance as covenant children in terms of the new testament or new covenant that is ours in Christ Jesus.

I know I can use the normal Biblical terms in this conversation – and maybe even “impress” a couple of you – but most of you know me well enough by now to know that I usually feel challenged to say things in a new way, but still in ordinary everyday language.

The other reason I want to speak in this way, is that it is then easy for you to repeat or explain it to someone, for instance in your office, without them thinking you are from another planet.”

May the Lord use these conversations to bless you to such an extent that you can be a blessing to others.

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CHAPTER 1

In the attorney's office

I don't know when last you read 2 Corinthians 3. This chapter hit me anew and has taken on a whole new life and meaning. To such an extent that I am excited about what God wants to do in the lives of His children. Let me quote verses 6 to 18 from the NIV for you:

"He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant- not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (The "bold" my own work off course)

Do you hear what God is saying here about His people? That their lives, through the working of the Spirit, will reflect a glory that will blind people more than the bright reflection from the face of Moses ages ago! Wow! This makes one want to jump up and tell the whole world...but it also makes me uneasy, because when I look at my own life and the lives of other Christians around me, I see very little of this reflected glory. The thing that makes me call out to God in desperation, is the tragic in the lives and relationships of many Christians around me and in the inner circle of the Christian congregations. I am convinced that if we can gain a better understanding of our inheritance in Christ and we start giving the Spirit of God space for its full work in us, it will radically change each one of our lives and make us shine with a new glory, as God promises.

It becomes even more urgent when I listen to what is taught and preached in the name of "God's covenant" in certain circles in the Body of Christ. At the one hand in the strict reformed circles, we hear it being preached to people who were baptized or christened as children, that they are "part of the congregation of Jesus" and that they do not need to be born again, but are already participants in the eternal life.

On the other hand, a certain superficial "prosperity" is preached in the renewal circles, as though this is part of the new covenant and the inheritance of each one who is a descendant of Abrahams. Therefore, I think it is so important that we go and have a good look again and contemplate what is held in this new testament/covenant as our inheritance as God's new family in Christ Jesus.

Let me explain it to you in this way. It is like you receive a telephone call from a lawyer inviting you to his office in order that he can inform you, as beneficiary, of what is contained in the will regarding your inheritance and how it will affect your future. Imagine you hear that you are inheriting a million pound! How this can change your life!

In a similar way Paul comes in many scriptures in his letters as "God's attorney" and points out what our inheritance is as Christians in the light of Jesus' death on the cross. Let's turn to Ephesians 1 and read what he says about our inheritance in verses 3 to 13.

"I have come that they may have life, and have it in abundance..." Jesus said. He gave His life on a cross for this. In order that we, instead of total bankruptcy, inherit from the abundance that He established for us with His death and resurrection. For this He also had to defeat Satan and his powers, and was raised from the dead as symbol of this total victory over Satan...to give to each one of Jesus' followers who believe, a new life as a gift through the working of His spirit.

How many people in the body of Christ are held captive by sin or are the slaves of strongholds! How many aren't confused and seduced daily by false teachings! Maybe you are in a prison of your own. Then I have good news for you and others: the new testament/covenant makes provision for complete and total salvation and freedom for each one of us. Listen carefully, God does not only want to forgive us, He wants to set us free...completely free...totally healed.

Let's turn to Ps 89 and read verse 34 together: "I will not break my covenant with him or take back even one promise I made him".

When the Bible uses the word "covenant", it refers to an agreement or promise made between two or more parties. These days we call it a contract or will.

Just like it's contemporary equal, it contains conditions and stipulations

Most of us who know the Bible know that this covenant or agreement God made with His people, play a hugely important role in the lives of God's people. Its importance is such that we call the collection of books written before the coming of Jesus as Old Testament/covenant and those thereafter New Testament/covenant.

If you like, you can turn to a couple of other scriptures to get a taste of what the Bible says about this new covenant: Romans 7:6 to 8:39; Galatians 2:15 to 6:18; Hebrews 8:6-13; 10:15-17 etc.

If, in closing, I could make a couple of comments about this new covenant, I would like to say the following: It is a covenant that God the Father drew up with His Son before the creation of the world.

The heart of what is determined by this covenant is to save a lost humanity from the hands powers of Satan. See, humans were terminally ill and in debt. In this testament God formulated a plan by which He would heal and set us free through the death of His son.

In it we hear, as part of this plan for salvation for humanity, how the Son promises to become man and come and live a life of complete obedience on earth. ("My food, Jesus said to them, is to obey the will of the one who sent me" –John 4:34). During this life on earth he will start ministering life to people (Isaiah 61:1 to 3) in order that they can start tasting something of the "abundance and blessing" that will become their share as heirs after His death. To eventually give His life and die in order that His followers can inherit a new life (John 10:17 and 18). But we also hear the Father's promise to the Son: I will give you the fullness of my Spirit, (John 3:34); He rests in you (Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 3 and 4); I will be a Father to you and you will be my Son (Hebrews 1: 5); I will give you a name like no other name (Philippians 2:8-10); After you have finished your work, I will restore your glory (Luke 24:26). We hear how the Father offers His son. And how the Son offers His life. All for our benefit, that we can enjoy the fruit of their agreement (John 1:12; 3:16; Romans 3:21 to 24)

In John 17:22 and 23 we hear Jesus' prayer for us, His heirs: "I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one: I in them and you in me, so that they may be completely one, in order that they world may know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me". And we also hear Him promise: "I will never leave you, I will never abandon you". Therefore, we can declare in confidence: "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid: what can anyone do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5b and 6)

We can trust this "Covenant-god" to do His promised work in our lives, according to the stipulations set out in the new agreement – and like Jude 1:24 and 25 says: "To him who is able to keep you from falling, and to bring you faultless and joyful before his glorious presence- to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might and authority, from all ages past, and now, for ever and ever! Amen."

CHAPTER 2

The heart of the new covenant

We are, in a manner of speaking, literally sitting in the attorney's office and are talking about the content of the new testament/covenant and what the implications are for us as heirs in Christ. After all, Jesus Christ died and was raised from the dead, and we as His followers, inherit what He and the Father agreed to leave us as inheritance.

Let's turn to two pieces of scriptures: Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:24-28. I'll quote a couple of verses to you: Jeremiah 31:31: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor or a man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," because they will all now know me from the least to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Ezekiel 36:24: "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean, I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

The heart of the Gospel is that the Jesus who died – to make our salvation possible – was raised from the dead. Without it, there would be no good news. If it did not happen, we as Christians would have nothing of meaning to tell others, because then the Bible was just another book and our faith just superstition.

Throughout Acts and Paul's letters we read that His resurrection, the open grave, the accounts of the overwhelmed eyewitnesses about their meeting with a living, risen Lord, forms the heart of the Good News they wanted to tell others. It is what changed their lives. And those are the events that enables you and me to now talk about what we inherit as His followers in terms of the New Testament that was His legacy.

It is wonderful to see what metaphors and images the Bible uses to help us understand exactly what our inheritance is. One of these images is one of "salvation", "healing" and "freedom". We were bound, and now our inheritance is that we are set free. We were bankrupt, but now our debt has been paid. We were terminally ill, practically already dead, and now we are healed. Christ Jesus died and was resurrected. Now we inherit LIFE.

Let me try to say it in a couple of other ways: The power that bound all of humanity after the Fall of Man, his power has been broken. The stronghold of sin, Satan and death over us has been broken. We are set free, free to live in capital letters for the first time in our lives.

Listen to how Paul puts it in Ephesians 1:6: "to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace."

What good news this is! We know the power of sin.

The destructive consequences of sin infest our lives, the communities we live in and every relationship we find ourselves in every single day.

We also know the power of evil, his seduction techniques and his hold on people and things.

We all know the bitter finality of death, the fear of its darkness and the tears and mourning when it walks through our families or circle of friends.

We know all these faces and facets all too well. But now we can, as Christian believers who know their inheritance in the light of the new covenant, confess:

No matter how you would like to bind us and rob us, your hold on us has been broken! Our debt has been paid. An antidote for the sin-disease in our veins has been found. The prison doors have been opened and even death has become just a door to another life in Jesus.

We are free. To become even more free. We are healed to heal even more. Our debt has been paid in order that we now can learn how not to fall into debt again. God gave His Spirit for this, to live in us and lead and teach us in this.

Jesus said that this new "Spirit" in us would help us see and understand the glory of the One who is risen, even better. Listen to how He tells us this in John 16:14: "He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and make it know to you.

All around the world the Spirit of God is busy breaking open more and more of the glorious implications of salvation in Christ Jesus, is He helping us to see the glory of the Risen One, Jesus Christ, and His Father.

As 2 Corinthians 3:17 and 18 tells us: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

The Father has revealed Himself to us through His Son, who is revealed to us more and more by the Spirit in us.

In this way, we learn of His love and the power of His resurrection. This makes us more and more free to understand how free we are. And in the process people around us see more and more of Jesus, His glory, His power and His salvation in us.

All this is the work of His Spirit, "His attorney" in us. Therefore, give His Spirit room in you! He wants to remind you of Jesus and what He said all the time. He wants to help you understand your inheritance and its implications.

Therefore, Paul describes Him in Ephesians 1:12-14 as the "guarantee" of what is to come. Listen for a moment: "In order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are in God's possession - to the praise of his glory."

The writer Totius wrote the following words in Ps 124 (the song): The faithful God has freed us Himself: the tie is loose and we were set free, free as a bird that finds his freedom. The eternal God, of all things Lord, He is our help, He has set us free.

It is the message from people who understand the heart of the Gospel. Who understand that what we believe is more than just another religion, because Jesus was risen from the dead. After all, we have inherited a daily living relationship with Him through the working of His Spirit. He himself teaches us to live as people who have become new and free.

CHAPTER 3

The cross makes the difference

Let's read Ephesians 1:13 to 21. Let me quote a couple of verses:

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. ... For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 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. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe...” NIV

We are still sitting in the office of the attorney in order that he can explain to us what we inherited after the death and resurrection of Jesus according to the new covenant/testament.

We hear that we are told: In Jesus...

- We are redeemed – our debt because of our sin, has been paid by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became man. We are forgiven.
- We are set free – the hold that evil had over us, has been broken. The prison doors, the handcuffs of sin that bound us, have been unlocked. In Jesus, through His death and resurrection, and His life in us, we have a key to unlock all prison doors.
- We are healed – the century old terminal disease that we suffered from along with the rest of mankind – that literally flowed through our veins and that we were born with – has been cured by the antiserum of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the new life He gave us through the working of His Spirit in us. Therefore even death no longer has any hold on us.

This has wonderful implications for each heir in the life of Jesus! But to understand something of this we have to get personal and honest for a moment. Some of us are struggling with things like fear, feelings of worthlessness, rejection, guilt, shame, judgement, and self-doubt...your purpose on earth etc. Some of us struggle with chronic emotional and physical illnesses that can be traced back to root causes on a spiritual level. Many struggle with addiction of some sort, or feelings of hopelessness, worry, anxiety, are struggling with forgiveness, feelings of sorrow, pride, anger, denial, rebellion etc.

While Jesus already said on the cross: It is complete! Heir, do you understand what this means? It is not necessary that we suffer any longer! We have been saved; we have been set free; we have been healed. It is part of our inheritance in Jesus Christ.

Maybe you can say “Amen” and “Hallelujah” to this. But the misery is that even though you know this, you cannot come free, you cannot feel free and you still struggle with the symptoms of the “disease”.

We cannot get this freedom out of our own efforts or strength! No self-help technique will work here! The Holy Spirit alone, the Spirit of Jesus Christ that dwells in us who are heirs according to the new covenant can free us further.

How does He do it?

- It is He who, before our rebirth used the Old Covenant and its stipulations to convict us of the fact that we are sinful and lost in general. It is His message of God's holiness and His quest for total obedience, which lead us to cry out to a Savior...to Jesus Christ.
- Why does the Holy Spirit do this? In order that man can come to their “own end”. In order that we can get to a point like in Acts 2:37 and cry out: What must we do to be saved? (Yes, even if we were people of the covenant- Old covenant people!) Can I ask you: Has the Old Covenant done its work in you? Have you realized somewhere in your life, that you are lost? Have you? Or do you still think that with a bit of help you can challenge your old habits and change them yourself? The Spirit of God invites you today, considering the message of the New Testament, to get to a point of surrender and to say: Lord, I am tired to death of all the rubbish in my life. Help me!
- He creates in us a desire to be free. We naturally want to resist change, but through the working of the Spirit in us this desire to be free just keeps getting stronger and stronger.
- He brings us to that place where we can surrender all control in order that God must do it...Where we say: Lord, help!

See, the moment we are at that place, we can honestly start talking about the blessings of the New Covenant. Then we can lead each other to Hebrews 8:8 and 9 and say: In Christ, by faith in His death and resurrection, through His life and the working of His Spirit in us, we are lead out of our own Egypt, and does the Spirit want to lead us out of a life of slavery into a new life of true freedom and healing.

It is then that we can lead each other to Acts 3:25 and 26 and say: Do you hear, God, in Jesus Christ and through this new life in you and through the leadership and working of His Spirit in you, wants to bless you!

The heart of this blessing is that He wants to teach you, through His Spirit, what it means to be redeemed, healed and free! He wants to teach you to believe this and to allow Him to teach you in the light of this, how to life from here on.

Let me put it this way: Through the working of the Life of Jesus Christ in you, through the working of His Spirit in you, He will teach you, one who has been saved, to each day understand and experience more of your salvation. He will teach you, one already freed in Christ, to practically experience more of your freed-state in the everyday aspects of your life. He will teach you, one already healed in Jesus, to experience further healing in other areas of your life.

It is like this pastor who was free from a drug addiction for 15 years. He was the director of a drug rehabilitation center. Then he started using again. Every time he used heroin he felt so guilty and cried out: Lord, how can I? After all these years of freedom, after all your blessings in my life!

It was the Spirit of God who helped him hear Micah 7:18 and 19 where it is written: "Who Is a God like you who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities in to the depths of the sea." NIV

It is this Spirit that helped him understand that it is once again a choice that he had to make that it is God, and God alone, who can make him free from his addiction through the working of His Spirit.

It is this Spirit that reminds us again, there in front of the attorney's desk and at the foot of the cross of Jesus and the open grave, that the battle in our lives against sin, evil, illness and death, is not ours but belongs to God through His Spirit.

Therefore, Paul can say in Romans 8:13 that the Holy Spirit is God's big gift of the new covenant to believers in Jesus. He has been sent to do in us what we ourselves cannot do. Therefore, He lives in each of us (Romans 8:14). Therefore, He is there to lead us and teach us.

Learn to trust Him in you. Surrender anew to Him. In order that He can do His work. It is He who will break the hold of sin in your life. How? I do not know exactly. All I know is this:

- He will open your eyes. He will give you insight into your problem.
- He will use people and His gifts to minister to you. He will use the Word. The truth He ministers to you will set you free.
- His love will set you free.
- The life of Jesus in you will set you free in order that you may be healed through His wounds.
- He will help you get to know God better...to get to know His love better...and His power...the same power that raised Jesus from the dead...that can break every stronghold of evil also in your life. (Ephesians 1:3).

What is our role in this? To believe it. Through faith we surrender completely. Through faith we learn to leave everything to Him. Through faith we learn to trust Him completely (Zechariah 4:6). Through faith we learn to listen to His whispers and to obey them to the letter.

God therefore asks of you as heir in Jesus, to take only one step: Choose to believe these things, to take them with the empty hands of faith.

CHAPTER 4

A sip of new wine

Here in the Western Cape we know about wine and winemaking. Most of us have successful winemakers and wine farmers in our circle of friends. Therefore, I take the liberty of illustrating our heritage and commission as heirs in Jesus Christ according to the New Testament using this metaphor.

Let's turn to two passages where we get this image: Luke 5:37 and 38 and John 2:1 to 11.

Sometimes the Spirit of God uses a single word from Scripture to "switch" something "on" in you, and you just know your life will not be the same again. Luke 5:37 to 38 was such a word to me personally: "And no-one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins."

We find this same image of wine, new wine, in John 2:1 to 11 where John tells us about Jesus' first miracle, when He "made" about 600 liters of new wine at a 7 day-long Jewish Wedding feast. What was initially an embarrassment for the host, turned into the feast of all feasts, as no one had ever tasted such wine!

Have a look at how Jesus did it: All the waiters had to do was to pour ordinary water into the six empty cans that was standing empty because the water that was in them had been used to wash the feet of all the wedding guests – according to the traditional custom according to Jewish law. Thereafter the waiters simply had to take a jug of this water to the master of ceremonies, and thereafter to all the guests off course. When he drank it, it was wine...new wine...like he had never tasted before...the best of the best – and it wasn't even diluted with water as customary in those days.

I don't want to drag this story out. What stuck in my spirit, is that God is going to use us as heirs in Christ, through the working of His Spirit to do something like Jesus, there where He has prepared a platform for us. We are going to walk into situations where people are, for various reasons, needy and all we will need to do is pour the ordinary water of the Word into ordinary traditional containers, (these can be opportunities, or languages or customs, where we can literally become Jewish for a Jew and Greek for a Greek.) God Himself, through the power and gifts of His Spirit, will make the supernatural happen when this "water" hits that person's life and will change the water into new wine. Wine that will at the very least have the characteristic of radically changing lives.

It is as though each one of us who understands and has been changed by the content of our inheritance in Christ – according to the stipulations of the new covenant – through the working of the Spirit, will become an expert "wine maker". We will offer them "the normal wine of the word" in containers that are familiar to them, and God will, through the working of His Spirit, make miracles happen. He will change that which we offer them into new wine, which will literally differ from situation to situation according to the needs of the specific "audience".

When God gave me my job description as "wine maker" it sounded something like the following: "This will be a place of healing, teaching, restoration and new birth..."

Let me put another way: When you ask me, what burns in my spirit...what kind of wine I want to minister to people...what causes me to want to jump out of bed and do what I must do...what I currently want to and will devote my life to, I would like to answer in the following way:

- To create places where people can heal to spirit, soul and body because the truth of the Word and power of the Spirit are ministering them to.
- To create spaces and opportunities where people can be taught that they are all leaders of one kind or another who can make a difference, even if only in the life of one other person.
- To create creative aids and opportunities to effectively facilitate the restoration process in each area and relationship in their lives.
- While trusting God to completely heal people through the working of His Spirit.

I know I cannot do this alone. God has given me the vision, and as I share this vision with people He will build a team around me with the gifts and abilities to make that which He has commanded, happen.

I believe God created people to be special, with unique abilities and with their own unique platform where He wants to use them to make a difference. But that He has also given you, deep inside you, a passion for something in life. Sometimes life and the things that happen in and around us suffocate this passion to such an extent that we are after a while merely existing and surviving from day to day without really LIVING.

But I believe that our paths have crossed in order that God can minister healing, restoration, teaching and new life to you, in order that you in turn can discover how God wants to use you as His co-worker, as His specialist wine maker, as part of a bigger team.

To do what...?

Luke 5:37 and 38 puts it into words.

We are going to serve new wine to people...yes, the same kind Jesus made in John 2. All we will need to bring to Him is water...even if it is in the typical traditional thought containers that the people to whom He is sending us, are used to...He will change it into wine, new wine, that can make their heads turn and change their impressions and lives radically through the powerful working of His Spirit.

Then we will discover how it will minister to and heal the pain and thirst of thousands of people.

In my spirit, I see training centers and training aids with which we are going to equip thousands of Christian leaders from all sectors of society from various communities to trust Jesus as Saviour and also Anointer with the Spirit to use them, through the working of the Spirit, to make a difference where God has prepared a platform for them.

I see trauma ministry centers, (most of them in ordinary homes), in different communities with equipped people from that community who can minister to people as whole person. There are doctors and nurses, and health care experts among them, but also many ordinary people who merely discovered that God can use them.

The miracle is that it is not limited to Hermanus and its people. It is also not limited to our specific family of believers. Part of this team are people from all over the world who, via the internet or satellite connection are enthusiastically taking a stand for this vision and allowing God to walk before us and point each step out to us, steps that are going to be steps of faith.

God wants to use you where you are, as a specialist wine maker, to minister to people in a way that He has prepared for you specifically.

CHAPTER 5

God came to live within us

I speak much clearer than when I write. Maybe because I try to do it as condensed as possible. Therefore, I constantly need to discipline myself to put across the richness of the Gospel, the content of this new inheritance that is ours in Jesus Christ according to the stipulations of the New Testament, as simply as possible.

Let me try doing it this way today:

Heir in Christ Jesus, you who believe in Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, according to the stipulations of the New Testament, Jesus has set aside three gifts for you:

- His complete salvation that He established for you through His death and the open grave.
- His Spirit to live inside you to work out the details of this salvation in your life.
- And His Spirit to come upon you to equip you with His supernatural power and gifts to minister this salvation to others around you.

When the average Christian really understands, what is ours in Christ Jesus, our world cannot and will not look the same any longer. Jesus Himself promised this when He said: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12). (Pay attention to the fact that these words were written in the passage where He talks about His Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit thereafter).

Luke 24:46 to 49 puts it another way... "This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my father has promised: but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

When we are equipped, clothed, or anointed with the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit, we are going – in the words of last week's Word- to be specialist wine makers like Jesus! Do you understand now why I say being a Christian means more than just being a follower of yet another religion, and much more than being just another religious person!

Of course, many Christians don't believe this! It is exactly the enemy's tactic to make a Christian feel he is just "a sinful man" and that this Word is not applicable to him/her. While it is in fact our inheritance in Christ Jesus that we have received full salvation through His death and resurrection. On top of that God sent His Spirit to come and live in each one of us to work out this complete salvation in each aspect of our lives. But not just this, to equip us in the process as instruments to, in turn, minister this through the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit as specialist wine makers to the world around us that is ill and in bondage.

Let me explain this better by breaking it into two parts:

1. We inherit complete salvation in Christ Jesus according to the stipulations of the New Testament. It is fascinating to page through the Bible and to discover the rich content of the word "salvation". The Greek word "sozo" can, in different contexts, mean "relieved, saved, healed and made whole". (If you want to see the variations of this practically illustrated you, for example, you can go to Mark 5:34, but you can also see this in the changes that took place in the life of the demon-possessed man of Gerasenes from verse 4 to 15. There you'll see how much punch there can be in such a glass of "new wine"!)

Let me go a bit further and ask whether you know which Hebrew word is sometimes used to translate this "salvation" and its results in the Hebrew text?

Will it surprise you when I tell you that this word is "shalom" in the Hebrew? An important verse in this regard is Psalm 35:27 where this "peace" or "complete well-being" is the result of God's righteousness or the embodiment of His new covenant promises. Shalom is derived from the verb "shaleem" which means "be whole, complete, have all your needs fulfilled" in different contexts. When this happens, the results will be "safety, peace, security, and prosperity". (If you want to look at some verses to confirm this, have a look at Is 54:10; Is 53; Luke 2:14; John 14:27; 20:19; 1 Thess. 5:23,24; Mark 5:28,34 and Phil 4:6-8).

The salvation Christ Jesus has established for you and me can heal people completely. That is why we need to teach people the contents of this complete salvation. As the Spirit of God ministers this complete salvation to the core of people's being, people are restored as God's intention was at man's creation and people will become new.

2. We inherit, as part of this complete salvation, God's Spirit living in us, but also the promise of God's spirit coming on us to minister this salvation to us and others.

Bible passages such as Rom 8:9 confirms the Bible truth that the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost day to live in the body of every Christian believer. So, if you're a believer, you can know for sure that God is living in you through His Spirit.

But not only that, according to passages such as Acts 2:38 and 39, you can also know that Jesus Christ not only is the Saviour, but also the Baptizer with the Spirit. Therefore, you have the promise that He wants to baptize you with the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, to equip you in such a way that you can become an instrument who can minister this salvation to other people around you (John 7:38). It could happen through a prophetic word coming from your mouth, or physical healing because you pray, or people experiencing God's love when you minister love to them, etc.

This is what Jesus meant when He promised in Acts 1:8: "... But ye shall receive power after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

This will happen when the power and gifts of the Spirit start working through us while we are doing what we thought was the ordinary, but to our amazement, miracles start to happen and people start experiencing this complete salvation.

Luke 11:13 tells us to pray for this to happen.

That is why the disciples lay hands on people and prayed for them at their baptism that Jesus, as their Saviour, should come as the Baptizer with the Spirit to equip them with supernatural power and gifts of His Spirit (Acts 8:15-19; 9:17,18; 19:5-7).

When we understand the full contents of our salvation in Christ Jesus and are willing to be used by His Spirit to minister new wine to people, we'll experience ...

- ... that the Christ we got to know and start loving, is the One who can free people from any prison they have been in (Luke 4:18)
- ... again and again that He can destroy the works of the enemy in the lives of people (1 John 3:8)
- ... that all the authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him (Matt 28:18) and is now given to us (Luke 10:19)
- ... that all of this is part of our inheritance in Christ Jesus

Only then God can start using us as specialist winemakers to minister to one another and to the community around us.

CHAPTER 6

My inheritance is a complete salvation

We are still sitting across the table from the attorney – who, we have now realized, is actually the Holy Spirit, from where He is busy stipulating our inheritance in Christ, according to the stipulations of the new testament that God drew up.

How did I formulate it last week? Jesus is standing in front of each one of us in the form of the Holy Spirit and reaches towards us with three gifts in His hands:

- Complete salvation in Jesus through His cross and the open grave;
- The Holy Spirit that lives in the body of every one who believes to come and practically work out this salvation in every aspect of our lives;
- And the promise of the Holy Spirit that wants to equip each one of us who believe with supernatural power and gifts in order that we can be witnesses to this salvation.

The Lord once again this week drew my attention to the fact that if I do not fully comprehend the full extent of this complete salvation that is mine in Christ Jesus, the danger exists that I will go through life like a beggar who lives off food found in the trash-can, all the while I am already a billionaire in Christ. Therefore, the Lord challenged me to trust Him to reveal through His Spirit something of the magnitude and full extent and the impact of this complete salvation that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Some of the wonderful aspects of this salvation that I have just discovered again are the following:

- The Bible uses different images and metaphors to help us understand how complete this salvation is that happens in us who believe the gospel of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17 put it like this: We are new creations. We have been recreated in Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, John 3 calls it “born again”. Ephesians 4 and other scriptures tells us that we received a new nature, the life and nature of Jesus Christ through the working of His Spirit that has now come to live in our bodies. Romans 8 says that the Holy Spirit inside us, when He is in control of our lives, will transform every aspect of our lives.
- Someone summarized the content of this salvation as a fourfold salvation; salvation from the punishment or condemnation for sin, salvation from the power of evil, salvation from the hold of sin on our lives, and salvation from the joy of sinning.

I have also discovered that this salvation/redemption breaks into our lives in three phases:

Phase 1 – The redemption I experienced immediately when I became a born-again believer.

A part of this salvation immediately came into my life when I became born again when I, as a terminally ill and practically dead individual, was revived and re-created/re-born. At that moment, I received spiritual eyes that can see into dimensions previously impossible for my human-eyes. That enables me; when I look carefully, even to see God and the work of His hands. From that moment, as if for the first time in my life, I could hear God's voice...in the Word...in my spirit...when people spoke...in events that took place. From that moment, I was able to start understanding things that I was previously unable to. It was as though I received a new brain that had access to dimensions I never previously had access to. Salvation indeed! But at that moment my past sin, the curse and debt that I carried because of that sin, was wiped out at once. It was as though I was redeemed from my whole past life and was given a new beginning, a new life. Like a blank dairy to fill with a new life. But this time as new person ...as an adopted son of the King of all kings. At that moment, I was saved from the orphanage of life and the living God, who I came to know through Jesus, became my real father. I was redeemed from the terrible burden of solely being responsible for taking care of myself and living only for myself. I discovered that there was more to live for. That He has a plan for my life and that I fit in somewhere. That my life has meaning, eternal meaning. What salvation!

Phase 2 – Through the working of the Holy Spirit in me, aspects of this salvation start becoming a reality in my everyday life

I also discovered that this salvation in Christ Jesus had to run the course of a second phase in my life, namely where it had to start affecting every aspect of my everyday life. It is something like what happens to someone who receives a new heart because of heart surgery. This new heart has to now start pumping healing and new life to every organ and part of a body that over the years became so diseased as a result of the old heart not functioning properly. This is exactly what the Holy Spirit now does in our lives. He came to live in us to spread this salvation and new life to each area of our lives. He wants to renew my thoughts and wants to teach me to re-evaluate the rubbish I started believing over the years for its truth content. The truth will set me free and will change me, but will

also be the key to the abundant life that is mine in Christ Jesus. This work of the Holy Spirit in us is described in many ways in the Bible: words like “sanctification”, “letting go of the old nature”, “putting on a new nature”, or as Paul puts it in his letter to the Galatians “living by the Spirit”. It is as though God becomes the Owner of my life when I became born again, but now the worms and cockroaches in the foundation and walls of the old building must be exterminated through His Spirit, because this also is part of this total and complete salvation in Christ Jesus.

Phase 3 – A dimension of this salvation only starts breaking through at the end.

When we die, or Jesus comes again, we receive salvation from a mortal earthly body that is exposed to illness and outside influence. Then we are clothed with a new body and can live forever in God's presence. (Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 15)

When we became Christians, amazing things started happening to us. Most of these things happen in a dimension that we cannot see or cannot even always understand or notice. These are the things that God comes to tell us through His Attorney, through the Holy Spirit, through His Word.

To be Christian is not to – as is the case in other religions – obey a couple of rules or to only live according to a certain model. No, the heart of being a Christian is that somewhere along the way you have a personal meeting with the Living God in Christ Jesus, and that He changes your life from the inside out through the working of His Spirit.

The Bible illustrates this process also in different terms. It is as though God takes us back to the Cross and open grave of Christ about 2000 years ago and then spells out the implications there of for our everyday lives. Listen to how Paul spells this out for us in Romans 3:21 to 28 (and you can read “salvation” where the words “righteousness” and “justified” are written).

Jesus did all that was necessary for us, as heirs and believers, for God to pour His grace out upon us and set us free completely. Nothing we can now do, no struggle of our own to obey God's law or live a good life, can add to what Jesus did.

Maybe you do not completely understand the full impact of this word. Let me try to spell this out for you in terms that Paul's original readers would have understood. Paul was writing to believers who came from a typical Jewish religious tradition. I can imagine that these people constantly struggled with a kind of mixture between faith in Jesus and the message of the cross, and a strong urge to still obey the typical Jewish laws to “do their bit”. To help them understand that this mixture can be like poison in one's life, we see how Paul points out the consequences of such a mixture to them in Galatians 2 to 4 and Colossians 2:6 to 23. His intention is very clear; anything that we might think can contribute to our righteousness in Christ, other than the cross and blood of Jesus, is confusing and worthless. Jesus Christ, on the cross and through the open grave, did all that is necessary for our complete salvation, redemption, righteousness and healing.

It is important that we understand this. Most of us also come from a typical religious background where we were fed a mixture of faith and religious rules, where we were given all sorts of religious rules about what to and what not to eat and drink or do if you wanted to be a “good” Christian.

Don't get me wrong. Of course I believe that being a Christian will outwardly manifest itself to others in a specific lifestyle with high moral values. But we are not Christians BECAUSE OF doing these things. We are Christians BECAUSE OF meeting the Living God personally at one point in our lives and understanding and believing the gospel around the death and resurrection of Jesus. Then God, through the working of the Spirit, started ministering this new life to us, this complete salvation through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

We can often make each other think, even in the renewal circles, that we are only “good Christians” that we have only really “made” it when we...have learnt to conduct spiritual warfare...regularly do intercession...do 2-3 hours of Bible study a day...give this much...or do this much. We even do this in congregations when we say that a congregation is only “successful” once they...show sporadic growth in numbers...or have a huge building full of people.

Sometimes we can speak about “being a Christian” in such a way that we ignore that heart of the stipulations of the New Testament and constantly judge and condemn and make people feel guilty, make them feel that they will never be “good enough”. Jesus Himself became furious at people who thought like this. He even called them “stumbling blocks” in the lives of others.

In closing, let's turn to Matthew 18:8, probably one of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible. But keep the context of this verse in mind. Jesus is busy warning against a mixture of faith and own works. He is busy speaking to people who thought that they, through the works of their hands, or how they walked with their feet, or how they saw with their eyes, will be “successful” in God's eyes.

When Jesus then says: "cut off, throw away..." He is saying; stop trusting in these things because it represents a trust in your own flesh or own works. What is needed is to completely give over ...to trust Him with a childlike faith and trust.

In terms of the gospel we hear here how God tells us: All I ask of you is childlike faith. I have after all, on the cross and through the open grave of my Son Jesus, done all that is needed for you to receive complete salvation and righteousness. Just choose anew to trust My Spirit in you to work establish this complete salvation that I've already achieved for you in Christ Jesus, in your lives. (This is also what is written in Galatians 5:4 to 6).

This is the heart of an undiluted Gospel and this sets believers free. But this also makes our job as messengers of this gospel a lot easier, because then we know that the salvation and new life that God gives man in Jesus, really is capable to deliver what God promises in His Word.

If we alter this message, or if we try to add something to this undiluted Gospel, we find ourselves in a mess because then we make Christianity out to be just another religion that people follow for purposes of "self-improvement".

IMPORTANT TEXTS IN THIS REGARD

2 Corinthians 1:10 "He has delivered us from such a peril, and He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us..."

And Matthew 1:21; Acts 16:17; Ephesians 1:13 and 14; Titus 2:14

CHAPTER 7

Saved from my past

Romans 6:1-14

As heirs of Christ Jesus according to the stipulations of the new testament we have heard that we inherited complete salvation that Christ established for us and on our behalf through His death and resurrection. But also that God even sent His Spirit to come and live in our bodies in order to ensure that this complete salvation runs its full course in the lives of each one of us who became Christian.

Therefore Paul says in Philippians 1:6: "... being confident in this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus".

The image the Lord gave me last week is that of a computer that was full of viruses. Then an anti-virus program is loaded that removes these viruses or places them under quarantine in order that they cannot do any further harm. With regards to the future, if this anti-virus program is updated regularly and allowed to control the computer, it can protect the computer and all the other programs against any other viruses.

Let's apply this to our status as Christians: When we became Christians, God in effect loaded us with a new program; the Bible calls it a "new nature". The Bible further describes this new nature as the nature and life of Jesus Christ, with the complete salvation He established for us, as part thereof, in effect built into it. From the day of our salvation and re-birth this cleanses us from the "viruses" our old nature and the attacks of the devil caused in our lives. Furthermore, if the Spirit of God is in control of our lives every day He can make this complete salvation flow through to all areas of our lives, and He can protect us against any other viruses from outside, but also from viruses that come from within still caused by the old nature.

Part of our inheritance in Christ Jesus is that God promises us that He wants to do this in our lives. If He said it, promised it with a covenant in the stipulations of the new testament, we must make the choice to say in faith: I believe it. God said it, I believe it, and therefore it stands.

I believe that God is working in each one of our lives in this regard. Is he challenging us to trust Him for the complete infiltration of this complete salvation in our own lives and the lives of others? When I went and contemplated this again over the past week, I gain new perspective on a couple of matters. Let me share some of it with you:

- Part of this complete salvation that you and I inherited as believers in Christ Jesus is that we can believe that we have been redeemed from our past. Never again will God keep an account of any of this. Christ literally wiped out my whole past and the punishment that consequently rested on me.
- But it is fascinating that the Word then goes further and challenges us to believe that even more than this happened. Part of being a believer is to believe that the "old Christo", who was caught in the grip of sin and totally under the control of the powers of evil and all his old urges and desires, are dead and buried. After all, this is how scriptures like Romans 6 spells out this truth. Romans 6 continues to say that our baptism after our conversion is in fact the symbolic portrayal of this invisible truth of our inheritance in Christ. It was so important to the early Christian churches that believers understand this part of their inheritance that they said to each other: We will not baptize anyone who doesn't know that he is dead!
- Why is it so important to believe this "being dead" as part of your inheritance? For two reasons: 1. In order that you can understand that the life you are living now is a new life, the life of Christ in you and through you through the working of His Spirit. 2. But also in order that you can understand that if you allow "old urges" and "old habits" from your past to control your life, you are in fact choosing to resuscitate something that is in fact dead. No wonder it stinks the way it does! Therefore, Paul challenges us in Romans 6 from verse 11 to count ourselves "dead" to sin, but "alive" to God in Christ. (Old translation language)

I would like to make this a bit more practical. Let me share with you something of my own quest for personal victory over specific sins and things in my life in the light of these truths. This message of what is mine in terms of the stipulations of the new testament covenant spoke to me intensely. We are so used to the message of the gospel that the death of Jesus, his cross and His blood dealt with our sinful past once and for all, yes that the power of sin, the hold of the powers of evil and the hold of our own flesh had been destroyed. And yet, if I had to be honest, I had to confess to how many nasty habits and things from my past still controlled my relationships with others as well as my thoughts and emotional life. Therefore, I started experiencing the Spirit of God challenging me to choose to also start believing this aspect of my inheritance in Christ Jesus in my personal life. I realized that I had come to a point in my life where I had to choose anew to believe that the old Christo was dead and buried at his baptism in October 1993. And I had to choose to believe that the new Christo in Christ Jesus, through the working of the Spirit of God in me, can experience complete redemption and salvation with regards to these things also, as Jesus had already established complete salvation for me from these things.

Therefore, I had to choose afresh to trust God, to allow Him to apply that salvation to the here and now of my life. As the Spirit of God pointed out wrong habits and specific sins in my life, the Lord challenged me to trust Him for complete salvation for this also.

Can you now understand why it is important to also point out this “flip side of the message of the new covenant” to each other? In order that you can understand that to believe the message of the new covenant, means to realize that YOU are in fact dead, that the OLD YOU died. The OLD YOU who couldn't love God, who couldn't obey God, is dead and buried. But the good news is that God gave you A new life, the life of the resurrection of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit living and working in you, and that that new life is now busy changing you completely. It is literally as though you've been loaded with a new program that is now ministering complete salvation to your whole being.

How does the Bible put it? It bears fruit in your and my lives (Galatians 5:22,23).

Listen to how Jesus puts it:

- Luke 14:27: “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (Please understand that when you are asked to carry your cross, you are carrying it to the spot where you are going to be nailed to it, and die! Jesus is therefore telling us that His followers are people who know that nothing good can come of themselves, and therefore that part of them must die in order that others can recognize them as followers of Jesus.)
- Matthew 10:38,39: “And anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (We discover what it means to live in our full inheritance in Christ, if we choose to believe that a part of us actually died when we became Christians.)
- Matthew 16:24: “Then Jesus said to his disciples: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”
- Listen to how Paul puts it: Ephesians 4:22-24: “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”
- Galatians 2:19,20: “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
- Galatians 6:14: “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

We have heard so many sermons about what it means to “take up our cross”. Some preachers say that we should make peace with our illness or dilemma or with our ill-tempered husband! But it seems to me that it means that we should come to the end of our own selves! It refers to those events where you discover and confess that of yourself you are totally powerless and helpless!

Mostly we only get to this point after we've tried everything: After we've listened to tapes, read hundreds of books, have cried, have prayed, we've been for counselling, read the Bible...all in an attempt to get rid of certain sins or habits in our lives. But nothing helped!

Somewhere in this process it then becomes apparent that the true salvation, the permanent salvation, will only happen if God is doing it through the working of His Spirit in my life. It is as though we suddenly realize one day – call it a revelation if you like – that the solution that we need, must come from God. If I want to free from this thing, God must bring this about. And that all that I need to do is to give over to Him, in order that He can do it through the working of His Spirit in me!

In other words, it is to choose to believe the heart of the message of the new covenant, namely that the old flesh must die to experience that Jesus Christ has already done all that is needed to set me free. Yes, that He already did all that is needed more than 2000 years ago on the cross and open grave. This now just must break through by the working of His Spirit in my life for me to experience the sweet taste of this salvation in the practice of my own life.

This is in fact what sanctification is. Paul proclaims this discovery in Romans 7:9 to 13. And his exclamation in Romans 7:24 and 25 follows this where he says: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I in my mind, am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.” Then in chapter 8 he continues to spell out how the Holy Spirit, through His control of his life, is spreading this salvation to all areas of his life.

Understand me clearly, to get to this point of “dying” isn't a “work”. It is just a “realization” a revelation that must happen! In fact, it is all a part of your inheritance that has already been established, that has been yours since you

became born again, that is now starting to spread to other areas of your life through sanctifying work of God's spirit in your life.

What are you currently trusting God to do in your life?

One of my friends in the ministry working from Reni in the Ukraine wrote in this regard: "And Father shows me how easily we can become tired and broken, how quickly the water in our water wells can dry up. Our answers to people's problems become like rusty tins, full of holes, and we get tired...tired...hopeless. But Father promises streams of living water that will flow from inside us. It is He who gives us strength. It is He who gives the weary rest. It is HE who gives life. His life...streams that never runs dry. His strength...His shield against all attacks, stress and hopelessness...His victory. "It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights..."

And I bring all my burdens to the foot of the cross. On Golgotha, it became His burdens. It is He who does the work. It is He who resolves the crisis. It is He who heals. It is He who takes away the hurt and pain. It is He who can change hearts of stone and establish workers. It is He who can open the doors for the gospel."

CHAPTER 8

Salvation is God's work alone

Let's read Romans 7:6 and chapter 8:1 to 30. Paul is busy explaining to the believers what is happening in their lives as heirs in Christ. The Spirit of the living God Himself is now living in each of us and He is busy working out this complete salvation that became our inheritance in each of our lives.

Let me start today by making a statement that might shock you. But don't be alarmed. Rather go and spend some time considering what I am going to say.

Nothing you and I can do out of our own strength can break the power and influence of sin in the here and now of our lives. Not one of us can stop our old sinful habits out of our own effort. Neither our tears nor our determination will make the difference or bring about the change. Real, deep-rooted, life-changing healing and deliverance is the work of God alone in our lives.

The old covenant and its requirements made people realize this. Every time the Law of Moses was read, people realized anew how powerless they were to obey all the laws.

I believe this is still the role of the Old Covenant and its commandments in the lives of non-believers. To be, as described by Paul in Galatians, "our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ ..."

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will convince the world of its sin... Why then? In order that they can realize how completely lost they are. In order that they can realize, as Paul writes in Romans 3, that they cannot in own power or of own effort get themselves to love and serve God.

In this process, this confrontation with the truth about their sinfulness and the resulting punishment or curse, and their own inability to change anything, it is then the further work of the Holy Spirit to create a need and longing for a Savior in them.

Without a realization or awareness of sinfulness, there is no real desire for a Savior or salvation. Only then, the Good News of the Gospel makes sense to people. Then it makes sense to hear of a God that, in spite of all things, loved them so much that He gave His own Son to come and do all that was needed to establish complete salvation for them (us), yes, that new life is possible for all who believe in Him.

Therefore, we as heirs of this total salvation can say to one another that real change, or call it real deliverance and healing in our own lives, start breaking through when we...

- Believe in the complete salvation that has already been established for us by Jesus through His death and resurrection
- And when we start trusting and allowing the Spirit of the Living God that lives inside us to work out the details of this deliverance in every aspect of our lives.

Then this salvation, redemption or deliverance, call it what you like, starts happening at such a pace and to such an extent that you yourself and others around you will become intensely aware of it.

When we contemplate, what happened to us when we became Christians, we realize: Everything that we need to change, has been given to us: a new spirit, a new heart, a new mind, new life, the Spirit of God Himself who came to live in our bodies, the resurrection power of Jesus working in you and me through the working of the Spirit of God Himself.

Let me put this a totally different way. Let's turn to Ezekiel 36:25 to 27 and read what is written there:

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all you idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

Do you hear what God is promising here? This is what HE is promising to do in people's lives. After the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and after the Pentecostal events depicted in Acts 2, this is what happens in the lives of each person who converts and are born again.

But God goes a step further and in chapter 37. He draws a picture for Ezekiel of how this is going to happen:

- A picture of a people that is dead. Remember however, that God is speaking of His circumcised covenant people. He says that they are in fact nothing more than a cemetery full of dead bodies. Just like a dead

body can do nothing to change, so they can do nothing to come to life again. Therefore, between you and me, we must stop telling people who are dead that they must obey God! We can preach to them till we are blue in the face, we can get angry and even scream at them. Nothing will help. Their spirits are dead! Dead with the death that Paul speaks of in Romans 7:9 and 11, or in Ephesians 2:1-4. Yes, even though they are wonderful people, even religious people, they are and remain dead!

- The Spirit and the Living God alone can bring them back to life. (Ezekiel 37:4-6). Any new life here will be the result of the supernatural intervention and work of the Spirit of God. HE will intercede and bring life where death currently reigns.

How will this happen?

Where God sends His children into these situations as witnesses and messengers - equipped- with the supernatural power and anointment of the Holy Spirit (like the prophet) – with the command to start prophesizing.

To start telling people what God wants to say to them. It is also your and my commission as witnesses of Jesus and the Good News of the Gospel to minister to the “dead” the life-giving Word. And along with that to pray that the Holy Spirit will work out the promise of new life, of a new obedience, complete deliverance, complete healing, complete victory in our lives and the lives of others.

Then we will see a new generation rising, a generation who believed it and started acting accordingly.

So many believers still struggle, remain captives of strongholds...because they cannot or will not believe this part of their inheritance in Christ Jesus. Unbelief robs us of so many blessings. Unbelief robs us of an experience of this complete deliverance and freedom through the working of the Spirit of God in us.

Therefore, I challenge you today to come before God with me and say to Him:

- Lord, I believe that in Christ Jesus you did all that is necessary for complete salvation and righteousness in my life. A complete salvation that pertains to my past, present and future.
- I believe that Your Spirit now lives in me to work this out. I believe that He wants to set me free in all areas. I believe that He can convict me of every area of my life where darkness still reigns. Not to judge or condemn me, but to give me the opportunity to experience Him ministering Your truth and Your light also in those areas. I believe that He can lead me and empower me to live a life of victory.
- Therefore, I wait on you...I trust in you...to minister life and death to me through Him. Death to my old nature, and life that will spread to every aspect of my life.

This is how we should pray in New Covenant language...This is how we honour the stipulations of the New Covenant in Jesus.

Then we will start experiencing the peace that Ezekiel 34:22-25, 28 and 30 speaks of. Then we will experience the ghosts and chains chastised and broken. Then, step by step we will be freed through the working of the cross and the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

CHAPTER 9

A holy fear

Part of our inheritance as Christian believers in terms of the stipulations of God's new testament is that we have inherited a holy dislike of sin and a holy fear of the consequences thereof on the grounds of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This is what I hear in passages such as 1 John 3:1 to 10 and chapter 5:8,9,18 and 19. Let me just quote a couple of verses from these passages for you:

- 1 John 3:6,8 – “No-one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him...He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.”
- 1 John 5:17a, 18 – “All wrongdoing is sin...we know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.”

1 John 3:9 and 5:18 are difficult verses to translate from the Greek. I want to try and translate verse 5:18 better: “We know that anyone reborn of God does not continue to sin, but the Son of God keeps him safe and the evil one cannot get a permanent hold on him.”

Although it is difficult to translate from Greek the true meaning of what John is saying here, the truth of what he is trying to convey here is very simple: A reborn Christian is no longer a sinner who can do nothing better than sin continually. He is no longer a captive or prisoner who is hopelessly trapped in the claws of the powers of evil and sin in his veins and his whole being. No, the new life of Jesus inside us has saved and delivered us from the rule of the powers of evil and sin in us in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the Spirit of God lives in us to teach us to live in this new victory and salvation that is our inheritance in Jesus.

I therefore make a very clear distinction between a born-again child of God and an ordinary, unsaved person. An unsaved person can only sin and cannot obey and love God as HE intended it. While if a Christian sins, the sin he does is a deliberate choice and wills decision.

We have told each other a couple of times that part of God's gift to us according to the new testament/covenant agreement is that He sent His Holy Spirit to come and live and work in each one of His covenant people. His spirit is not called the “Holy” Spirit for nothing. Therefore, we should not be surprised to discover that He is going to create a “holy” dislike of sin and a “holy” fear of the consequences thereof.

Jeremiah 32:40 teaches us something of this. It is written: “I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me.”

In the Hebrew text, it is explicitly written that God will inspire His “fear” in our hearts. Not that this fear means that we should fear our God. We are new covenant people after all who discovered and got to know God as a loving Father. No, this fear is rather the Holy Spirit wanting to keep us aware of the fact that our Father is a Holy God who hates sin with passion. With such passion that He gave His Son's life in order that we could be free from sin and remain eternally free from the reign and dominance thereof.

Therefore, this Spirit is going to change our outlook on sin. He is after all the Spirit of Truth. For that reason, He gives you this distaste and dislike of sin and even makes you sick of the remains of sin in your own life.

Many Christians quote Romans 8:1 amongst others when the subject of sin is raised in the lives of Christians. To say that we shouldn't make one another feel judged and condemned. And they are correct, but verse 2 is also applicable and it says: “...because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”

One can also translate it: “The principle is: The Spirit who in Christ Jesus gives you life, (is the same Spirit) that freed you from the principle of sin and death (in your life).”

To continue toying with sin or to ignore it in the lives of one another is to allow brothers and sisters to drink poison and dance in a room filled with poisonous gas. Therefore, I would like to make the following statements with regards to this:

- God regards sin and the remnants of our old sinful nature in our lives with the same disdain as in the lives of non-Christians. If you do not believe me, go and read what God said to the congregation in Laodicea in Revelations 3: 15.

- The longer we continue to sin, the more our own heart is hardened, Hebrews 3:12-13 tells us. We all know many Christians around us who continue doing the most horrific sins seemingly without any struggle of conscience!
- The Bible tells us that for a reborn Christian to continue sinning is like saying black is white and white is black. 1 John 3:7-10 and 5:18,19.
- To continue sinning is to give evil a foothold in your life and to open your life up to all the chaos and other consequences it can bring about (Ephesians 4:27).
- To sin can cause the loss of our inner peace and even our spiritual power and sensitivity. Listen to what David says in this regard in Psalm 31:10. It is like having a hole in your oil tank that will systematically rob you of your joy, peace and power.

God is speaking to you personally at this very moment. But don't panic. Listen to what 1 Peter 5:6 to 10, and 1 John 1:5 to 2:6 says.

Remember you are now the child of a new covenant with the life of Jesus through the working of the Spirit of God in you. The power of sin in your life has been broken. Therefore, to sin now, is to deliberately choose it.

In my spirit there is a word with which I would like to close: In the well-known 2 Chronicles 7:14 the Lord says: "...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

How does Bruce Wilkerson put it: I see many people who humble themselves and pray and seek the face of God...but why do I not see people who turn from their wicked ways!

Therefore, each one of us every day is faced with the choice to minister either life or death to ourselves.

Choose life. Choose to focus anew on the life and complete salvation in Jesus for you. Grab it in faith and say no time and time again to the temptations that come your way. Choose anew that the Spirit of God control your life and show you His heart and His way. Allow Him to lead you into the blessings and abundance that is God's intention for you as His child.

CHAPTER 10

Let the Spirit of God guide you

The danger exists that we can talk about our inheritance in Christ – according to the stipulations of the new testament – as though we are all lying on a beach somewhere in heaven “sunbathing”, without daily catastrophes and challenges which we have to face in our regular daily lives.

Our daily lives aren't always easy. We all have our days when we need hair on our teeth and need to face challenging crises. We all experience times when we feel discouraged and don't know whether we are coming or going. I know, because my family and I also experience it. Therefore, today I want to talk to you about a wonderful part of our inheritance that is specifically meant for this.

In Ephesians 5:18 it is written: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit...” Many spiritual leaders have preached wonderful messages around this verse, but I have always felt that “be filled with the Spirit,” means more than what we've been told.

The more I think about it, the more I am convinced that it means at least two things:

- It means that you and I need to choose each day to live 100% under the control of the Holy Spirit in us, and to obediently allow Him to lead us in all our decisions
- But also, that we should ask God each day to equip us with the power and gifts of His Spirit, in order that we can be “ready” – can be filled – to be used by God to minister to the people around us with the dynamite-power from heaven.

Part of the inheritance of each child of the living God in Jesus is that God, through His Spirit who lives in you, wants to lead you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, minute to minute.

Listen to how Paul puts it in Romans 8:9-14: “You, however, are controlled not by the old nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation – but it is not to the old nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the old nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

Some of you might notice that I differ from the new translation in that I translated “sinful nature” with “old nature”. The reason for this is, as I said on a previous occasion, that I am convinced that the Word teaches us that part of our inheritance in Christ is that we as Christians are no longer “sinners” – even though we still sin – because the reign of sin in our lives has been broken. In the life of a born-again child of God to sin is a deliberate choice.

Paul is speaking of this wonderful aspect of our inheritance in Jesus, namely that Jesus Christ now lives in our bodies through His Spirit. Specifically – if we allow Him – to control our lives in their entirety, and to lead us by His voice. The image I would like to use to explain this better is that of a TV-presenter with an earpiece in his ear by which the director of the program “prompts” him word by word what to say and do.

Proverbs 3:5 puts it this way: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding”.

We can off course follow our own understanding; it remains our choice. Paul describes this as “being in the flesh” or “being controlled by our old nature”. But then we must realize what we are missing out on being lead by the living God Himself. And He is, after all, the One who only wants the best for us. As our Father, He wants to provide for us in the smallest detail of our needs. After all, He sent His Son to minister life to us, and abundant life at that.

Therefore Paul prays in Ephesians 1:15 –21: “For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 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. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion...”

Do you hear? The Spirit of God wants to lead us...

- To get to know God better. To personally learn more of His love, His power and His glory through our personal experience.
- To understand to what God has called you and the extent to which He wants to use you, uniquely, specifically.
- To discover more of the incredible diversity and multi-faceted ness of your inheritance and wealth in Jesus.
- To experience more and more how the power of the living God – yes the same power that resurrected Jesus from the dead – flows from and through your life, your words, your hands, your ministry to people when the Spirit of God through His gifts and His power start ministering to people around you.

Can you imagine yourself moving in amongst people and under the guidance of the Spirit, like Jesus, start ministering to people who are sick and experience God healing them one by one! Can you imagine yourself in situations where you look at a person and God gives you a prophetic word, or a word of detail knowledge of that person which you then must impart to that person, and as you obey, see and witness that person experiencing the living God personally speaking to him or her!

This is how God wants to use us as heirs in Christ Jesus. But not only when the power of the gifts flow through us. People must also see and experience more and more of the character and heart of Jesus in our lives. This can only happen when we are under the control of the Spirit of God. Only then, Paul says in Galatians 5:16, the Spirit of God can establish characteristics like love, peace, kindness, patience and self-control in our lives.

What a challenge! What a wonderful calling! To be lead by the Spirit of God inside you all day long! This is what we should trust God for. This is the choice before us, every day, every moment.

Then, what happened in this story, can happen: Two sons farmed next to one another and, as sometimes happens, started arguing. As a result, a huge emotional divide grew between them. And this after they had been farming hand in hand for 40 years. Before they shared everything: machinery, labourers and vehicles. And suddenly, because of this misunderstanding, they regularly had uncontrollable arguments and started avoiding one another like the plague.

One morning there was a knock on the door of one of the brothers, Johan, and when he opened the door a man was standing in front of him with all the regular tools of a carpenter, looking for work.

Johan employed him and told him the following: Do you see that farm on the other side of the ravine? That farm belongs to my neighbour, who is in fact also my youngest brother. Until last week there had only been a valley between us, but then he took the bulldozer and bulldozed the riverbed to such an extent that there now exists a ravine between us. Well, if this is the game he wants to play, then I will show him. I can beat him at his own game. Do you see those planks lying in a heap over there? Take them and build a wall, eight feet high between us so that I cannot see his house or his face!

He then helped the carpenter move the planks to the river and went into town. The carpenter worked hard all day long, measuring, sawing and building. The farmer returned after sunset to find the carpenter seemingly finished with his work.

However, when the farmer went to inspect the completed work, his mouth felt open when, to his surprise, instead of an 8-foot high wall, he found a neatly built bridge built over the ravine, complete with hand railings and all...and his neighbour, his brother, walking towards him on over the bridge.

Johan looked at the carpenter and said: "You are a very brave man to build a bridge between us after all I told you."

The two brothers looked at one another for a while and then took each other's hands. When they turned around, they noticed the carpenter walking away with his tools.

"No, wait!" they shouted, "we have plenty more work for you to do here on our farms, stay a while longer."

"No" the carpenter replied. "There are plenty more bridges that I need to go and build".

"Blessed are the peacemakers" Mathew 5:9 tells us, "for they will be called sons of God."

Let's trust God to fill us with His Spirit in such a way that people will know that children of the living God are living and working among them!

CHAPTER 11

Inherit to serve

I would like to conclude this series.

You must have realized by now that you have not been sitting at the feet of God week after week just to receive ministry for yourself. God has been ministering to you in order that you can minister to others. It always works in this way.

For three years, a couple of men and women walked and lived with Jesus day by day, but the day came when He told them: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses..." (Acts 1:8)

Let me immediately tell you this: in our case, it no longer takes three years. After the Pentecost, the normal Biblical model is: repentance, conversion and public profession, baptism and prayer for the baptism with the Holy Spirit, all in one day if possible (e.g. Acts 2:38,39), in order that God can start using you immediately in the lives of others, yes even to do supernatural things.

Therefore Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:9 and 10: "But you are chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

You, as new testament heir, are a person with a new identity and a calling on your life. You cannot allow life and the things that happen to you to let you forget who you are. You may not allow yourself to become one of thousands of people who merely try to survive each day. There is a higher calling on your life.

- You are a child of the King of all kings and therefore called to be king. Called to reign over situations and challenges. You are a slave to no one and no situation. All authority belongs to Jesus, your Lord and King, and He has appointed you to represent Him and His Kingdom-business in your circle of friends and your work circles. It is for this reason that you are in your specific marriage or in that relationship you are currently in. In order that people can become aware of Jesus, and of the impact of the complete salvation that He has established for all men. It is as though you must wear His crown here on earth, and His ring.
- You are meant to represent the people you love, around you, with God, every day when you intercede for them in prayer (John 17:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:17). But you are also called, as new testament priest, to represent God with them, in their midst, each day, like Jesus, our best example of what a real priest should look like. Through the offer of your whole life (Romans 6:13,16). By the way in which you honour and care for your body. By your praise and thanksgiving to God, that flows from your mouth (Hebrews 13:5). By the good deeds you do daily without being asked (Hebrews 13:16). By your financial support to spiritual leaders and ministers that God presses on your heart (Philippians 4:18).
- Yes, you can expect a big part of your testimony among people to also be prophetic. 1
Corinthians 14 tells us that God wants to use each one of us at least in the gift of prophesy in people's lives. So, He wants to use also you. Therefore 1 Peter 4:10-16 tells us: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."

But be warned, because verses 12 to 16 tell us: "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trials you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."

I want to close with a prophetic word that you should test for yourself. But I believe it is God's Word now for you and me.

"Do you not know that you are the people who God personally chose by hand, to be His vessels for now? Do you not realize that you are part of a handpicked, holy-different group of people, literally meant to be king and prophet, whose life should reflect My glory to an unbelieving and cynical world?"

I have called you and I want to equip you to live among men with supernatural heavenly power.

If you are continually unsure of your identity... of who you are, of where you really belong and what the meaning of your life is...how can you be the person you are meant to be?

Therefore, I tell you again: You are part of my people on earth, one of my people renewed-from-the-inside, whom I chose to wear My cape of authority. I want to use you to minister healing to people and with a testimony of how to be a winner.

Isn't this reason to be excited? To praise and worship God?

In My Word, I said I want to use you to destroy the enemy and his works.

Therefore, stop thinking and living like a helpless victim. Get up, let My Spirit in you empower you and lead you into My presence. Come and let Me make you aware of the resurrection power in you through the working of My Spirit who can minister life to you, and can set you free of all that the enemy has been holding you captive up till now.

Was it not My intention that you should be the light? Like a lamp on a stand or a city on a mountaintop, for all to see?

Come; spend time with ME in order that I can bless you, for you to be a blessing to others. Come; let Me speak to you face to face, in order that you'll have something to say to others.

Don't think that I cannot use you. I am tired of people who continually say: I can't...and this while I, the living God, personally called you. I have prepared a stage for you. I am busy opening doors ahead of you. Don't start doubting now and turn back. Do not underestimate My grace and power. If you feel you lack power and salvation, ask Me and I will give it in order that you can face the challenges that will come your way in freedom. When I have freed people, they are free. Do not function or act out of fear any longer, because fear is a cruel ruler who wants to totally hold you captive and eventually destroy your whole life.

I need people who are prepared to bravely stand up and report for service. People who are prepared to be people of faith who no longer stare themselves blind against circumstances. Who chose to get up from self-pity or passivity and to take the step that I am asking them, in faith.

Seek Me, My kingdom and My will with your whole life, and you will experience how I will provide for you all you need."